



$\int f(x) dx = \lim_{\Delta x \rightarrow 0} (f(a)\Delta x + f(x_1)\Delta x + \dots + f(x_n)\Delta x)$

μιθολογία      mitologia

$\sum a_i = a_1 + a_2 + \dots + a_n$

μυθολογία      itan aye atijo

# OUR MYTHICAL EDUCATION

Edited by Lisa Maurice

神話      mythologie

$(x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n) \begin{pmatrix} y_1 \\ y_2 \\ \vdots \\ y_n \end{pmatrix} = x_1 y_1 + x_2 y_2 + \dots + x_n y_n$        $\left(\frac{u}{v}\right) =$

$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n} = 2$        $\infty$       מיטולוגיה

$f(x) = \frac{1}{\sigma\sqrt{2\pi}} \exp\left(-\frac{(x-\mu)^2}{2\sigma^2}\right)$

$F(x) + C$       мифология

$y = \ln x$       Mythologie

$\int \frac{dx}{x} = \ln|x| + C$

μυθολογία      mitología

$N(\mu, \sigma^2)$

$C = \frac{n!}{k!(n-k)!}$

# OUR MYTHICAL EDUCATION

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OUR MYTHICAL  
EDUCATION  
The Reception  
of Classical Myth  
Worldwide in Formal  
Education, 1900–2020

Edited by Lisa Maurice



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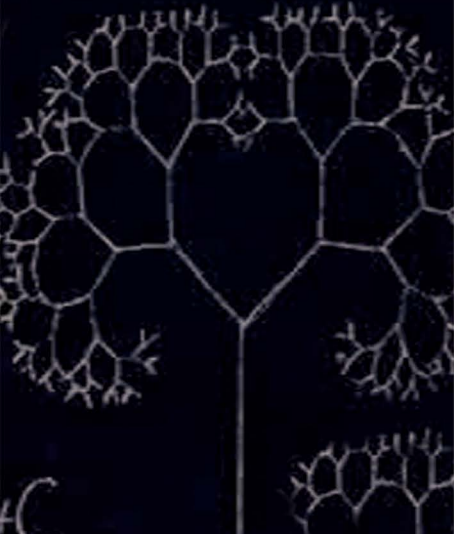
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$\dots + f(x_{n-1}) \Delta x$   
 $\dots + a_n \sin^2 x + \cos$

МИФОЛОГИЯ

міфалогія

$$\left(\frac{u}{v}\right)' = \frac{u'v - uv'}{v^2}$$



mitologia

$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty}$   
 $n!$

Part II

OUR MYTHICAL EDUCATION  
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN  
EUROPE



## MACTE ANIMO! – OR, THE POLISH EXPERIMENT WITH “CLASSICS PROFILES” IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION: THE WARSAW EXAMPLE

After World War Two, Poland, separated from the West by the Iron Curtain, had at its disposal a powerful tool in the fight for preserving links to the free world – namely, ancient tradition. The Classics, widely read in European schools throughout the ages, had established a common spiritual heritage upon which the Polish intelligentsia could draw to maintain ties with the West. Thus, no slogans similar to *À bas le latin!* were heard from rioters in Poland.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Latin (also associated with the language of the Catholic Church, then one of the centres of opposition) and ancient culture were perceived here as a vital connection with the Mediterranean community in the realm of the spirit – beyond geographical and political borders. The intelligentsia also cherished the ancient tradition in the belief that it helped defend their identity from the attempts to create captive minds.

High School No. XI in Warsaw,<sup>2</sup> bearing the Latin motto *Macte animo!* (see Figs. 1 and 2) and the name of Mikołaj Rej – the sixteenth-century poet and writer – has long been a place of special significance for Classical Antiquity in Polish education. Founded in 1905 by the Protestant clergyman Julian Machlejd (1866–1936) as an institution of the Lutheran Church (Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession), the school quickly became famous for encouraging freedom of thought and religious tolerance. To this day, to meet a pastor, both a Catholic and an Orthodox priest, and

---

<sup>1</sup> This slogan, coined in 1933 by Régis Messac, returned to the barricades in France during the cultural revolution of the 1960s. See, e.g., Françoise Waquet, *Latin, or, the Empire of a Sign: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, trans. John Howe, London and New York, NY: Verso, 2001 (ed. pr. in French 1998) 339, and Alain Bosquet, “A bas le latin”, *Combat*, 9 October 1968, 1.

<sup>2</sup> In Poland, schools are referred to by their number, assigned to them by the local authorities and in the case of secondary education institutions expressed in Roman numerals.

a rabbi together taking part in school festivities is nothing extraordinary at Mikołaj Rej High School.

In 1970, the first class of a humanistic profile was established at Rej (transformed into a state institution shortly after World War Two, in 1952). In 1982, in turn, the school opened a class with the "Classics profile".<sup>3</sup> This was an educational experiment undertaken by only a few high schools across the country, and one that to many seemed impossible in that time of communist censorship and ideological pressure in many respects. In the present chapter we take a look at the Warsaw example of the Classics profile – how it came into being, how its curriculum was shaped over the decades, and how it changed after 1989 – as a testimony to the joint mission of teachers and researchers of antiquity to provide young people with an education that would help them become adults with critical minds, aware of their choices. We will also examine which elements of that experiment continue on to the present day.

Ours is an unusual look, for it originates from the differing perspectives of the two authors of this chapter: that of a teacher (Barbara Strycharczyk) engaged in the school reforms, who shaped and taught Rej's Classics classes for thirty years (1982–2012), and her student (Katarzyna Marciniak), a graduate of that profile in the late 1990s, who today, as a scholar at the University of Warsaw, researches the reception of Classical Antiquity with a special focus on youth culture. Our analyses are complemented by an interlude – a commentary by the author of the concept of the Classics profile at Rej, the Headmaster of this school in the difficult 1970s and 1980s, Prof. Witold Kaliński.

---

<sup>3</sup> This profile included obligatory courses in Latin, Greek, and Ancient Culture, along with special tailoring of other courses in order to highlight the presence of the classical tradition, and with an interdisciplinary approach being maintained throughout – this concerned such subjects as maths, physics, and modern languages (Polish, French, and English were all compulsory). An absolute novelty for the 1990s, an IT course, including the basics of programming, was also obligatory in the aim of providing students with a broad education. For the history of this profile, see section 1.2. "The Origins and Development of the Classics Profile". For similar profiles in other schools see the chapter by Janusz Ryba ("Greek and Roman Mythology in Classical Education in Poland after 1945") in the present volume, 209–236.



**Figure 1:** The inscription *Macte animo* on the Mikolaj Rej High School No. XI building in Warsaw (detail, adapted). Fragment of a photograph by Adrian Grycuk, Wikimedia Commons.

Barbara Strycharczyk

## **I. On the Benefits of Writing on Walls; or, A Brief History of the Classics Class at Mikolaj Rej High School No. XI in Warsaw**

The history of Latin teaching at Rej High School in Warsaw needs to start with an explanation of the benefits of writing on walls. Although this may raise eyebrows, since I am supposed to be presenting classical education at school, I think some information on how old and widespread such writing is could be important for what follows.

### **I.1. In the Beginning There Were Words...**

If we look closer at writing on walls as a trend, we can notice it almost everywhere, to mention only the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (for example, γνῶθι σεαυτόν – “Know thyself!”), the University of Oxford (*Dominus illuminatio mea* – “The Lord is my light” from Psalm 27), and the Jagiellonian University



in Kraków (*Plus ratio quam vis* – “Reason rather than force”).<sup>4</sup> The sources of the quotations are the three great pillars of our culture: the Greek tradition, the Roman tradition, and the Bible. The language of these strange graffiti from the modern age is Latin. Couldn’t these sentences and adages, which can be hard to remember, have been written in the native vernacular everyone understands? It seems, though, that since these are quotations from our cultural depository, this is precisely the reason they were written down and passed on in a language that protects this depository from variability. The living languages we use in everyday communication are subject to change. Thus, the irreplaceability of Latin is connected with its timeless character. It helps pass on and understand all that is lasting, fundamental, and constant – values and rules of conduct. Writing on walls in Latin thus has a centuries-long, rich tradition. Invoking that tradition, at a time when almost every school had its Latin motto, over a hundred years ago the inscription *Macte animo* was placed over the entrance to the school named after Mikołaj Rej. In spite of appearances, a simple translation is not enough to fully understand these words. It is also important to know the hidden meaning linked to the context from which they were taken. Thus, reading this motto, we are discovering what is essentially the axiological foundation of the school and the starting point for its educational vision – all deeply rooted in classical mythology.

The words *Macte animo* – most often translated as “Be bold!” or “Do not waver!” – come from Statius’ epic poem the *Thebaid*. The poet quite often uses the expression *Macte animo* throughout the text – especially when his fighting protagonists – two sons of King Oedipus: Polynices and Eteocles – grow weaker and lose heart. As if wanting to shake them out of their torpor, encourage them, and rouse them to fight, Statius calls: “Go ahead! Be bold! Don’t waver! Come on!” In one book he even cries: “*Macte animo iuvenis! Medios parat ire per enses / nudaque pro caris opponere pectora muris*” (*Theb.* 7.280–281) – “Bravo, young man! He means to go through the midst of swords and protect the walls he loves with his bare chest”.<sup>5</sup> Today it is actually hard to believe that this – encouragement to fight – could have been

---

<sup>4</sup> This adage was long erroneously attributed to the elegiac poet Cornelius Gallus, see Anna Maria Wasyl, “Plus ratio quam vis’. Od mimochodem rzuconej sentencji do dewizy uniwersyteckiej” [“Plus ratio quam vis”, or, The Career of a Sentence], *Terminus* 15.1 (2013), 15–34, <https://doi.org/10.4467/20843844TE.13.001.1048> (all the links quoted in this chapter were accessible as of 8 September 2019, unless stated otherwise).

<sup>5</sup> Trans. by D.R. Shackleton Bailey, from his edition of Statius, *Volume I: Thebaid. Books 1–7*, Loeb Classical Library 207, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, 419–421.

the only message of *Macte animo* – despite the circumstances in which our school was founded and the first years of its operation at a time when Poland as a country had not existed on the map of the world for over a century.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, in order to extract the full meaning of our motto, we need to go back to the model on which Statius based his poem.

The motto *Macte virtute! Macte animo!* – understood to mean “Be daring! Go boldly! Be positive!” – was popular as far back as Cato the Elder’s time. Again, however, the mythological context is important here, and it is not connected to some minor theme but one that was of the utmost importance to the Romans, as it was linked to the origin myth of Imperium Romanum. Praising the valour (*virtus*) of Aeneas and then his son, Iulus, Virgil in the *Aeneid* has Apollo use the words: “*Macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra*” (*Aen.* 9.641) – “Be valiant, my son, that is the way to the stars”. These words, also thanks to the popularity and significance of the *Aeneid* in Rome, were quoted so often that they turned into a saying repeated in abbreviated form as *Macte virtute!* or *Macte animo!*, or as a longer sentence: “*Mact(e) animo, generose puer, sic itur ad astra*”.<sup>7</sup> No wonder Statius, invoking tradition, refers so often to valour, which the Romans considered one of the main civic virtues. However, even with this we have not reached the end of our adventure with the motto *Macte animo!*

Let’s go back to the *Aeneid* and take a closer look at Aeneas. The gods put this man – soldier, husband, and father – in a tough and unenviable situation. He is supposed to drop everything and, with a group of others like him, desperados who survived the burning of their city, set off on an indeterminate journey because he has been chosen to search for a place for his new homeland. Worse still, the benefits of this find will only be felt by future generations, sometime in the indeterminate future. Of course, we immediately think such a story is pure fiction and will never happen to any of us, yet in fact the myth of Aeneas portrays human struggles with daily

---

<sup>6</sup> Poland lost its independence in the years 1772–1795, as a result of partitions carried out in stages. Its territory was divided among three powers: Russia, Austria, and Prussia. Warsaw ended up in the Russian partition. Poland regained its independence in 1918. On Mikołaj Rej High School’s history after World War Two, in the times of Stalinism, see Krzysztof Jan Wojciechowski, *Liceum imienia Mikołaja Reja w Warszawie 1950–1955 (apogeum stalinizacji) widziane z Cafe Gruz* [Mikołaj Rej High School in Warsaw 1950–1955 (the Height of Stalinization) Seen from Cafe Gruz], Pruszków: Wydawnictwo M.M., 2006.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Voltaire, *Recueil des lettres 1775–1778*, in his *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 63, [n.p.]: De l’Imprimerie Société Littéraire-Typographique, 1785, 44 (“Lettre XXV, à M. de la Harpe”, 31 March 1775).

life.<sup>8</sup> Hardship, fatigue, discouragement, fear, anger – these are weaknesses we have to keep overcoming on the way to our goals.

The founders of Rej High School knew well that each and every one of us leaving school and crossing the threshold of adulthood would face the same obstacles that both Aeneas and his son, Iulus, and the heroes of the *Thebaid* struggled with in mythological tales. That is why, just like them, we need support and encouragement to fight our own limitations. The heroes of Roman poems acting in accordance with the encouraging call *Macte animo!* are valiant because they have persevered in fulfilling whatever they consider to be their duty. And because they are valiant, they can also judge the circumstances accurately and fulfil their tasks prudently and patiently in order to see the best fruits of their bravery. And this is the meaning of the inscription above the school entrance. According to the message of the words *Macte animo* and the intention behind its placement over the entrance, we are all heroes of a mythical story who need constant encouragement to overcome obstacles every day.

Since 1905, when the school was founded, its teachers and students have often served as examples of bravery and perseverance. First under Russian rule, then after Warsaw was seized by the Germans in 1915, and later during World War One. Very soon after the school opened and in its first years, many young Rej High School alumni testified to Statius' call from the *Thebaid*. On 1 September 1939, when another – thirty-fourth – school year was due to start at Rej High School, the entire school community was busy preparing for war. Today plaques on the school's walls commemorate those students and teachers who in 1915–1918 and 1939–1945 showed determination and dedication in fulfilling the saying inscribed over the entrance.

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<sup>8</sup> See also Bob Dylan's remarks on a similar aspect of the *Odyssey* in his lecture upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature ("Nobel Lecture", The Nobel Prize, 5 June 2017, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2016/dylan/lecture/>): "*The Odyssey* is a strange, adventurous tale of a grown man trying to get home after fighting in a war. He's on that long journey home, and it's filled with traps and pitfalls. [...] In a lot of ways, some of these same things have happened to you. You too have had drugs dropped into your wine. You too have shared a bed with the wrong woman. You too have been spellbound by magical voices, sweet voices with strange melodies. You too have come so far and have been so far blown back. And you've had close calls as well. You have angered people you should not have. And you too have rambled this country all around. And you've also felt that ill wind, the one that blows you no good. And that's still not all of it".

## **I.2. The Origins and Development of the Classics Profile**

The classical languages – Greek and Latin – played an important role in the canon of school subjects. They were taught by outstanding teachers, who were later often fondly remembered by former students and who are commemorated in the School Tradition Room. One of the most famous of them was philosopher and ethicist Prof. Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886–1981). After studying at the Jagiellonian University, in Darmstadt, and in Lviv (Philosophy and Classical Philology), in 1912 he started working as a teacher of classical languages at Rej High School. In those days, school teaching experience was valuable in that it prepared future professors for research and teaching in the academic community. Prof. Kotarbiński worked at Rej until 1918, when he became a lecturer and later an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw.

After World War Two, as work continued on rebuilding the school, teaching began in temporary premises. Latin was taught at Rej High School from 1947 until the Classics profile was established in 1982 on the basis of official ministerial curricula.

The year 1982 is an important date; one might call it the close of the twentieth century, abundant in important and difficult events in Poland and in Warsaw (martial law in 1981–1983 and the start of political system change). At Rej High School, a Classics class was launched in the 1982/83 school year. Expanding the curriculum to incorporate more humanities content was partly the effect of the tradition at the school, which from the moment of its founding in 1905 had been famous as a humanities high school. On the other hand, it was an attempt to supplement the traditional curriculum of a general high school with knowledge that could facilitate deeper ties with European heritage. The return to the tradition of a wider humanities education at Rej High School was initiated by Headmaster Witold Kaliński – a Polish studies teacher with an excellent grasp of the school’s role in preparing the young generation to read, understand, and inherit the cultural depository. The first major step was to invoke an old school tradition and revive the Rej Middle and High School Alumni Club, followed by the start of work on organizing the School Tradition Room, and then another reference to the pre-war tradition of a humanities school: opening a Classics class. Looking back now, this profile’s history can be divided into three stages:

- Stage I: 1982–1989 – working with the nationwide Polish curriculum for teaching Latin and Greek;

- Stage II: 1990–2000 – following a newly developed, original curriculum;
- Stage III: from 2002 – beginning of enrolment for the Classics class in the three-year high school – up to the school year 2018/19.<sup>9</sup>

When I look back today at the earliest stage, I think the decision to “introduce Classics” at Rej High School was a sign of extraordinary courage. Remember what those times were like? *O tempora, o mores!* There were no computers, no Internet, and although photocopiers existed, they were a luxury item. Original Latin texts and textbooks? Well... you could import a copy of Caesar’s *Gallic War* or Horace’s *Odes* from London at 25 pounds apiece (an astronomical amount of money for Poland back then, when the average monthly salary was about 20 US dollars), and only if you knew someone who could buy it over there and bring it over here. A university textbook teaching Greek, *Wstępna nauka języka greckiego* [Preliminary Study of the Greek Language, ed. pr. 1926] by Marian Goliás (1887–1966), available on the Polish market and published mainly for students of university courses in classical philology and philosophy, was the only textbook our students could use. We also used pre-war Latin textbooks for humanistic classes, and we copied – on typewriters or by hand – long excerpts from textbooks found in our school library and the Latin classroom.

You could say that all the students in the Classics class and their teachers, under Headmaster Kaliński’s leadership, operated like a special task force which had to overcome many a barrier together. Gradually, years of work and experience enabled Rej High School to elaborate a humanities education that worked specifically for this school. We developed our own curricula for teaching the classical languages as an important element of education in the new general high school. We started a collaboration with the Department (later: Institute) of Classical Philology at the University of Warsaw and with the Polish Philological Association.<sup>10</sup> Rej High School teachers working together with University teachers developed a core curriculum according to which a special role in the curriculum framework and the curriculum itself, besides Latin and Greek, was assigned to Polish, history, foreign languages (French and English), and mathematics.

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<sup>9</sup> After the latest reform, the 2019/20 year brought back the four-year high school – time will tell how the final official core curriculum for Latin and Ancient Culture will develop. On the changes in the structure of Polish education over the past seventy-five years, see Janusz Ryba’s chapter (“Greek and Roman Mythology in Classical Education in Poland after 1945”) in the present volume, 209–236.

<sup>10</sup> For more about the Polish Philological Association and consecutive stages of the reform, again see the chapter by Janusz Ryba.

Therefore, we can say that 1990 marked the start of a new, second stage in the history of the Classics profile. We were becoming increasingly professional: we started sharing the experience we gained at Rej High School with other schools and even educational institutions. Our teachers of the classical languages were invited to work on a new core curriculum and to develop the concept of a new school-leaving exam (*matura*). After ten years of experience and having introduced original curricula, we knew there was nothing that teaching Latin at school needed more than new teaching methods and a broad cultural context. The school was getting more and more University teachers to teach classes in which they referred to ancient history and culture. It also should be added that the moment of moving from the first to the second stage of the Classics class’s development was crowned with the successes of our students, who were prize-winners and finalists of national-level Latin-language school competitions. In 1991, fourth-year Classics class student Marcin Morawski won the third prize and a bronze medal at the *Certamen Ciceronianum* – international Latin competition in Italy, in Arpinum – Cicero’s home town. In the course of twenty-five years,<sup>11</sup> among Rej High School’s 141 national school competition prize-winners and finalists, 72 were prize-winners and finalists of the Latin-language competition. This was made possible by the relentless hard work and enthusiasm of the students, but also thanks to support from the teachers: Alicja Zielińska, Dariusz Zawistowski, Agnieszka Jasińska, Bożena Lesiuk, Anna Wojciechowska, as well as class tutors and school headmasters. I remember times when four Latin teachers worked at Rej High School and additionally University teachers came in once a week for two hours, including the most distinguished professors, such as Jerzy Axer, Oktawiusz Jurewicz, and Anna Świderkówna. Our students and alumni confirm that an education in Classics has played an enormous role in their lives and careers. Here are a few examples:<sup>12</sup>

I am a graduate of the Faculty of Painting at Warsaw’s Academy of Fine Arts. My graduation project *Et in Arcadia Ego*, inspired by ancient mythology and literature, won me the Dean’s Distinction. After graduation I went to Italy for three years on a scholarship from the Italian government. I graduated with honours from a course on Byzantine mosaic at the Academy in Ravenna (Italy); for producing the best graduation project, I received

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<sup>11</sup> The period here refers to the Classics profile before its transformation into the “Polish studies-Classics class”.

<sup>12</sup> Input collected for the school’s website (now archived).



a six-month scholarship to Saint Petersburg. I can assure everyone with absolute certainty that being in the Classics class at school shaped me intellectually and enabled me to experience Herbert's "power of taste",<sup>13</sup> and from a practical viewpoint, it gave me a tool for learning foreign languages. (Matylda Tracewska, graduated in 1997)

Learning Latin and understanding and translating texts by Roman authors was above all a way of communicating with people from antiquity. It was exactly this ability to communicate with people I've never met and never will meet that became the foundation of my current work. My job is to develop e-learning training courses, and every day I do my best to put myself in the situation of course participants so as to design the optimal training adapted to their individual needs. Thus, imagination is a key skill in my work, but I equally need logical thinking, attention to detail, and the ability to simultaneously see individual elements and the end result. Latin taught me all that. (Marta Kozak, graduated in 2000)

I have gone quite a long way away from Latin – although it is invaluable when you're learning Roman law. However, learning in the Classics class above all gave me a language background and the ability to build statements precisely, skills that are priceless in further learning and work. The girls and boys from my class chose all kinds of different university courses, but all of us received a good foundation for further studies from being in the Classics class. (Tomasz Pietrzak, graduated in 2009)

Thus, it appears that a classical education which encompasses not just language but also culture is still an irreplaceable tool that helps us understand the reality around us, enables us to move around the world of signs as if it were a familiar place, opens the door to knowledge about the past, the present, and the future, but, above all, it makes it easier to understand our own identity, which is especially important in periods of rapid social and cultural transformations, such as the times after 1989 in Poland.

At this point I would like to share a personal thought. When I started working at Rej High School in 1982, I had just defended my MA thesis at the Department of Classical Philology, but of course had no experience or even

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<sup>13</sup> A reference to the work of the great Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), famous for his dialogue with classical mythology; see also the second part of the present chapter by Katarzyna Marciniak, "Why the Classics? – or, On the Use of Classical Mythology in Education and the Side Effects Thereof". It is worth observing that the author of this reference to Herbert, Rej's graduate Matylda Tracewska, is also the artist who painted the symbol for the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme (see Fig. 5).

any idea not only of what working in a Classics class would be like, but even what we were seeking to achieve. I can say quite honestly that working at Rej High School shaped me as much as it did the students – we “boldly jumped over obstacles” together and obtained knowledge together, including the knowledge that we still had a lot to learn.

The year 2002 saw changes in how the Classics class functioned, a consequence of broader curriculum changes in Polish education after middle schools and three-year general high schools were introduced. From the classical languages, only Latin and Ancient Culture – as one subject – were left in the obligatory curriculum framework. But the curriculum changes that affected high schools<sup>14</sup> and unquestionably caused the range of specialist subject teaching to be limited, did not restrict our inventiveness in any fundamental way. You could say that in this skirmish we had to give up Greek, but we seized Rome. A new idea for the Classics class appeared: a study trip to Rome, conceived of as a week-long expedition to the Eternal City, invoking the tradition of the nineteenth-century Grand Tour – a mandatory trip for any educated, young person to supplement their theoretical knowledge by experiencing and seeing sites of culture. During daily walks, Rome became a school lab in which we looked carefully at everything the past had left behind. Until then, we had learned about the past from maps, texts, stories, films, and sources available to us at school. Now we looked for Ancient Rome in the heart of a noisy, tourist-filled city. You could say our expedition consisted in tracking down Rome in Rome. It was and still is a fantastic adventure.

The next original element incorporated into the Classics class’s curriculum at this third stage was a school course in rhetoric, concluding with an oratory display in the White Room of Wilanów Palace – a building with plenty of references to mythology, and especially to the myth of Hercules, with whom King John III Sobieski (1629–1696), Wilanów’s founder, identified. The art of speech is a rare skill, although – especially today – a very useful one. It would be hard, however, to find rhetoric in the education canon

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<sup>14</sup> The reformation of the educational system in Poland in 1999 not only introduced middle schools (*gimnazja*), but also affected the high schools (*licea*), which from then on covered three, not four years. This, in turn, resulted in changes in the core curricula, including the status of Latin, henceforth to be taught only in high school. In 2019/20 the latest change in the Polish school system was pushed through, following the reform of 2018/19 (i.e. the elimination of middle schools and a return to four-year high schools), yet the implementation of this reform has proven complicated to say the least, and it is too early to sum up its effects (see above, n. 9).

in Poland. That is why at our school hours spent on translating Latin texts, identifying grammatical structures and figures of speech, and analysing historical and cultural realities also enabled us to develop oratory skills that we decided to proudly show off, to demonstrate that by practising rhetoric we learn to organize our thoughts and statements but also to overcome fear and insecurity.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3. The Classics as the Key to Interdisciplinary *artes liberales* Teaching**

Today I look from the perspective of 2019 at what we managed to achieve at Rej High School in terms of education in Classics and the humanities; I hope we have not fallen short of the school founders' expectations and, as far as capabilities and circumstances allowed, we were faithful to the motto *Macte animo!* This was made possible by the teachers who set up and later revived the Classics class, who wrote the curricula, oversaw their implementation, and shared their experience. Each of them contributed something valuable, and the whole venture was based on an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the academic contacts flourished. Work on the Latin and Greek curricula was overseen by Dr Jerzy Mańkowski from the Institute of Classical Philology at the University of Warsaw in association with Rej High School's teachers. With time, new Latin teachers joined the group.<sup>17</sup>

All of the teachers of the classical languages, regardless of their experience and length of service at Rej High School, have contributed to the

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<sup>15</sup> There is no such subject as classical studies in Poland, nor is there a syllabus in this field that would specify the relevant requirements in detail. There is, however, a core curriculum for the subject Latin Language and Ancient Culture. It defines the content of the subject, which, apart from Latin, also includes mythology, elements of ancient history, rhetoric, ancient art, and ancient philosophy. The solutions at Rej High School were experimental (e.g., we paid attention to teaching writing skills and practising oratory presentations). For the mythological component of Rej's courses in particular, see the next section of the present chapter: "Why the Classics? – or, On the Use of Classical Mythology in Education and the Side Effects Thereof" by Katarzyna Marciniak.

<sup>16</sup> I wish to mention especially Julia Tazbir – history teacher and author of the history curriculum; Tomasz Kowalczyk – Polish studies teacher and author of the Polish studies curriculum; Alicja Zielińska – Latin and Greek teacher in the Classics classes; Antonina Ponder – maths teacher and author of the maths curriculum. I was in charge of the Greek and Latin curriculum.

<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned: Bożena Lesiuk, Dariusz Zawistowski, Agnieszka Jasińska, Anna Wojciechowska.

Classics class’s development, which has included original curricula for teaching the classical languages, the curriculum of the introductory subject Mediterranean Culture, which was taught by Latin teachers in classes with a maths-science and biology-chemistry profile, sharing experiences and proposing new solutions for education in the humanities on a nationwide scale, establishing collaborations with the academic community, the programme for the study trips to Rome, the annual rhetorical contests at Wilanów, the students’ successes in national competitions, and, currently, participation in international projects connected with Classical Antiquity as part of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme.

I think I can take the liberty of making a bold comparison here. If I remember rightly, in 2012 at the University of Warsaw, the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” at the initiative of Prof. Jerzy Axer was set up – a special humanities centre for interdisciplinary research, with a curriculum referring extensively to the Greek and Roman tradition, originating from the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA).<sup>18</sup> I am convinced that from the very inception of the Classics class at Rej High School, the curriculum taught there was compatible with the concept of *artes liberales*. In fact, since 2016 the Faculty has been exercising patronage over the Classics class, which today is called the “Polish studies-Classics class”.

It is easier to understand these ties when we take a wider look at the general obligatory model of education – with only a limited amount of knowledge, sufficient to get through consecutive stages of education all the way to training for some profession or other. This is the knowledge described in the core curriculum, its amount being measurable according to certain rules. Measurements and ranking lists show what stage of curriculum implementation we have achieved, which in fact allows us to stop at the “minimum”. Liberal education enables us to look more broadly – it proposes education through problem-solving, refers to original texts and not just abridged versions and extracts, underlines the role and support of teachers, who have their own educational ideas for their students and the ability to modify schemas and propose their own original solutions. This is what we might call “first-hand education”. In this model, “education in culture” is extremely important. If you wanted to elaborate on this idea, you could

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<sup>18</sup> See Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Antiquity and We*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, also available online: [http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity\\_and\\_We\\_eBook.pdf](http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity_and_We_eBook.pdf).

say that school students obtaining knowledge according to the principles of *artes liberales* learn mathematics, for example, not only to pass their school-leaving exam or calculate their taxes, but perhaps above all – to read Plato.<sup>19</sup> Interdisciplinary and parallel reading of works from different areas of the arts – literature, for instance, the medieval Latin text *Requiem* by Thomas of Celano; music, for example, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's great funeral mass *Requiem in D Minor*; painting, for instance, *The Last Judgment* by Hans Memling – becomes an incredible adventure for students and teachers alike, also thanks to Latin and knowledge of mythology. There are many educational situations in which teachers from different disciplines, thanks to the collaboration and support of teachers of the classical languages, can help students discover completely new and unknown realms.

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After thirty years of working at Rej High School, I decided to share the experience I had gained there with another school and another group of teachers. In 2011, the *Sternik* Education and Family Support Association, invoking an education model popular in English-speaking countries and Spain, founded the "Strumienie" High School for girls in Józefów near Warsaw. I was invited to take part in developing the concept for the curriculum, especially in developing an original humanities curriculum. In a group composed of teachers of Polish, history, cultural studies, and Latin (working with Rej High School teacher Anna Wojciechowska, with whom I collaborate on a regular basis, also in the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme), we designed a curricular block called Culture and Tradition, which combines the curricula of three subjects – Polish studies, cultural studies, and Latin – into one whole. The main emphasis here is on considering phenomena of Polish and European culture in conjunction with Mediterranean tradition and culture. In the process of instruction and education at the *Sternik* schools, special importance is given to a return to sources. In our Culture and Tradition

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<sup>19</sup> According to Plato, it was important to learn mathematics, which was helpful in achieving a higher level of knowledge and understanding of the world of ideas. At his Academy, mathematics (especially geometry) was also considered a field that helped in acquiring virtues and shaping character. There was an inscription at the entrance to the Academy: ἀγεωμέτρητος μηδεὶς εἰσὶτω – "May no one untrained in geometry enter". See also below, section 2.1. "Telemachus' Crew", by Katarzyna Marciniak. Cf. M.F. Burnyeat, "Plato on Why Mathematics Is Good for the Soul", in Timothy Smiley, ed., *Mathematics and Necessity: Essays in the History of Philosophy*, Proceedings of the British Academy 103, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 1–81, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pubs/proc/files/103p001.pdf>.

curricular block, the Latin curriculum *Ad fontes* answers the question about the purpose of and need for keeping content related to Graeco-Roman antiquity a part of school curricula. We believe this is still an essential and irreplaceable tool for reading and understanding the recorded depository of European culture. And it is this content that is slowly disappearing from the core curriculum of general education at public schools.

At this point it seems important to underline that in Poland up to the end of the eighteenth century, Latin was the Poles' second national language, a fact that has had a major impact on the unique character of our national heritage. Therefore, in order to be not only well educated but also to responsibly take care of European and especially Polish heritage, you need to know Latin. And wherever Latin is still appreciated as a tool that teaches thinking, good speaking, and writing, people believe that if someone has completed a Latin course and successfully translated original Latin texts, they can be trusted with a responsible job.<sup>20</sup> And things being as they are – *quae cum ita sint* – as Cicero would probably say, since passing on shared heritage and taking care to preserve it is hard and often thankless work, it requires proper preparation all the more. It appears that schools have and will continue to have an important and responsible role to play in this.

Today, in the face of another change in Polish education, the question arises about what will happen to Latin and Ancient Culture at school, and particularly at general high schools. And once again the motto *Macte animo!*, which the founders of Mikołaj Rej High School No. XI placed above the entrance, reminds us of its message. How wise were those people who knew what challenges emerge for education in all times and circumstances. Today I would add a thought from an old Latin textbook we used at Rej High School for a few years, in the good times. It references mythology again, this time an Olympian god who has the gift of seeing the future. If I remember correctly, in one chapter Apollo says to a follower: “Noli timere, tempus est novum cursum vitae inire” – “Fear not, the time has come to start a new life”.

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Andy Bloxham, “MI5 Boss Attracted by ‘Intrigue’ of ‘I, Claudius’”, *The Telegraph*, 4 October 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/8039653/MI5-boss-attracted-by-intrigue-of-I-Claudius.html>; J.K. Rowling, “The Fringe Benefits of Failure, and the Importance of Imagination”, *Harvard Magazine*, 5 June 2008, <https://harvardmagazine.com/2008/06/the-fringe-benefits-failure-the-importance-imagination>; Christopher Perrin, “10 Reasons to Study Latin First”, Classical Academic Press, 12 November 2019, <https://classicalacademicpress.com/10-reasons-to-study-latin/>.



## Appendix

Witold Kaliński

### The Idea of a “Classics Class”

*Witold Kaliński is a retired teacher, active community volunteer, long-time headmaster of renowned Warsaw secondary schools, including Mikołaj Rej High School No. XI, where he initiated the Classics class.<sup>21</sup>*

The word “Classics” already contains the kernel of “class”. Need we say more? And yet, I shall add a few words, because it is great to discern when looking into the essence.

If truth be told, I never understood how you could be a philologist without knowing Greek, although that was exactly the kind of philologist I became. But should a good teacher repeat his deficiency in his students? A rhetorical question.

(Neither did I ever understand how you could get your school-leaving certificate without the rudiments of philosophy. In other words, I’ll die a fool.)

Due to the “first Solidarity” (*pierwsza Solidarność*) movement, the system of supervision began to shake, and when the breeze of history touched the education authorities as well, we started digging into that crumbling wall. A city whose population exceeded a million at the time, Warsaw should have more to offer in education than three to four so-called profiles, three to four foreign languages. Life – even the life of a university – is much richer than that.

And, it is the mission of a high school to prepare students for university. At least that was the mission then (and those were proper university studies then). At Rej High School, the great majority of the teaching staff (led by the modest and brilliant Dr Julia Tazbir) fully understood this mission, while the Education Board was becoming happy not to interfere.

The idea of a Classics class? Let’s be clear: if a person is a special union of body and spirit, then the classic style is a natural environment for both. For the body – because it praises physicality and scorns death. See also: Greek sculpture. For the spirit – because it was the Pre-Socratics, Plato,

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<sup>21</sup> Barbara Strycharczyk’s and Witold Kaliński’s texts have been translated into English by Joanna Dutkiewicz.

and their successors who created the notional categories for describing the human condition, Greek historians lent it rhythm, and Greek tragedians brilliantly expressed both pity and fear. See earlier: Greek myths.

Then came Latin, and long afterwards – as one might impressively conclude – there was Constantine Cavafy.

I think that for “those like me”, Horace would be enough to teach Latin. Not necessarily to learn it first. It needs saying that Horace has had some excellent translators in Poland, Adam Ważyk not being the last of them.

Meanwhile, even before feminism dawned, we took delight in Sappho. It’s truly wonderful that almost every decade the image of Ancient Greek poetry assumes still watercolour but nonetheless ever-deeper hues. We discover new fragments of that poetry. As if it were being written today.

Thanks to the Classics, we live livelier lives, nothing left to say!



**Figure 2:** The inscription *Macte animo* on the Mikolaj Rej High School No. XI building in Warsaw (the classical column in the foreground belongs to the Holy Trinity Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession). Photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak.

Katarzyna Marciniak

## **2. Why the Classics? – or, On the Use of Classical Mythology in Education and the Side Effects Thereof**

Once upon a time there was a king who had a grandson. Because the boy was his hope for the future and the heir of his huge empire, the king wanted to provide him with only the best. And he could indeed do so, for he was a very rich and powerful king. He understood that knowledge was the key to authority and that it formed character. And this was exactly what the prince needed, as now, at the age of seven, he was considered to be an exceptionally hot-headed and spoiled child. The king brought together the most eminent tutors and teachers in the land. One of them achieved spectacular pedagogical success, acknowledged even by his most ardent enemies.<sup>22</sup> The boy matured and started showing an impressive sense of duty.

However, this story is not a fairy tale and hence there is no happy ending. Not only did the king fail to thank the tutor, but he dismissed him, then banished him, and never let him return to the royal palace ever again. The king's rage was caused by a book the tutor had written to improve the course of the prince's education. This was a truly mythical education, as we could call it, and at first sight the book seemed to be utterly detached from reality. François Fénelon (for he is the tutor in our story) wrote for his pedagogical purposes a text that he christened a "prose epic" – a novel about the adventures of Odysseus' son Telemachus (*Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse*, ed. pr. 1699). Louis XIV (for he is the king in our story) saw himself in the mirror of Classical Antiquity, as it was polished by Fénelon. Thus, suddenly, the myth from a remote past, with no apparent link to seventeenth-century France, turned out to be a commentary on that precise period. The character of Mentor, whose form was taken by Athena in the novel – Athena who for her part became the alter ego of Fénelon – provided Telemachus, and through him Louis XIV's grandson – Louis, Duke of Burgundy (for he is the student in our story) – with a clear lesson on the absolute monarchy's depravity.

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<sup>22</sup> See Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon, *Mémoires inédites du Duc de Saint-Simon sur le siècle de Louis XIV et sur la régence*, Paris: Chez les marchands de nouveautés, 1838, chapter 19, esp. 257–259.

## 2.1. Telemachus’ Crew

The king could get as mad as he wanted, but not without reason does the term “education” originate from the Latin verb composed of the preposition *e* and the verb *ducere*. Thus it means ‘to lead out’ (from a lower condition up onto the highlands of the human mind through knowledge). As Craig Evan Anderson observes, “we find the notion of positional leadership within the Latin *ducere* in the English derivative ‘duke’”.<sup>23</sup> Who has once been led out in that way, cannot be forced to return. S/he becomes the ruler of their own mind. For the transformation takes place once and for all. Nor is there even any preposition to describe its – at least purely theoretical – reversal, as *de-ducere* or *in-ducere* denote completely different actions, while *re-ducere* – ‘to bring back’ (the army or Cicero from exile) – acquired the meaning ‘to bring to an inferior condition’ as late as in the Middle Ages, and mostly in the context of material status or military rank.<sup>24</sup> This is hardly surprising in light of one of the fundamental laws that govern the world of ancient mythology: once a metamorphosis has been carried out, it cannot be undone.<sup>25</sup> Louis XIV’s grandson, called Le Petit Dauphin, declared himself in favour of limiting absolutism.

However, as I have mentioned, this is not a fairy tale and there is no happy ending. Fénelon’s ward died at the age of thirty and thus we will never know how history would have developed had he received an opportunity to implement the ideals of his mentor and Mentor. The power of myth and good literature consists nonetheless in the fact that they have no “expiry date”. On the contrary: each new reader as an individual, and each new generation as a community, can discover the same story anew and they can

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<sup>23</sup> Craig Evan Anderson, “Exodus from the Cave: Moses as Platonic Educator”, in Matthew Ryan Hauge and Andrew W. Pitts, eds., *Ancient Education and Early Christianity*, London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2016, 25, n. 1.

<sup>24</sup> See A. Vos, H. Veldhuis, E. Dekker, N.W. den Bok, and A.J. Bekk, eds., *Duns Scotus on Divine Love: Texts and Commentary on Goodness and Freedom, God and Humans*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2017 (ed. pr. 2003), 210, n. 8 (the editors comment on their English translation of Scotus: “In the translation we have rendered ‘reducere’ by ‘reduce’, although the Latin term does not have the connotation of ‘boiling down’ or ‘making smaller’. ‘Reducere’ means ‘tracing something back to its origin’”). For the meaning of *reducere* in alchemy, see William R. Newman, *Newton the Alchemist: Science, Enigma, and the Quest for Nature’s “Secret Fire”*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018, xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Midas’ and Tiresias’ fates are very particular exceptions to the rule: in Midas’ case the power of his golden touch was “transposed” onto the river Pactolus, while Tiresias “had to” change from man into woman and back to be used by Zeus and Hera in their bet, and in the end he paid for these multiple transformations with his sight.

find therein content that is valid in their own times, even millennia after the given story's origin.

Louis XIV, despite his rage and power, could not stop the "damage" done to absolutism by Telemachus, a Greek hero from the ancient past. Manuscripts do not burn, not even Fahrenheit 451 would be enough, for our mythical library is located within our hearts, souls, and minds (delete where not applicable). So *The Adventures of Telemachus* did not end with the death of Le Petit Dauphin, nor even with that of Louis XIV or Fénelon. For the myth revived in the imagination of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and it inspired his ideas that forever changed the notion of civilization – we feel their consequences to this day. Still back in the eighteenth century, one of the most avid readers of the novel was Thomas Jefferson, a Founding Father of the United States of America, its third president, and the author of the Declaration of Independence – a document not only still valid in his country, but also still inspirational for the shapers of political systems all over the twenty-first-century world. Fénelon's novel was also the favourite childhood book of one of the greatest classical philologists in the history of our discipline – Tadeusz Zieliński (1859–1944), the author of the seminal *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (1897) and *Tragodumenon libri tres* (1925).<sup>26</sup>

This eminent and charismatic scholar of a shattered *curriculum vitae*, who declared himself to be a professor of the University of Warsaw until the very end of his life in Germany, but who in communist Poland was sentenced to *damnatio memoriae*,<sup>27</sup> decided to engage in the dissemination of Greek mythology among young people already at the turn of the twentieth century. He then faced accusations of being a bungler and wasting the precious time of a scholar on second-rate activities.<sup>28</sup> But Zieliński did not belong

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<sup>26</sup> Thaddaeus Zieliński, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1897 (the last ed. rev. by Zieliński was published in 1929 and reprinted in 1967), and his *Tragodumenon libri tres*, Cracoviae: Sumptibus Polonicae Academiae Litterarum, 1925.

<sup>27</sup> On his biography and works for youth, see my chapter "(De)constructing Arcadia: Polish Struggles with History and Differing Colours of Childhood in the Mirror of Classical Mythology", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, *Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity* 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 67–75.

<sup>28</sup> Tadeusz Zieliński, *Autobiografia. Dziennik 1939–1944* [Autobiography; Diary 1939–1944], ed. Hanna Geremek and Piotr Mitzner, Warszawa: OBTA and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2005, 181. See also Tadeusz Zieliński, *Queen of the Wind Maidens: Prologue*, introd. Michał Mizera, trans. from the Russian original Katarzyna Tomaszuk, English trans. and textual notes Elżbieta Olechowska, Warsaw: Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, 2013 (ed. pr. in Russian 1917), 7, [www.al.uw.edu.pl/zielinski\\_queen](http://www.al.uw.edu.pl/zielinski_queen); and my chapter "(De)constructing Arcadia", 69.

to those who permit critics to discourage them. Perhaps remembering his own emotions while reading, as a child, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, he understood how important it was to educate and to acquaint young people with the heritage of Classical Antiquity. So he wrote for them *Starożytność bajeczna* [Fabulous Antiquity, in Russian 1922–1923, in Polish 1930] – a mythology exceptional, indeed, on a global scale, as he based it on the Greek tragedies he researched. He also took part in the national debate on education by publishing such studies as *Starożytność antyczna a wykształcenie klasyczne* [Classical Antiquity and Classical Education, 1920] and “Kilka uwag o wykształceniu klasycznym” [A Few Remarks about Classical Education, 1927].<sup>29</sup>

Finally, a devoted Fénelon reader and member of “Telemachus’ crew” already as a child was the writer who became the most important figure for Polish classical culture and antiquity-oriented education: Jan Parandowski (1895–1978), the author of *Mitologia. Wierzenia i podania Greków i Rzymian* [Mythology: Beliefs and Legends of the Greeks and Romans], known simply as *Mythology* – a book that has been uninterruptedly reissued since its first publication in 1924 in Lviv, canonical reading for all subsequent generations of Poles at least up to the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps Parandowski was influenced by *The Adventures of Telemachus* also while preparing the most popular Polish translation of Homer’s *Odyssey* in an “epic prose” style (1953) and, even earlier, when he published its special adaptation for children, *Przygody Odyseusza* [The Adventures of Odysseus, 1935].<sup>31</sup>

While both of Parandowski’s books were required school reading (*The Adventures of Odysseus* and *Mythology* in elementary school, for circa eleven-year-olds; and *Mythology* once again, in high school), education in the

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<sup>29</sup> Tadeusz Zieliński, *Starożytność antyczna a wykształcenie klasyczne* [Classical Antiquity and Classical Education], Zamość: Zygmunt Pomarański i Spółka, 1920; “Kilka uwag o wykształceniu klasycznym” [A Few Remarks about Classical Education], *Kwartalnik Klasyczny* [Classical Quarterly] 1.2 (1927), 6–10. See also Elżbieta Olechowska, “Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland”, in David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classics and Class: Greek and Latin Classics and Communism at School*, Warsaw and Ljubljana: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw; Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2016, 213–228.

<sup>30</sup> On his biography and works for youth, see my chapter “(De)constructing Arcadia”, 61–67, and Janusz Ryba’s remarks in the present volume, 209–236.

<sup>31</sup> See Jan Parandowski, *Mitologia. Wierzenia i podania Greków i Rzymian* [Mythology: Beliefs and Legends of the Greeks and Romans], Lwów: Księgarnia Wydawnicza H. Altenberga, 1924; *Przygody Odyseusza* [The Adventures of Odysseus], Lwów: Księgarnia Wydawnicza H. Altenberga, 1935; Homer, *Odyseja* [The Odyssey], trans. Jan Parandowski, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1953.



field of Greek and Roman myths in Polish school classes of a "Classics profile" had a much broader scope. Below I present the case of the "Classics class" from the late 1990s at Mikołaj Rej High School No. XI in Warsaw – the school famous for its support for the ideas of religious tolerance and the tradition of intellectual liberty, where the Classics profile was an interdisciplinary endeavour.

To be admitted to a class of this profile, you had to pass a special exam, and not even the diploma of a winner in any of the elementary school competitions ("Olympics", as they were called – in my case, in biology) could assure you entrance, as was typical for the majority of Polish high schools. The exam took place early in the spring, not to deprive the young people of their chance in the standard procedure in case they failed. Skills in the creative use of Polish language were tested and – in a similarly demanding way – so was knowledge of mathematics, which heralded an interdisciplinary education in a Platonic spirit: ἀγεωμέτρητος μηδεὶς εἰσὶτω – "May no one untrained in geometry enter".

The Classics profile was an experiment at that time, at its second stage. Its programmes were still evolving. In this respect, I have a unique opportunity to present its idea from the perspective of a graduate in possession of the complete set of my notes from the main subjects that were constitutive for Rej High School "Classics". Thus, I dare assume here the difficult dual task of a researcher of and a witness to a certain endeavour. Owing to this and striving to proceed *sine ira* (or rather *favore*) *et studio*, I am able to reach to the very essence of this experiment. So first, I characterize the unique nature of the Latin and Greek classes; then I present some examples of the interactions between the subjects with a special focus on the most important one, called Ancient Culture; finally, in reference to the societal and educational aspect of the international research programme *Our Mythical Childhood*, I show which elements of the Classics profile experiment are still in force.

From among different aspects that were important for Rej High School "Classics", I pay particular attention to the presence of classical mythology in this experiment, including the "side effects" thereof. For as we have seen with the example of Le Petit Dauphin, myths are by no means neutral. King Louis XIV – *le Roi Soleil* – knew this well when he was presenting himself as an incarnation of the solar god Apollo: as the patron of the arts whose daily rhythm – including his rituals of getting up and retreating – regulated his citizens' life cycle, next to the Palace of Versailles, full of Apollonian

attributes, such as laures, lyres, and tripods.<sup>32</sup> However, it did not come to the King’s mind (or it did, but not until it was too late) that mythology was a double-edged sword, and it educated the people not only into his admiration, but also into their desire for freedom. What is more, the full potential of mythology manifests itself exactly when it stops being an instrument in the hands of a ruler who uses it for his temporal politics, and becomes a heritage that builds a community.

May my case study be food for thought for all who still care and wish to make a change in the education systems today, not counting on short-term profits, but aiming to save this heritage for the long term, κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ – “a possession for ever”, to quote Thucydides (1.22.4), for the generations to come who deserve the chance to resolve on their own the question: “Why the Classics?”

## 2.2. “I Drank a Poison and I Sing”: Greek and Latin as the Keys to Mythology

“Disce puer Latine, ego faciam te mościpanie” – “Study Latin, my boy, and I will make you a mościpanie”, that is, a nobleman. According to an anecdote famous in Poland, that was the promise which, in macaronic Latin, King Stephen Báthory (1533–1586) was supposed to have made to a pupil whom he met during his visit to a school in the city of Zamość. A noble title for the knowledge of Latin? Indeed, Latin played a special role in Polish culture. This phenomenon is the subject of Jerzy Axer’s analysis in the volume *Łacina jako język elit* [Latin as the Language of the Elites, 2004]. The heterogenic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth deemed itself an heir to Rome, and it was none other than the language of the Romans that welded together the members of the gentry nation.<sup>33</sup> The Roman republican ideals of liberty were so firmly rooted in the soil of the Commonwealth that the various forms of absolutism could hardly develop.<sup>34</sup> From the sixteenth century, Polish kings

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<sup>32</sup> See the website of the Palace of Versailles: “Louis XIV (1638–1715)”, Château de Versailles, <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/great-characters/louis-xiv>.

<sup>33</sup> See Jerzy Axer, ed., *Łacina jako język elit* [Latin as the Language of the Elites], Warszawa: OBTA and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2004; see also Katarzyna Marciniak, “Zum *Mocium Panem* zu werden... Kleine Gedanken zu einem grossen Buch”, *Eos* 97 (2010), 297–307.

<sup>34</sup> On Jefferson’s reading list there was an English version of the treatise *De optimo senatore* (1568) by Wawrzyniec Goślicki, a professor of the Jagiellonian University, who postulated the limitation of the king’s authority. The treatise, today nearly forgotten, is said to have inspired Jefferson

were elected by the gentry in a procedure called the “free election”. Such a king was also Báthory, who ascended the Polish throne, also *iure uxoris*, in 1576. As he was not a Pole by birth – in fact, he was the Prince of Transylvania and a native Hungarian – he communicated with his new “republican subjects” in the only language possible then: Latin.

Even if the vision of making a career thanks to Latin does not convince many today, another argument is still valid – namely, the one put forth by Wilfried Stroh in his *Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein!* (2007), a bestseller of Germany’s largest weekly, *Der Spiegel*. Prof. Stroh, a Latin speaker himself, writes about “the Experience of the Masterpieces” (*das Erlebnis der Meisterwerke*) – an upbeat emotional sensation that can be gained only via direct contact with the given text, that is, in its original language. So, it is a strange paradox how highly traumatic memories are shared by people who have studied Latin or Greek as part of their school education. A fan of Stroh’s book and the author of one of its enthusiastic reviews at Amazon.de has the following flashback:

Mein Lateinlehrer in der 3. Klasse Gymnasium (7. Klasse in Deutschland) war ein kleinwüchsiger Giftzwerg, der seine Komplexe an den Schülern ausliess, völlig irre Strafen verteilte, noch bevor man etwas getan hatte, etwa nur weil man lächelte etc. Der Teufel möge ihn peinigen!

My Latin teacher in the third grade of gymnasium (seventh grade in Germany) was a small and poisonous dwarf who vented his complexes at the students and meted out completely insane penalties even before you had done anything, just because you smiled, etc. May the devil torment him!<sup>35</sup>

After the publication of the famous book by Françoise Waquet *Le latin, ou l’empire d’un signe* (1998; in English as *Latin, or the Empire of a Sign*, 2001), which called into question the presence of ancient languages in general education, Jerzy Axer organized at the University of Warsaw’s Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA) a “court” session, *Łacina na*

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in his work on the Declaration of Independence; see Mark F. Bielski, *Sons of the White Eagle in the American Civil War: Divided Poles in a Divided Nation*, Philadelphia, PA and Oxford: Casemate, 2016, 12.

<sup>35</sup> Echo 1954, “Ja, so hätte ich mir den Lateinunterricht gewünscht!”, Kundenrezensionen, Amazon.de, 28 August 2008, [https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3548608094/ref=cm\\_cr\\_arp\\_d\\_paging\\_btm\\_2?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending&pageNumber=2](https://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/3548608094/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_paging_btm_2?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending&pageNumber=2). See also my paper “Zum *Mocium Panem* zu werden...”, 305. English translations of all the quotations are mine (K.M.), unless stated otherwise.

*ławie oskarżonych* [Latin in the Dock, 2004]. During the session, more testimonies similar in nature were gathered, and by renowned thinkers and authors. Of course, their statements were embedded in the intentionally comic style of an “act of indictment”;<sup>36</sup> nonetheless, they are significant. Chronologically, Bolesław Prus (1847–1912), one of the best Polish writers (the author of the outstanding psychological novel *Lalka* [The Doll] and the great historical fiction *Faraon* [The Pharaoh]), stated: “Out of a hundred philologists – each one has an ailing liver and stomach, each one is caustic, and each one is ever so wise with a wisdom whose *kingdom is not of this world*”.<sup>37</sup> In his satirical inclinations, Prus was soon joined by Julian Tuwim (1894–1953), a distinguished poet of the interwar period, who – in the poem “Łacina” [Latin], widely read at Rej High School – summed up his study of the conjugations and declinations as follows: “What a torment, how great the drama!”<sup>38</sup> On top of that, even the eminent classicist poet Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998) recalled: “So we studied Latin with Grześ [the nickname of his teacher]. How? In pain”.<sup>39</sup> And the Nobel Prize in Literature laureate Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) stated: “Latin was mostly a terrible bore to us”.<sup>40</sup>

Things were not any better for Greek. Let’s quote Prus again: “[F]or it has been proven that the people who can choose between Ancient Greek language and Hell – they choose the latter”.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, another Polish Nobel Prize in Literature laureate, the author of the globally acclaimed *Quo vadis*, Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916), remarked melancholically:

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<sup>36</sup> The prosecutor was Prof. Małgorzata Borowska and she played her role superbly. See the booklet (incl. a DVD), AA.VV., *Łacina na ławie oskarżonych* [Latin in the Dock], Warszawa: OBTA and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> One of Bolesław Prus’s feuilletons republished later in the collection *Kroniki* [Chronicles], vol. 4, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1955, 350: “Ze stu filologów – wszyscy są chorzy na wątrobę i żołądek, wszyscy skwaszeni i wszyscy bardzo mądrzy tą mądrością, której *królestwo nie jest z tego świata*”. I owe the information about Prus’s remarks on Latin and Greek to Prof. Borowska.

<sup>38</sup> From the collection *Jarmark rymów* [The Market of the Rhymes], Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1955 (ed. pr. 1934), 301: “Jaka to męka! Co za dramat!”.

<sup>39</sup> Zbigniew Herbert’s essay “Lekcja łaciny” [Latin Lesson], in his *Labirynt nad morzem* [A Labyrinth by the Sea], Warszawa: Fundacja Zeszytów Literackich, 2000, 186: “Więc uczyliśmy się łaciny u Grzesia. Jak? W męce”.

<sup>40</sup> See Aleksander Fiut, *Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem* [In Conversation with Czesław Miłosz], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981, 67: “Łacina była dla nas straszną nudą przeważnie”.

<sup>41</sup> In Bolesław Prus, *Kroniki* [Chronicles], vol. 3, ed. Zygmunt Szweykowski, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1954, 212: “[P]rzekonano się bowiem, że ludzie mając do wyboru grecczyzną albo piekło – wybierają to ostatnie”.

Grecja dała światu dużo arcydzieł, ale też zostawiła taką plagę ludzkości pod postacią swego języka, że gdyby cholera była wydusiła za czasów Peryklesa wszystkich Greków, świat byłby może dziś weselszy, a ludzie zdrowsi. Mogłaby to jeszcze poniekąd cholera wynagrodzić, wydusiwszy wszystkich filologów.<sup>42</sup>

Greece gave the world a lot of masterpieces, but it also left such a plague of humanity in the form of its language, that had the cholera in Pericles' times strangled all the Greeks, the world could be merrier today, and the people healthier. Cholera could still compensate for this to a certain degree by strangling all the philologists.

However, those philologists (indeed, lucky to deal with an exceptionally grateful subject) managed to awaken in Sienkiewicz his great and eternal love for Greek culture and its language:

Zbyt lubię Homera, Sofoklesa, zabytki Grecji i jej ogromną tradycję, która, choć często o tym nie wiemy, płynie jak krew w naszych żyłach – i żyć bym już bez tego nie mógł!

I like Homer, Sophocles, Greece's monuments and its huge tradition too much. This tradition, although often we are not aware of it, circulates in our veins like blood – and I would not be able to live without it anymore!

Reading *Quo vadis* we have no doubts that Sienkiewicz felt similarly towards Latin tradition. The motif of the circulation of Latin in the veins returns also for Tuwim, who concluded his famous poem about the tortuous (or even torturous) process of studying this ancient language as follows:<sup>43</sup>

Aż nagle – nagle wszystko umiesz,  
Już krąży w twojej krwi łacina  
I dumny jesteś, że rozumiesz:  
*Quousque tandem, Catilina?...*

I już ci nie żal szkolnej pracy,  
Gdy żyje, kwitnie każde słowo,

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<sup>42</sup> This and the next quotations come from Henryk Sienkiewicz's letters (to Karol Potkański, 30 October 1897; Maria Wrotnowska, 2 February 1886; and Maria Radziejewska, 12/13 June 1903), quoted after Borowska's splendid oration in *Łacina na ławie oskarżonych* and her *Mormolyke*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1996, 9, n. 1.

<sup>43</sup> English translation mine (K.M.).

A ty z Wergilim i Horacym  
Przeżywasz stary Rzym na nowo!

I myślisz: wieczny pomnik wzniesli,  
Choć nad nim czas burzami leciał!  
Jakiż to martwy język, jeśli  
Nie więdnąc przetrwał tysiąclecia!

I potem ci się *terra, terram*  
I *amo, amas* przypomina:  
I kochasz ziemię, *amas terram*,  
Z którą złączyła cię łacina.

I ona kocha cię (*amaris*),  
I jużście się zrozumieli  
Z italskim morzem (*mare, maris*),  
Z italskim niebem (*caelum, caeli*).

All of a sudden you gain the skills,  
And Latin courses through your veins,  
And you are proud to understand this:  
*Quousque tandem, Catiline?...*

And you don't see your school as wasted,  
When each word is a blooming rose,  
While you along with Horace, Virgil,  
May now feel ancient Rome's new force!

You think: for all times they erected  
A monument – in stormy weather!  
Thus what dead language, and neglected?  
It's been flourishing since forever!

And you recall then *terra, terram*  
And *amo, amas* with no patin:  
You love the land then, *amas terram*,  
That you are joined with thanks to Latin.

And then it loves you (*so, amaris*),  
And you have known each other fairly  
With Italy's sea (*mare, maris*),  
With Italy's sky (*caelum, caeli*).

The study of the ancient languages in the Classics class at Rej High School started precisely with Latin, from the very first year, in the amount of four hours per week. After a short but inspiring contact with a young classicist Joanna Derda, Latin was taught by Barbara Strycharczyk, who managed to sweeten the bitterness of repeating the conjugation and declination patterns by sharing with us the fascinating cultural context.

As soon as the second week, we came to know the maxim *Per aspera ad astra*, and clearly it was a significant pedagogical message to us (nearly a warning: "Beware! It will not be easy!"), as well as an ethical one too, for it enabled us to understand the background of the school's motto (Stadius, *Theb.* 7.280, in reference to the Virgilian verse, *Aen.* 9.641: "Macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra"). In the third week, as in a follow-up to this motto, we had our first Close Encounter of the Third Kind with the *Aeneid* as such – one of the texts for the sake of which ("the Experience of the Masterpieces"!)) we were supposed to go *per aspera*. We read its famous opening "Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris". The beginnings were not easy, indeed, and we even kept a class register of our translation slips (unbelievable, but nonetheless true: "I drank a poison and I sing" in regard to the *Aeneid's* incipit – probably because of the similarity between the nouns *vir* and *virus* – or the Horatian *Memento mori* as "Do not forget to die!"), but over time our skills grew. At the lessons of Latin, classical mythology also played an important role – present already in the handbooks and language exercises of various kinds.

As the programme of the Classics profile was experimental, we had no predefined manual. We used *Lingua Latina* (1958) by Stefan Staszczuk, Jadwiga Daabowa, and Zbigniew Sabińo; the photocopies (or the handwritten copies) of the preparations<sup>44</sup> from the British, French, German, and Italian textbooks that Prof. Strycharczyk or her colleagues "grabbed" in various ways – often owing to the kind help of scholars abroad (*Asterix Latinus* was an extra bonus when we did particularly well in our tests); and the exercises drafted by Rej's teaching staff. Soon we also started reading original fragments. Staszczuk et al.'s textbook was centred on the issues of slavery and agriculture, in line with the post-war policy of the Polish state, but it also contained some mythological references, both to Roman legends ("De

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<sup>44</sup> "Preparacje" (preparations) is a technical term in the Polish tradition of learning ancient languages – it refers to texts in Greek or Latin that are indeed prepared on the base of originals. These "preparacje" are simplifications that help prepare students for direct contact with ancient masterpieces at later stages of education (as in *Wheelock's Latin* model for the USA).

Romulo”, “De lupa Romana”) and to Greek myths (“De bello Troiano”, “De equo Troiano”), while the maps of the regions discussed in the texts and the pictures of the monuments (Homer’s bust, the walls of Troy, the Luperical Cave), despite the terrible resolution of their photocopies, contributed to holistic learning.

We practised the ACI (*Accusativus cum infinitivo*) construction on a mythological story, too – mainly, Daedalus’ crime. It was easier to understand the grammar when we were already familiar with the content of the exercises. Thus, we created various configurations of phrases based on the starting point in the form of the sentence: “Daedalus discipulum suum necavit”, that is, “Fama est Daedalum discipulum suum necavisse”, “Dico Daedalum discipulum suum necavisse”, etc. Even if the nature of this crime reached us in a slightly mitigated form (the murder of his pupil, not precisely his nephew), it was shocking nonetheless. Indeed, the myth of Daedalus and Icarus is usually reduced to its main, that is “Cretan”, core – the episode of their imprisonment and flight towards liberty; hence their tragedy seems to be (*nomen omen*) “suspended” in a kind of vacuum. Thus, this kind of learning made it possible for the students to look deep into the tissue of mythical tales.<sup>45</sup> Besides, the Latin course ran in parallel with the studies on the myths we were expected to carry out on our own: in my notes I can see a test on Parandowski’s *Mythology* scheduled already for the second month of the term.

The Greek lessons – two hours per week from the third year – were also organically linked with learning about the myths. After a crash course on the alphabet, we translated such sentences (mainly from Greek into Polish, but sometimes also the other way round), as: “The Gods admire Hermes’ art”, “The olive trees are sacred, they are under Athena’s care”, and “The young boys worship Hermes”, prepared by our teacher Alicja Zielińska. Greek, due to its “otherness” (as we saw it at that time), plain already at the level of the alphabet, seemed to us a true language of “transition” – the key to Fabulous Antiquity, to use Tadeusz Zieliński’s term (the similarity of his and our teacher’s surnames was coincidental, but maybe mythical...).

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<sup>45</sup> I recall having come across the full version of the myth during my childhood readings of the “adult” elaborations on mythology, but only at high school, recasting the story word by word (as a side effect of this process), for the first time did I become aware of such “hidden” connections between mythological events and only then did I grasp consciously the need to incessantly search for the mechanisms that rule the world (of myths, at least).



Along with the materials prepared by Prof. Zielińska, an old collection of preparations by Marian Golias (1887–1966), *Wstępna nauka języka greckiego* [Preliminary Study of the Greek Language, ed. pr. 1926], was in use in the Classics profile.<sup>46</sup> It opened with some easy readings; thereafter the degree of difficulty grew, and the collection closed with fragments of some simple originals. A short biography of Homer appeared as early as lesson 11, next to a reproduction of his bust, again in very poor resolution. Subsequently, we read about the Muses and next, about Daedalus – his myth was our first longer reading in Greek, in two parts, with the information that the pupil killed by the architect was the son of his sister. Thus, the main version of the story, studied at the elementary level of the Polish education system,<sup>47</sup> and deepened at Latin lessons within Rej's Classics profile, revealed its full dramatic dimension with Icarus' death in the cause-and-effect chain of crime and punishment. The text of the myth was again complemented by a visual element: a faint reproduction of a relief showing the image of the protagonists.

Other myths in Golias's preparations, in order of their appearance, were the following: the Argonauts; the Four Ages of Man; Arion; Delphi; Frixos and Helle; the Danaids; the Sphinx; Achilles and Odysseus; the Greek Gods; Zeus, Prometheus, and Momus according to Aesop; Hercules at the Crossroads according to Xenophon (in three parts); Cadmus; Tantalus' Crimes; Perseus; Achilles at Skiros (also in three parts); Hercules and the Wagoner – the original text of Babrius. Some images from Greek vases featuring the relevant mythological protagonists were a precious enrichment of learning.

Along with Golias's preparations we did a few early units from the manual *Hellenike Glotta* by Agnieszka and Kazimierz Korus – an academic couple from the Jagiellonian University (Kazimierz Korus is Professor of Greek

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<sup>46</sup> On the place and role of Golias's manual, see, for a change, the critical voice by Bogdan Sobillo, "Golias for ever, czyli dlaczego (nie) należy nauczać greczyzny z anachronicznego podręcznika?" [Golias For Ever, or, Why You Should (Not) Teach Greek from an Anachronistic Textbook?], 25 November 2015, a lecture given at the conference *Nowoczesna dydaktyka akademicka języków klasycznych* [Modern Academic Teaching of the Classical Languages] organized by Monika Miłkuła and Magdalena Popiołek at the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of Warsaw, available at Academia, [https://www.academia.edu/32279188/Golias\\_for\\_ever\\_czyli\\_dlaczego\\_nie\\_nale%C5%B-Cy\\_naucza%C4%87\\_greczyzny\\_z\\_anachronicznego\\_podr%C4%99cznika\\_1](https://www.academia.edu/32279188/Golias_for_ever_czyli_dlaczego_nie_nale%C5%B-Cy_naucza%C4%87_greczyzny_z_anachronicznego_podr%C4%99cznika_1).

<sup>47</sup> Until our times usually in the fourth or fifth year of primary school; see the document *Podstawa programowa – język polski – szkoła podstawowa* [Core Curriculum: Polish Language. Primary School], Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, <https://archiwum.men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/podstawa-programowa-%e2%80%93-jezyk-polski-%e2%80%93-szkola-podstawowa-%e2%80%93-klasy-iv-viii-.pdf>.

Literature). The book, published in 1996, was a pioneering step in teaching Greek. The material was to a large degree original, with the predominance of Greek historians, Plutarch, the Bible, and some “must-haves” of an educated person, like the Lord’s Prayer and the Hippocratic Oath. The mythological stories were present in the manual, for example, via *Dialogi deorum* by Lucian, but we did not get that far during the course.

My class was also lucky to work with the groundbreaking handbook by Małgorzata Borowska, *Mormolyke* (1996), whose very title refers both to classical mythology and Modern Greek folk tradition. This eminent researcher of Greek and Modern Greek culture, endowed with literary talent and an amazing sense of humour,<sup>48</sup> opens her manual by quoting Prus’s words about the Hell of the Greek language. Next, she presents her vision of education:

Mormo, Lamia, Gelo, Gorgo, czy też wilkołak Mormolyke należą do sporego zastępu wiedźmowatych demonów, którymi nianie greckie zwykły straszyć małe dzieci. [...] Mormolykami szkoły średniej od niepamiętnych czasów były języki klasyczne: łacina i greka, dręczące pokolenia uczniów.<sup>49</sup>

Mormo, Lamia, Gelo, Gorgo, or the werewolf Mormolyke belong to quite a big host of witchery demons used by Greek nurses to scare small children. [...] From time immemorial, the Mormolykai of high school have been the classical languages: Latin and Greek, tormenting whole generations of students.

Borowska does not promise an easy way to Greek (*Per aspera ad astra!*, as we remember...), but she wishes to make it appealing (as she recalls, “according to Greek myths, Mormo was a beautiful girl”), and indeed, she achieves her aim – by giving voice to the ancient authors. The special character of her manual consists in the fact that it contains *only* original texts, even if in the first units they are limited to the short *gnomai*. The choice of the material covers the whole of antiquity, including Plato, the Bible, the tragedians, Menander, epics, and *Homeric Hymns* – for example, the *Hymn to Dionysus*, a precious source to learn about his myth. *Mormolyke* is also rich in the iconography. For example, the fragment from Pseudo-Apollodorus’ *Library*

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<sup>48</sup> See *Łacina na ławie oskarżonych*. It was Prof. Borowska who collected the aforementioned testimonies to studying the ancient languages by eminent Polish poets and writers. Her speech was a daring and thrilling palinody.

<sup>49</sup> Borowska, *Mormolyke*, 7. All the page references provided in parentheses are from this edition.

(3.5.3) on Dionysus and the pirates is illustrated by a reproduction of the famous kylix by Exekias, the Dionysus Cup (390), with the information on its current location (Staatliche Antikensammlung in Munich). Thus the students could be sensitized to Greek art and made aware of the role of extratextual sources in the research into antiquity. Although this aspect was present in the previous manuals, its interactive potential is used by Borowska fully and consequently at each lesson. Indeed, they conclude with “iconographic riddles” for the students. The riddles are far from obvious and – although there is a key with the answers in the final section of the book – the author challenges our ambition: “Are you able to recognize these gods by their attributes?” (28); “Hermes Kriophoros – which functions of this god are linked to this image?” (64); “What happened in the end with the Gorgon’s head?” (226), etc. The questions refer to classical mythology and they focus on the elements that are important in the context of the reception of myths, like the Hermes Kriophoros iconography, crucial for the later motif of Christ the Good Shepherd.

Borowska is aware of the demanding character of her manual. She also suggests the supportive use of Golias’s and Parandowski’s books. During our Greek lessons, of course, we managed to take up but a few first units of *Mormolyke* (it is circa 400 pages long),<sup>50</sup> but in spite of certain difficulties, unavoidable at the high school level, it gave us the precious sensation of direct contact with the word (and the world) of the Ancients – a splinter of what Wilfried Stroh would call later “the Experience of the Masterpieces”.

Summing up the programme of Latin and Greek in the Classics profile in relation to mythology, it can be said that it was precisely this direct contact with the sources that was the most valuable aspect of the courses. We learnt the languages, at the same time expanding our knowledge of the myths and the relevant iconography. Mythology as one of the subjects of the readings also worked the other way round – that is, it made the tedious process of studying grammar more attractive. That programme was complemented by elements of ancient history (which is outside the scope of the present volume, so I leave this aspect for another occasion) as well as by universal maxims, aiming at developing both the linguistic skills of the students and their character, including the ambitious Greek exhortation: γνῶθι σεαυτόν – “Know thyself!” – quite appropriate for maturing youth building their identity. We gained the opportunity to look into the ancient *Logos* ruling the world that was perhaps cruel, as in the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, but not

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<sup>50</sup> I met *Mormolyke* again and in a wider scope during my studies at University.

devoid of meaning, and where destiny and free will mingle in a dynamic, often dramatic interaction.

### 2.3. *Universitas*: Education in a Mythical Community

The hallmark of the Classics profile at Rej High School that in my opinion merits wide application was the interdisciplinary character of the education – in the spirit of *artes liberales*, as mentioned by Barbara Strycharczyk. Such an approach required that the teachers collaborate with additional effort across the disciplines while building and adjusting their programmes. Owing to this, however, different pieces of knowledge could consolidate in the minds of the students who became aware of the links between ostensibly remote subjects. In the field of the sciences this aspect was obviously limited, but it did occur, too, for example in physics – in regard to the “mythological” terminology in astronomy. And it is worth adding that the founders of Rej’s Classics profile did not wish to “absolve” the students from science subjects – on the contrary, the Classics class had an obligatory IT course, two hours per week, including the rudimentary skills of programming – in the 1990s a rarity even in the mathematical profiles.<sup>51</sup>

Of course the idea of activating the links between the areas of knowledge was carried out to the fullest in the humanistic classes. The Polish lessons – for three out of four years held by Małgorzata Sucharska – are a good illustration of this practice. The first word I wrote down in my notebook during the first lesson of Polish was: “Myth” – in green ink to emphasize its importance. And indeed, classical mythology, as the main component of ancient literature, was the subject of our classes throughout the opening term. We began by learning about different definitions and functions of myth, with a particular focus on the analysis of the origin myth, while confronting the vision of the Greeks with the Judaic and Christian traditions. The homework then was to compose our own myth of creation – a perfect exercise to make us practise and consolidate the knowledge we had acquired, and great fun as well. Subsequently we analysed Homer’s *Iliad*. Our homework was to describe a plum cake in Homeric style. That was how my *Cookeid* came to life – a hexameter poem, in which the plums displayed some Achilles-shield-like

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<sup>51</sup> This was the merit of the then Headmaster, Jerzy Gniadek, who had an understanding of a truly interdisciplinary education and encouraged it at Rej High School.

scenes on the pastry, and finally a *katasterion* happened – the cake was placed in the sky by Athena, while the recipe remained on Earth. Next it was time for the *Odyssey*. We focused on *Telemachia* in terms of the maturation process of a young man. We also compared Achilles to Odysseus – a thread that would return later to be expanded on – during the lessons on Ancient Culture (see below). Greek myths accompanied us also while learning about Athenian theatre, with the compulsory reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

After a quick insight into Hellenistic poetry, we arrived in Rome. There we faced Virgil: his *Eclogue* 4 and the *Georgics* – the latter being a poem of particular importance for Polish culture, as not only did the gentry in Poland speak Latin, but they also identified themselves with Roman farmers.<sup>52</sup> Thus the *Georgics* – and not the *Aeneid* – was the favourite poem by Virgil in Polish lands. But of course we also discussed Aeneas' adventures for the literary value and importance of the *Aeneid* in culture, both globally and in Poland (for example, in the Romantic era). We read the most famous of Horace's *Odes*, analysing the mythological references present therein, and finally fragments of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with a particular emphasis on the myth of the Golden Age.

Summing up the semester course in relation to classical mythology, it is worth emphasizing three elements: solid knowledge of the works and their authors, focus on the threads important for Polish and global culture, and – next to the traditional school-tests and chores – some creative tasks as homework. Last but not least, the references to myths returned in the subsequent years, during the lessons on the literature of later epochs: from *Odprawa posłów greckich* [The Dismissal of the Greek Envoys], a drama of 1578 by one of the most eminent Renaissance poets, Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584); through the national Polish epic *Pan Tadeusz* [Sir Thaddeus] of 1834 by the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855; with one of the male protagonists called even the "Slavic Dido", as he saved the life of two hot-headed noblemen by making them duel at the distance of a bear's skin – he had cut it into thin strips, as the Phoenician Queen when demarcating the land of Carthage); up to Henryk Sienkiewicz with his *Quo vadis*; and the contemporary poetry by Zbigniew Herbert and Czesław Miłosz.

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<sup>52</sup> A similar "trend" can be observed also in the history of the United States of America with George Washington as "a Cincinnatus of the West"; see Carl A. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994, 71.

An analogous programme based on a holistic approach to the humanities was carried out at history lessons. As it contained but a small component of classical mythology, again, I leave it outside of the present study. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the person in charge of the programme was Dr Julia Tazbir – an academic historian who also taught at the University of Warsaw. In an interview given in 2017 to Rej High School students she compared her didactic work in these two circles with the following conclusion: “Uczenie studentów nie różni się zasadniczo od uczenia młodzieży w liceum. To jest podobne towarzystwo” (Teaching students is not essentially different from teaching young people in high school. This is a similar company).<sup>53</sup> The idea of a company in the sense of a Community and of a link between high school and the University leads us to the key and absolutely fundamental element of the Classics profile – the subject called Ancient Culture.

Ancient Culture took two hours a week through the whole four-year high school cycle. The best (and half-mythological) term to define the subject was “the Chaos Controlled”, and I mean it as the highest compliment. On the one hand, its programme was carefully defined. For example, for the first class an introductory course was foreseen. In the beginning, each student received a detailed list of the topics that would be discussed during the school year. For Greece: ancient chronology; Aegean, Cretan, and Mycenaean cultures; Greek colonization; the lawmakers; the tyranny; Cleisthenes’ reforms; Sparta and Athens; Delphic Amphictyony; Ionian school of the philosophy of nature; religion and mythology; literature and art of Archaic Greece. For Rome: the population of Italy and its distribution; the Etruscans; Rome in the regal era; Rome after the expulsion of the kings; the rudiments of Latin art and literature. We also received a bibliography that in the first year included the excellent introduction to the ancient world, *Historia kultury starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu* [History of the Culture of Ancient Greece and Rome, 1955] by Prof. Kazimierz Kumaniecki (1905–1977)<sup>54</sup> and of course Parandowski’s *Mythology*. Kumaniecki’s work was at that time

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<sup>53</sup> The interview (in Polish) is available online: RejMedialni, “Naprawdę znałam całego Reja. Rozmowa z Panią Prof. Julią Tazbir” [I Really Did Know the Whole Rej High School: Interview with Prof. Julia Tazbir], RejMedialni, 7 November 2017, <https://rejmedialni.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/naprawde-znalam-calego-reja-rozmowa-z-prof-julia-tazbir/>.

<sup>54</sup> On Prof. Kumaniecki, see Jerzy Axer, “Kazimierz Kumaniecki and the Evolution of Classical Studies in the People’s Republic of Poland”, in György Karsai, Gábor Klaniczay, David Movrin, and Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classics and Communism: Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain*, Ljubljana, Budapest, and Warsaw: Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study; and Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, 187–211.

used as an academic textbook at the courses of classical philology at the University of Warsaw. And it was the scholars from this University who were invited to hold lessons within the framework of the Ancient Culture subject.

The tradition of close collaboration between the school and the University has deep roots in Poland. As Elżbieta Olechowska writes in her analysis "Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland": "In order to retain their *venia legendi* the holders [of PhDs] were required to teach one class per trimester for two years".<sup>55</sup> The scholars' school activity was often continued for years due to their difficult economic situation – teaching as a parallel job seemed the best choice to them, due to its social significance, understood also by many as a mission: their contribution to educating the youth. Thus, Polish high schools hosted among their teachers such outstanding researchers and academics as Prof. Tadeusz Sinko (1877–1966) – a Graecist and pioneer in classical reception studies; Prof. Władysław Witwicki (1878–1948) – a philosopher and the translator of the whole corpus of Plato into Polish; Prof. Kazimierz Kumaniecki in person; and – at none other than Rej High School – Prof. Tadeusz Kotarbiński (1886–1981), the eminent ethicist, a graduate of Philosophy and Classics at the Jagiellonian University, Darmstadt University, and the University of Lviv.<sup>56</sup>

The cooperation with the Classics profile drew on this tradition and the faith in the joint mission of the school and the University – nonetheless, no formal contract or remuneration were foreseen for the academics involved. Simply, Prof. Strycharczyk invited the scholars to propose a topic embedded somehow in the general programme. The topic resulted from their research interests. Once a week, for a two-hour lesson of Ancient Culture, which corresponded to a University lecture, a different scholar came and shared with us – on a fully volunteer basis – their knowledge and passion. They represented various branches of ancient studies, such as classical philology (in the majority of cases), history, philosophy, archaeology. They were at various stages of their research paths: highly experienced professors, young faculty members, PhD students. It seems something more than a coincidence that nearly all of them are today recognized experts and

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<sup>55</sup> Olechowska, "Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland", 217.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem. See also the project *Gnôthi Seauton! – Classics and Communism: The History of the Studies on Antiquity in the Context of the Local Classical Tradition. Socialist Countries (1944/45–1989/90)*, established by Profs. Jerzy Axer, György Karsai, and Gábor Klaniczay (<http://www.obta.uw.edu.pl/pliki/Gnothi%20Seauton.pdf>), now further developed by David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska.

organizers of the research environment. Their willingness to join the didactic process in a scholars–teachers Community (thus going back *ad fontes* to the all-embracing word *Universitas*) and their faith in the meaning of sharing their time with the youth seems now a testimony to a set of features that might be necessary to become a Scholar with a capital S. And their participation in the educational experiment could be somehow a test for those features and an opportunity to cultivate and develop them. Again some food for thought for those who suggest to separate research from teaching.

As it was difficult to coordinate the time schedules both for the school and the University, the programme of Ancient Culture was not always implemented “linearly”; in fact, it rarely was. In addition, the scholars were coming to us with their own fresh theories and discoveries, and often they did not stick to the arrangements – they were led by their passion and the willingness to share their research results with us. Thus, what was supposed to be a lecture happened to develop into a vivid conversation – sometimes so intense that my notes started resembling *notae Tironis* mixed with hieroglyphs or a bizarre mind map. This was typical of, for example, the classes held by Prof. Jerzy Axer, the founder (in 1991) of the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA), transformed later (in 2012) into the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, and the creator of experimental study curricula in the spirit of liberal education in Poland.<sup>57</sup> What needs to be emphasized is the fact that the conversation was authentic – the scholars really wanted to hear our opinions and were willing to open up to digressions and unexpected discussions. They certainly treated us as a public that would be able to understand their research. And we strove to meet those expectations. Of course, the necessity to follow different kinds of discourses and jumping from topic to topic required an extra effort (*Per aspera...* again), but precisely this “untamed” character of the classes was the essence of their charm,

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<sup>57</sup> OBTA was awarded twice (1999, 2000) the Hannah Arendt Prize “for the best innovative research and educational establishment in East-Central Europe”; see Jerzy Axer, “Antiquity and We – The Perspective of the Period of Transformation”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Antiquity and We*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, 45, also available online ([http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity\\_and\\_We\\_eBook.pdf](http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity_and_We_eBook.pdf)). Many educational initiatives created by Prof. Axer have also been “exported” abroad (e.g., the system of Inter-Area Individual Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences – the so-called MISH, adapted in Ukraine). Among the most recent projects by Prof. Axer the joint curriculum – Anthropozoology (since 2017/18) – of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, Faculty of Biology, and the Faculty of Psychology should be mentioned, the first curriculum of its kind in Poland, and the International PhD Program “Nature–Culture” (since 2018/19; see <https://nature-culture.al.uw.edu.pl/>), all rooted in the humanistic tradition of *artes liberales* and the Classics.



and it helped us better understand the non-linear relationships between the subjects, in particular regarding Classical Antiquity and its reception. Hence my atypical compliment to define those lessons – “Chaos Controlled”. We never knew what to expect and that is why each Thursday (eight o’clock in the morning!) was the day that we really awaited.

The first lesson in Ancient Culture was conducted by Adam Łajtar – then a PhD student, today Professor of Archaeology and one of the organizers of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology in 2013. We expected a lecture on Greece or Rome and we received a fascinating conversation about Egypt, we wrote our first hieroglyphs, and we learnt – from a practitioner in reading papyri and participant in archaeological excavations – an outline of the history of Mesopotamia and the Middle East, with Classical Antiquity’s chronology against that background. We also got acquainted with some Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian myths concerning the beginnings of the world, and that complemented the knowledge we gained from the lessons of Latin and Polish. The subsequent classes were devoted to the development of the writing systems, and they were vigorously conducted by Prof. (then a doctor) Małgorzata Borowska, concluding at that time her work on the *Mormolyke* handbook, and by Prof. Oktawiusz Jurewicz – an eminent linguist, the translator of Horace’s corpus into Polish, long-time director of the Department (now Institute) of Classical Philology at the University of Warsaw, and finally a cherished member of OBTA, who won our respect and admiration with his vast knowledge and his pre-war gentlemanly demeanour. He made us search for connections between different languages and for the etymology of words as a key to understanding the given culture and its people. In the first year, classical mythology was present (complementarily to the Polish classes) mainly at the lessons on Greek vases, Homer, Hesiod, and ancient drama.

One of the most valuable experiences we gained from the course on Ancient Culture was the awareness that scholars might not know something and that instead of “one fundamental thesis” it was possible to deal with several theories (as, for example, on the origin of tragedy or in regard to the text transmission process). Suddenly, nothing was taken for granted, and this encouraged openness, curiosity, and the need for posing questions in a constant dialogue with the lecturer and the texts.

Of course, it was not required from us that we read all the texts under discussion, but the character of the lessons encouraged such extra-curricular engagement in further reading. A precious added value was in fact that

of the bibliographical hints we received from the scholars and our teachers. Their passion and personalities had a better effect than any kind of book marketing or didactic pressure. That is how I came across, among others texts, the stunning novel about Ovid, *Nazo poeta* [Naso the Poet, 1969] by Jacek Bocheński, the poignant *Laughter of Aphrodite* (1965) by Peter Green, and the breath-taking *Story of San Michele* (1929) by Axel Munthe. It was also during the course on Ancient Culture that I came to know Tadeusz Zieliński's difficult *curriculum vitae*. Whole decades of ostracizing him by communist censorship in Poland removed him from collective memory. After 1989, his books could again be published, and in fact I had at home the first three parts of his tetralogy *Świat antyczny* [The Ancient World],<sup>58</sup> including *Fabulous Antiquity* printed still outside of Poland (1988),<sup>59</sup> so I could immerse myself in it as a child, but I gained the awareness of his tragic fate from my Masters whom I met at Rej High School and who preserved the memory of their Masters, *antiquorum non immemores*.<sup>60</sup>

In sum, the Classics profile was an education in Community, where all the parts involved (scholars, teachers, and students) learnt responsibility for the transmission of the ancient heritage and were presented with opportunities to develop their horizons in the study process, taking place according to the principles of *docere, movere, delectare*.

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<sup>58</sup> The fourth part, *Cesarstwo rzymskie* [Roman Empire], was republished for the first time after World War Two as late as in 1995 in Warsaw.

<sup>59</sup> Tadeusz Zieliński, *Starożytność bajeczna* [Fabulous Antiquity], Zagreb: Wydawnictwo “Śląsk”, 1988 (re-ed. of 1939; ed. pr. in Polish 1930, ed. pr. in Russian 1922–1923), with a foreword by the famous Polish historian of Classical Antiquity and popularizer of history Prof. Aleksander Krawczuk.

<sup>60</sup> *Antiquorum non immemores* is also the title of a monograph on the history and on the remarkable members of the Polish Philological Association; see Jerzy Łanowski and Alicja Szastyńska-Siemon, eds., *Antiquorum non immemores... Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne 1893–1993* [Antiquorum non immemores... Polish Philological Association 1893–1993], Warszawa and Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne and OBTA, 1999, incl. Zieliński's biography by Jerzy Axer, 332–334. On Zieliński, see also Marian Plezia, “Tadeusz Stefan Zieliński 1859–1944”, in Iza Biezuńska-Małowist, ed., *W kręgu wielkich humanistów. Kultura antyczna w Uniwersytecie Warszawskim po I wojnie światowej* [In the Circle of Eminent Humanists: Ancient Culture at the University of Warsaw after World War One], Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991, 38–53; Marian Plezia, *Z dziejów filologii klasycznej w Polsce* [From the History of Classical Philology in Poland], Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne, 1993, chapters: “Z młodzieńczych lat Tadeusza Zielińskiego” [From the Years of Tadeusz Zieliński's Youth], 168–180 (first published in *Meander* in 1982), and “Dziecię niedoli. Ostatnie dzieło Tadeusza Zielińskiego” [“Child of Misery”: The Last Work of Tadeusz Zieliński], 181–235 (first published in *Analecta Cracoviensia* in 1983).

## 2.4. Prometheus “the Internet-Bearer”: Our Mythical Education Today

In December 2017, a newspaper report from a British school captured the attention of public opinion not only in the United Kingdom. Its popularity was not surprising, as the school in question stated to have found a method for teaching its students how to distinguish fake news from the facts – a competence crucial in the present-day world. This was done mainly by training young minds with excerpts from the ancient philosophers.<sup>61</sup> The method seems reasonable all the more so as we are still in debt to the Ionian school of the philosophy of nature and the inquisitiveness of their representatives, whose rudimental questions – repeated later by Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, et al. – have never stopped guiding us through the mysteries of the world. And there are more arguments for the presence of the Classics in education, including the concept of “the Experience of the Masterpieces” as articulated by Wilfried Stroh. To renounce the legacy of Greek and Roman antiquity by eliminating it from school means to sever ties not only with the ancient masterpieces that indeed make us think deeper and more sharply (woe to fake news!), but also, due to the mechanisms of reception, with many masterpieces of post-antiquity art, literature, and thought – all still breathtaking and with the potential to inspire successive generations of artists and thinkers, as well as us – their public.

And, in fact, you cannot give up on this heritage all that easily. Ancient culture, as noticed by Sienkiewicz and Tuwim, courses through our veins. It is enough to look around. Bob Dylan dedicates a crucial part of his 2016 Nobel Prize Lecture to Homer. Helen Oyeyemi conquers the British (and not only)<sup>62</sup> book market with her novel *Icarus Girl* (2005), in which she combines traditions of the Yoruba tribe with the Greek myth that is foundational for Western civilization. Biologists name a recently discovered gene that prevents obesity in sheep after Aphrodite Kallipygos (Venus of the Beautiful Buttocks)<sup>63</sup> and a genus of octopus discovered in 1998 in extremely

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<sup>61</sup> Camilla Turner, “Leading Private School Uses Greek Philosophers to Teach Pupils How to Spot ‘Fake News’”, *The Telegraph*, 29 December 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/12/29/leading-private-school-uses-greek-philosophers-teach-pupils/>.

<sup>62</sup> In 2007 Helen Oyeyemi visited Poland (Lublin, Warsaw, Toruń, and Łódź) and met with her Polish readers within the programme *Faces & Places – New British Writing*; see [British Council], “Helen Oyeyemi w Polsce” [Helen Oyeyemi in Poland], Afryka.org, 8 May 2007, <http://afryka.org/helen-oyeyemi-w-polsce/>.

<sup>63</sup> Noelle E. Cockett, Maria A. Smit, Christopher A. Bidwell, Karin Segers, Tracy L. Hadfield, Gary D. Snowder, Michel Georges, and Carole Charlier, “The *Callipyge* Mutation and Other Genes

hot hydrothermal vents is christened in honour of the Roman god of fire, Vulcan, as *Vulcanoctopus hydrothermalis*.<sup>64</sup> The trails of Hercules can be found all over the world. Near Kraków he left his Club, as a huge limestone stack is called (Maczuga Herkulesa). The Spaniards would point out to us the Pillars of Hercules, which again, though *mutatis mutandis*, in our times of a new wave of great migrations, are a symbol of the gate to the new world. The hero also signs the Treaty of Waitangi in the artworks of the New Zealand artist Marian Maguire;<sup>65</sup> he is called on for help in the American Wild West by Bonnie Tyler in her famous hit of the 1980s “Holding Out for a Hero” (“Where’s the street-wise Hercules / To fight the rising odds?”); and he features in The Chainsmokers and Coldplay’s “Something Just Like This” of 2017 (together with Achilles: “I’ve been reading books of old / The legends and the myths / Achilles and his gold / Hercules and his gifts”). The twenty-first century brings us ever new Classical Antiquity-inspired works, to mention only *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling and the *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins for youth, the female perspective on the ancient world in the fascinating novels by Natalie Haynes, Madeline Miller, and Pat Barker, a number of Netflix series with classical references (from the obvious *Troy* to the enigmatically Sisyphian *Before I Fall*), a moving report from Daniel Mendelsohn’s journey with his father on Odysseus’ trails (*An Odyssey: A Father, a Son, and an Epic*, 2017), etc. I have mentioned here but a few crumbs from the great table of Homer and his ancient colleagues. There are more, and they provide us with solid nourishment at all stages of our lives. In fact, if we have a classical background, we can feed on them and draw strength from the past to create the present for the future. We can read the messages left by the great artists and thinkers in the world that suddenly proffers meaning and gives us insight into its Mystery.

Three exceptional minds, in different periods of tensions – Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1850), T.S. Eliot (1944), and J.M. Coetzee (1990) asked what was a Classic, each time arriving at the paradoxical definition that it was the work of an author who – anchored in tradition, but well aware

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that Affect Muscle Hypertrophy in Sheep”, *Genetics Selection Evolution* 37 (2005), Suppl. 1, 65–81, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1297-9686-37-S1-S65>.

<sup>64</sup> Angel F. González, Angel Guerra, Santiago Pascual, and Patrick Briand, “*Vulcanoctopus hydrothermalis* Gen. et Sp. Nov. (Mollusca: Cephalopoda): An Octopod from a Deep-Sea Hydrothermal Vent Site”, *Cahiers de Biologie Marine* 39 (1998), 169–184.

<sup>65</sup> Marian Maguire, “The Labours of Herakles”, 2008, <https://www.marianmaguire.com/2008--the-labours-of-herakles.html>.

of the challenges of his/her times – would lead humankind a step forward.<sup>66</sup> And why the Classics? The answer to this question is more complex and it is not very “comfortable”. Classical Antiquity, and Greek and Roman mythology in the first place, offer us some lessons – ones difficult for both the students and the teachers who transmit them. For example, on the “Law of the Contrite Heart”, as it was called by the Polish philosopher Adam Krokiewicz (1890–1977), a professor at the University of Warsaw, but earlier also a teacher of ancient languages at a Kraków middle school. He discovered this law while reading the scene of the *Iliad* (Book 24) in which King Priam comes to the tent of Achilles and kisses his hands still covered with Hector’s blood. They lay down their anger and pride, and unite in grief, for there is no victory in war for those who have lost their near and dear.

There is also the “Law of the Appreciation of Life”, as we may call the lesson taken by Odysseus from the ghost of Achilles at the entrance to the Underworld:

μη δὴ μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα [...];  
βουλοίμην κ’ ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλω,  
ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀκλήρω, ᾧ μὴ βίωτος πολὺς εἶη,  
ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν. (Hom. *Od.* 11.488–491)

Say not a word [...] in death’s favour; I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man’s house and be above ground than king of kings among the dead.<sup>67</sup>

The next crucial law is discovered while pondering Oedipus’ fate – a myth particularly important in the context of the Rej High School motto.

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<sup>66</sup> Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, “Qu’est-ce qu’un Classique?”, *Le Constitutionnel*, 21 October 1850; T.S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic? An Address Delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October, 1944*, London: Faber & Faber, 1945; J.M. Coetzee, “What Is a Classic?” (1990), in his *Stranger Shores: Literary Essays, 1986–1999*, New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2001, 1–16. See also the recent, most interesting study *Forward with Classics: Classical Languages in Schools and Communities*, edited by Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Steven Hunt, and Mai Musié, London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018. See also my introductory chapter “What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 1–26, and my chapter “The Ancient Tradition in the 21st Century – Cui Bono?”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Antiquity and We*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, 209–281, also available online ([http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity\\_and\\_We\\_eBook.pdf](http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity_and_We_eBook.pdf)).

<sup>67</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Samuel Butler, New York, NY: Race Point Publishing, 2015, 135.

A good man who gave up his throne and accepted the life of an exile to avoid a destiny which for him meant harming his near and dear, fulfilled it to the very end. But his tragedy is not devoid of meaning. It offers us a glimpse into the divine order of the world – its *Logos*. We may not understand the complex tissue of things, but our limitations are not relevant. Maybe we are not meant to. After all, the most cursed of men brings finally a blessing to Athens, the cradle of democratic values for millennia to come.

The story of Oedipus’ descendants teaches us yet another law: that we are born “to share love not hate” (Soph. *Ant.* 523: οὔτοι συνέχθειν, ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν), and that only this shared love can save us – a very particular species, as defined by Sophocles: “Numberless are the world’s wonders, but none / More wonderful than man” (*Ant.* 332–333: πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κούδεν ἄν- / θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει) – which is both the highest compliment to humankind and the highest warning we should never forget, unlike it happened to Daedalus.

There is finally the “Law of Irreversibility of a Metamorphosis”, as we know it from Orpheus’ myth and King Louis XIV’s mythological experience with Fénelon. You cannot undo a transformation that has already taken place, not even if you go to Hell and back. Not even if you are a mighty king who has the means to send your defiant subject there.

All such laws contribute to building young people’s identity and character – whereas, as Zieliński wrote, the “force of mind is not the product of an easy but of a hard school”.<sup>68</sup> In view of this, classical education has consequences – side effects in the form of constant doubts – natural when you present students with the powerful tool of the knowledge acquired from the great minds that have shaped our world and shown to us our strengths and our frailties. Young people learn to question and at the same time to respect the authorities, for the real ones will not be harmed, as Coetzee remarked. They also become part of the millennia-old mythical Community, where they are encouraged to think independently and to test and set the limits of their own freedom.

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<sup>68</sup> Zieliński, “Kilka uwag o wykształceniu klasycznym”, 10, quoted also by Olechowska, “Teaching Latin and Greek in Inter-War Poland”, 227. See also Barbara Brzuska, “Latin and Politics in People’s Poland”, in David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classics and Class: Greek and Latin Classics and Communism at School*, Warsaw and Ljubljana: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw; Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2016, 229–286 (on the situation until the school year 1993/94), and Janusz Ryba’s chapter in the present volume.

Sadly, the potential of this kind of education and the experience of the Classics profile – let’s admit it: difficult both for students and their teachers as freedom is a demanding value – has not been fully used after the turn of the third millennium.<sup>69</sup> The subsequent reforms tend to eliminate the Classics from the school curriculum in Poland (a ray of hope: thirty hours as an elective course since 2020/21),<sup>70</sup> the main argument being always the same: the necessity to give space to the most recent discoveries. Yet paradoxically, they will soon be obsolete – taking into consideration the light-speed development of the sciences, while the base of the Classics will never change, the fundamental questions will still require answers, and the gesture of Antigone who sprinkles a handful of soil on her cursed brother’s body will never be forgotten by those who have witnessed it on their education path.

Fortunately, there are ever more bottom-up initiatives to popularize Classical Antiquity at schools, such as the efforts of the Polish Philological Association on the national scale, or the Ancient League (a kind of school competition) in Toruń.<sup>71</sup> The Classics classes are still kept (*mutatis mutandis*),<sup>72</sup> and headmasters all over the country, also in small towns, with ever-growing support from parents, try to preserve Latin lessons. Nonetheless, the situation is very difficult. Latin as a school subject is on the verge of extinction in Poland: for now it is learnt only by 3% of high school students.<sup>73</sup>

The Classics will survive, I have no doubts. The stake here is not the future of ancient culture, but of the present generations of students who may be deprived of this source of their strength, of this, to quote Thucydides, κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ – “a possession for ever”, if the educational process

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<sup>69</sup> See Grażyna Czetwertyńska, “Expectations and Disappointments: Latin and Antiquity as Components of the Education System in Poland at the Beginning of the Nineties”, in David Movrin and Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classics and Class: Greek and Latin Classics and Communism at School*, Warsaw and Ljubljana: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw; Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; and Wydawnictwo DiG, 2016, 287–298.

<sup>70</sup> See the report *Nauczanie łaciny w Polsce – stan obecny* [Teaching Latin in Poland: The Current Situation] on the website of the Polish Philological Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne, <http://www.ptf.edu.pl/nauczanie-laciny-stan-prawny/>).

<sup>71</sup> Just a small observation in this context: one of the organizers of the Ancient League, Prof. Barbara Bibik from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, is a graduate of Rej High School.

<sup>72</sup> For example, in Bartłomiej Nowodworski High School No. I in Kraków, where Dr Janusz Ryba, the author of the chapter “Greek and Roman Mythology in Classical Education in Poland after 1945” in the present volume, is currently a teacher of Latin and the tutor of the ancient culture-oriented initiatives.

<sup>73</sup> See the report *Nauczanie łaciny w Polsce* [Teaching Latin in Poland] on the website of the Polish Philological Association.

is focused on short-term benefits only. May this volume be our cry *de profundis* to join forces, both regionally and globally, to help the shapers of the school curricula to see the value of this ancient possession.

One of the crucial roles of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme, as I have seen it from the very beginning in 2011, is to build an international milieu to succour the Classics in education. Since the programme’s stages supported by the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant (2012–2013) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives (2014–2017), we have been collaborating on a regular basis with two schools in Poland, a venture possible due to the highest engagement of the teachers and the kind consent of the school authorities and parents.<sup>74</sup> Since 2016, the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” has been a patron of the Polish studies-Classics profile at Rej High School with the aim of continuing and developing in new circumstances the traditions elaborated by our eminent predecessors.<sup>75</sup>

Already in 2014/15 I decided to apply for an ERC Consolidator Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, including the idea of citizen science also here, to make full use of this great chance for us to expand Our Mythical Community on an unprecedented global scale. The application was successful,<sup>76</sup> and since 2016, educational activities have been a vital part of this newest stage of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme. We come from different regions of the world – team members from Australia, Cameroon, Israel, Poland (including a colleague from Belarus), and the United Kingdom, cooperating with experts from Germany, Italy, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the USA, and New Zealand. But we all share the same vision, or hope: together to make a change by combining research and education to create a new holistic

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<sup>74</sup> Mikołaj Rej High School No. XI and “Strumienie” High School, which in itself shows the potential of the classical Community that collaborates and teaches its members, including the students, the spirit of open-mindedness and respect for different approaches: Rej High School is a public, old educational institution in Warsaw, with Evangelical traditions, and “Strumienie” High School – a private, Catholic school on the outskirts of the capital. I wish to thank for their excellent collaboration and engagement in particular two teachers *sine quibus non*: Barbara Strycharczyk and Anna Wojciechowska, as well as the headmasters of both schools, and the teacher teams.

<sup>75</sup> It is worth noticing that Prof. Axer’s successor as the Dean of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” is Prof. Robert A. Sucharski, who as a PhD student also gave lectures for the Classics profile at Rej High School.

<sup>76</sup> For basic information on the project, see its website: Katarzyna Marciniak, “About OMC”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/about>.



model of collaboration in the humanities. Thus, we invite students to make their first steps in research work under the guidance of teachers. As a result, more than a hundred high school students have prepared their first scholarly presentations so far, and they showcased them at our key conferences and meetings.<sup>77</sup>

During the *Our Mythical Hope* conference in 2017, the students gave presentations about the reception of classical mythology in the works they reach for when in need of guidance in their coming-of-age issues. At the workshops *The Present Meets the Past* in the European Year of Cultural Heritage (EYCH 2018), they analysed the traces of Classical Antiquity around them, in the context of some poignant events from the history of the twentieth century up to this day, and reconstructed the fate of a boy who paid with his life for his participation in clandestine education during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw in World War Two.<sup>78</sup> In 2018/19, for the second stage of the ERC project – *Our Mythical History: Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to the Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome* – we developed a collaboration with four schools: next to Mikołaj Rej High School in Warsaw and “Strumienie” High School in Józefów, the challenge was taken up by Nicolaus Copernicus University Academic Junior and Senior High School in Toruń and Bartłomiej Nowodworski High School No. I in Kraków. The students entered into the role of Publius Cornelius Nepos and chose four figures from Polish history who appreciated the classical tradition and whose lives may still serve as *exempla* in our times. The students, guided

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<sup>77</sup> These data regard Poland, but similar endeavours take place in other countries, to mention the event for children organized by Lisa Maurice and Ayelet Peer at Researchers’ Night in Israel in September 2018; Daniel A. Nkemleke and his colleagues’ workshops for teachers in Cameroon; Elizabeth Hale’s talk at the conference of the Classical Languages Teachers Association in Australia in October 2018; and the conference *Classics and Education*, organized by Susan Deacy, Frances Foster, and Sonya Nevin at the University of Cambridge in September 2017, with its second instalment in February 2020, incl. a presentation by Hazel Pearson (English teacher at “Strumienie” High School) and Barbara Strycharczyk, “Mythology as a Source of Creative Inspiration and an Element of Interdisciplinarity”, on the endeavours within the programme *Our Mythical Childhood*; see the post by Hazel Pearson, Barbara Strycharczyk, and myself: “Mythology and Education at the University of Cambridge”, *Our Mythical Childhood Blog*, 19 March 2020, <https://ourmythicalchildhoodblog.wordpress.com/2020/03/19/mythology-and-education-at-the-university-of-cambridge/> (accessed 28 April 2020).

<sup>78</sup> See the school project’s booklet *Okruchy pamięci: Scraps of Memory*, edited by Barbara Strycharczyk ([http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/assets/images/present/4\\_School\\_project\\_booklet\\_English.pdf](http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/assets/images/present/4_School_project_booklet_English.pdf)).

by their teachers,<sup>79</sup> presented the results of their task in the collection *De viris mulieribusque illustribus*.<sup>80</sup> In 2017 we also established the Cluster “The Past for the Present: International Research and Educational Programme”, to make full use of the potential of our academic work and to support teachers in various countries in developing special programmes to engage students with the Classics.<sup>81</sup>

It is worth noticing that these programmes also include artistic activities, like the staging of a fragment on Pyramus and Thisbe from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* – and in Latin,<sup>82</sup> or the video competition *Antiquity–Camera–Action!* we organize in Poland.<sup>83</sup> In its first edition, devoted to classical mythology,<sup>84</sup> one of the teams created a story about a modern Prometheus who gives the humans not fire, but... the Internet. Indeed, owing to this medium we can do more today<sup>85</sup> – for example, we

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Strycharczyk from “Strumienie”, Anna Wojciechowska from Mikołaj Rej, Barbara Bibik from Nicolaus Copernicus, and Janusz Ryba from Bartłomiej Nowodworski High Schools. The book *De viris mulieribusque illustribus* is also available online (<http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/dvm.pdf>). For a presentation of the book, see the short reportage by Mirosław Kaźmierczak, “De viris mulieribusque illustribus: ERC Our Mythical Childhood & Schools (2019)”, YouTube, 29 July 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVECLB5LYKs&>.

<sup>80</sup> The *mulier* from the collection is the audacious secret agent Krystyna Skarbek who might have inspired Ian Fleming in his creation of Vesper Lynd in James Bond’s adventures.

<sup>81</sup> The Cluster has been established by the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw, the Faculty of History and Cultures and the Faculty of Classical Philology and Italian Studies of the University of Bologna, and the Faculty of Languages and Literatures of the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in May 2017 and was joined by the Faculty of Education of the University of Cambridge in 2019. See a short reportage about the Cluster by Krzysztof Korwin-Piotrowski, “A Reportage about the Research Cluster The Past for the Present 2018”, YouTube, 10 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HfypV5PUMuc&t=>. In December 2019 we also organized a school panel during the Ciceronian Congress *Cicero, Society, and the Idea of Artes Liberales* in Warsaw. The panel was excellently moderated by Caroline Bristow from Cambridge School Classics Project; see also the Congress’s website: <http://www.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/en/cicero-congress-schools>.

<sup>82</sup> See a clip from the event available online: “Our Mythical Childhood ERC Consolidator Grant”, YouTube, 6 July 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFey\\_V6RPw&t=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFey_V6RPw&t=).

<sup>83</sup> We draw in this also on the experience of Dr Sonya Nevin, our team member, and also Prof. Ingo Gildenhard from the University of Cambridge, where a similar competition has been organized by the Faculty of Classics for several years now. By the way, this kind of exchange of experiences shows the strength of our research Community to collaborate with the aim of supporting the Classics globally.

<sup>84</sup> See the competition’s website: *Antyk–Kamera–Akcja!*, <https://antykkameraakcja.wordpress.com/>. The second edition (2018/19) was focused on the reception of ancient history. The theme of the third edition (2019/20) is ecology and environmental issues in relation to the ancient tradition.

<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., the results of the panel organized by Prof. Markus Janka within the international conference *Digitale Bildung – zwischen Hype und Hybris* by the Münchener Zentrum für Lehrerbildung, on 10 October 2018, at the University of Munich.

are able to share the winning movies worldwide or we can try to encourage Internet users to reach for the works for youth with classical references by the means of the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* – an Open Access database of a global coverage.<sup>86</sup>

The Internet and the opportunities offered by digital instruments provide precious support to the life of the Classics. Still, whatever method of education we choose, high-tech or rather old-fashioned, we need to remember one important factor. As the case of Rej High School and the adventures within the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme demonstrate, the Classics are a social phenomenon, one that works best if shared, revived, and experienced in a Community based on a vibrant and direct exchange of ideas, both via online, but “live”, sessions (as we practise, for example, in the cycle *OBTAmistic Meetings*<sup>87</sup>), and during traditional gatherings, whenever the circumstances and the logistics permit. This is even more important the more advanced technologies we have or will have to our disposal in the future. The Classics Community is also mentioned by Sienkiewicz, who speaks of the ancient tradition that “circulates in our veins like blood”, even if we are not aware of this, and by Tuwim, who addresses his poem to a “you” – potentially each one of us. Thus, instead of a “passive education” through giving instructions (be it from a computer screen or in a crowded classroom, in the big centres or in the province), it is crucial to encourage dialogue and creative engagements. And although artists usually create their works in seclusion, and many scholars appreciate the calm peacefulness of their ivory towers, the true conversations and dialogues between various milieux and generations, at least sporadically, are priceless, as the last case I wish to mention here shows.

Closing the first edition of the video competition for schools, we wanted to offer to the laureates – next to the laurel wreaths and the Oscar-like

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<sup>86</sup> See *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2016–, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey>.

<sup>87</sup> This cycle was inaugurated in 2014, with an online meeting with Prof. Jo-Marie Claassen from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, on “Gained in Translation: Greek and Roman Classics in Afrikaans Literature”, and is continued up to now, both with the use of Internet communicators and in traditional academic format, depending on the circumstances and opportunities. For example, in 2015 we were honoured to host online Natalie Haynes and to talk about “The Amber Road, or Keeping Up with Electra & Co.”, while in 2019 we hosted Dr Hamish Williams from Leiden University in the seat of the Faculty of “Artes Liberales” to discuss “Classical Worldbuilding among the Inklings: J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis”.

Athenas (see Fig. 3)<sup>88</sup> – something immaterial that would stay with them for a long time, if not for ever: the Experience of a Meeting. And so it happened, during the workshops *The Present Meets the Past* (see Fig. 4). We invited the victorious teams with their teachers (as it turned out, they were not only from Warsaw and the nearby centres, but also from distant villages) to practise Ancient Greek dance with us under Dr Helen Slaney’s guidance. We painted Greek vases together at a workshop held by Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, who at the same time, still within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project, are preparing five animations based on the vessels with mythological images from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (also to be available online).<sup>89</sup> Summing up, during our meeting we could experience the mythical Community and, to quote Ms Anna Rogala-Goj, the tutor of the students’ team from the Elementary School in Tworóg (distinguished for the movie *The Epitaph for Troy*),<sup>90</sup> this Community offered to young people “an alternative that helps you think differently”. It is significant that the words of the teacher from a school that has never been in contact with Rej High School in Warsaw fit so perfectly as to universalize also the case of the Classics profile, thus being a testimony to the potential of ancient culture in education as a tool of offering more than sterile knowledge – a tool that permits us to open new paths together and to rely on the Classics to make a step forward:

My thirty years of work as a teacher have convinced me that much can be done if a way is shown to the students, when one turns on the light of faith in their own abilities, and above all when their passion is ignited, and their cognitive curiosity.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> An artwork by the young Belarusian sculptor Vitali Paliakou.

<sup>89</sup> See the project’s website, where you can already watch the first animation on *Iris – Rainbow Goddess* (published in May 2020) and also find some creative activities prepared by Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons: “Animating the Ancient World”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world>.

<sup>90</sup> The movie is available online: Alicja Warzecha, “Epitaph for Troy Epitafium dla Troi”, YouTube, 13 April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsDGAc3nTNA>.

<sup>91</sup> See the reportage by Mirosław Kaźmierczak, “The Present Meets the Past: Our Mythical Childhood Workshops 2018”, YouTube, 21 June 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RizU-WYMW0Q&>. I wish to acknowledge the support from the “*Artes Liberales* Institute” Foundation in covering the travel and accommodation expenses of the competition winners. Ms Anna Rogala-Goj’s words are quoted from her email to me, with her permission.



**Figure 3:** *Athena* – a statue by Vitali Paliakou for the winners of the video competition *Antiquity–Camera–Action!* Photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak.



**Figure 4:** Our Mythical Community during the international workshops *The Present Meets the Past*, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, May 2018. Photograph by Robert Przybysz; used with permission.

Indeed, we do not give easy solutions or simple answers to the fundamental questions, but we try to offer an alternative, and we search for it for ourselves too. Needless to say, it does us good to leave our ivory towers. This meeting with the young people and their passionate teachers was a reward to us, too. We repeated it in 2019, within the second instalment of the video competition, during the ERC Grant conference *Our Mythical History: Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to the Heritage of Ancient Greece and Rome*,<sup>92</sup> and it helped us think differently in many respects.

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This unexpected coda to my chapter is dictated by the coronavirus pandemic that broke out in the early months of this year. The current situation only

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<sup>92</sup> See the reportage by Mirosław Kaźmierczak, “Our Mythical History, May 2019”, YouTube, 12 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVeEjWSCXD8>.

confirms what we have learnt through our experiences of late on the sense and the ways of studying the Classics. I am writing these three paragraphs in May 2020 – in the very week when we were all supposed to have met in Warsaw for the conference summarizing the stage of the project entitled *Our Mythical Nature: The Classics and Environmental Issues in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*. With a new instalment of the video competition (its topic: *Ecology*) and three schools working on their understanding of the theme, we were avidly awaiting the students' presentations, both artistic and scholarly. And we are still awaiting them – indeed, ever more avidly. For we have changed only the course, and not the destiny of our journey. *Our Mythical Nature* will take place online, with "live" discussions open to everybody, and the deadline for the video competition and the form of the school presentations will be adjusted to meet safety measures. Nor do we complain. We are not the only ones affected. The whole world is facing this terrible challenge.

With many work groups, starting with healthcare professionals, putting themselves at personal risk to help us function in this new reality, we embrace with gratitude the opportunity they give us and thus we try to do our best to press onward – both as a research team and within a broader societal scope – in *Our Mythical Community*, now passing this test, as I believe, outstandingly. The school "environmental" project has manifested a new potential in the present circumstances. We are now working on a booklet showing its results thanks to the excellent engagement on the part of the teachers and students who took care to write down their reflections and discoveries. The telecommunication solutions we apply with the team members in our everyday work within the project (we are from distant continents, and yet in touch on a daily basis via emails and Internet communicators) make all the new necessary adjustments, even if not always easy, then at least not scary. We also try to support the efforts of educators at least to a small extent: within the initiative *Find the Force!* we prepare research and creative activities to be performed with pupils and students at various stages of education – or simply during family time at home, when mobility is limited. We aim to publish them in more languages in order to make their range as broad as possible across societies worldwide.<sup>93</sup> We can see the potential

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<sup>93</sup> For now we have English, Italian, and Polish versions, expanded on a voluntary basis: "Find the Force!", *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/find-the-force> (accessed 10 May 2020). I wish to invite all to contribute. See, e.g., the "Paint the Muses" activity (<http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/paint-the-muses>).

of this initiative and therefore wish to continue it also once the pandemic is over, as the Classics accompany us not only for worse, but for better, too.

Yet with all this focus on as constructive an approach as possible, we yearn for the next Experience of a Meeting. The year 2021 brings the tenth anniversary of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme and hopefully an international gathering will again be safe then, or shortly thereafter. In the meantime, we are sailing, or rather surfing, with Telemachus on the waves of the Internet, and learning from the Classics the meaning of freedom in both the smaller and bigger choices between one’s own wishes and the needs of our local and global communities. In short, a millennia-old journey of the γνῶθι σεαυτόν kind, with *Macte animo!* on our flag.

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To sum up, a combination of study and art seems to be the key to the hearts and minds of young people, and, as the process is mutual, their positive feedback strengthens the Community of the Classics, which is so much needed by all generations. Why? Because the side effect of this education is the courage to doubt and to strive for intellectual autonomy, followed by the sense of responsibility for others and respect for Nature – all this so important even in our everyday decisions that can transform the world in more ways than we think. As in Rej’s motto *Macte animo!* from Statius’ *Thebaid* filtered through Virgil’s *Aeneid* – the poem that for ages has been posing the dire question, never voiced by Augustus loudly, about the real prize of building an empire.<sup>94</sup> And in the darkest times, returning not that rarely in the past, many people answered this question with their lives.

From the faith in the Classics as a tool for saving the new generations from such times was the Classics profile at Rej High School born. This idea united the young people, their teachers, and the scholars from the University of Warsaw who engaged in its implementation. Within the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme we try to continue their venture and adjust it to the regional and global challenges of our times, with the aim of educating the youth who will go on to make a change and become a courageous elite

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<sup>94</sup> See Craig Kallendorf, “Historicizing the ‘Harvard School’: Pessimistic Readings of the *Aeneid* in Italian Renaissance Scholarship”, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 99 (1999), 391–403, and, more recently, Daniel Mendelsohn, “Is the *Aeneid* a Celebration of Empire – or a Critique?”, *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2018, [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/15/is-the-aeneid-a-celebration-of-empire-or-a-critique?fbclid=IwAR2PeIQGLwgtddVYPaRZCZ2jhNdj9\\_qRe7Sg-XHvtXl8\\_07D\\_h47Z1X1xq4](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/15/is-the-aeneid-a-celebration-of-empire-or-a-critique?fbclid=IwAR2PeIQGLwgtddVYPaRZCZ2jhNdj9_qRe7Sg-XHvtXl8_07D_h47Z1X1xq4).





**Figure 5:** Matylda Tracewska, *Our Mythical Childhood* (2013) – artwork symbolizing the programme *Our Mythical Childhood*. Reproduced with permission from the Author.

in terms of the mind – regardless of (or even contrary to) the needs of the reigning ideologies and particular interests. An approach not quite distant from the educational concepts of Fénelon and the host of his followers who felt the ancient myth clash with the absolutisms of their epochs. We all are members of Telemachus' crew. Only it is a paradox of history that today, in times of the apparent freedom of the mind, the vision of classical education again needs support – now perhaps more than ever before.

In the poem "Dlaczego klasycy" [Why the Classics] from the volume *Napis* [Inscription, 1969], Zbigniew Herbert refers to an episode recalled by Thucydides in his κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ for us – *Peloponnesian War*, Book 4. The historian describes there his expedition from Athens to Amphipolis. It ended with a disaster. Thucydides sailed to succour that colony and did not make it; Amphipolis fell into the hands of the Spartan Brasidas, and Thucydides was banished from his beloved city in punishment for his failure. In the second section of his poem, Herbert juxtaposes that ancient episode with contemporary history shaped by people without a "classical backbone", thus

giving one of the simplest answers to the question of why the Classics – quite compatible with Rej’s *Macte animo!* and a homage to the side effects of being educated by our ancient Masters:<sup>95</sup>

generałowie ostatnich wojen  
jeśli zdarzy się podobna afera  
skomlą na kolanach przed potomnością  
zachwalają swoje bohaterstwo  
i niewinność

oskarżają podwładnych  
zawistnych kolegów  
nieprzyjazne wiatry

Tucydides mówi tylko  
że miał siedem okrętów  
była zima  
i płynął szybko

generals of the most recent wars  
if a similar affair happens to them  
whine on their knees before posterity  
praise their heroism and innocence

they accuse their subordinates  
envious colleagues  
unfavourable winds

Thucydides says only  
that he had seven ships  
it was winter  
and he sailed quickly

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<sup>95</sup> The poem has been translated by Peter Dale Scott and Czesław Miłosz in Zbigniew Herbert, *Selected Poems*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, 137.