

Summary

Jesuit Flexible Pen

Early Modernity Through the Prism of Studies on the Society of Jesus

The six essays presented in this collection show the development of various genres of Jesuit writings and their significance for the early modern period, and the reaction these writings received. Of course, the Jesuits were aware of the value of the printed word, which was an important tool in their multifaceted ministry. Not surprisingly, they set up several publishing houses of their own to publish what they needed to accomplish their mission, and contracted, sometimes very expensive, contracts with several European printers, including the best ones, such as the Plantin-Moretus printer in Antwerp. They were usually very careful before sending a manuscript for printing, not least because of the censorship in place. Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercises* were not published until 1548 – about twenty years after they were composed. Once printed in numerous translations and subsequent editions, they convinced the Catholic world that Loyola originated this kind of new spirituality. In the first essay, I show that this was not the case.

Another important text for understanding the Jesuit charism, their *Constitutions*, on which Ignatius and Polanco worked for about eighteen years, were not published until 1558 – two years after Loyola's death. Their repeated rhetorical theme of adapting to different groups of people, times, and places presaged that the Jesuits would also show flexibility in their writings, as the title of this book implies – there is hardly a literary genre they would not use to propagate their message: from letters, travelogues, and diaries to confession books, devo-

tional works, casuistry, theological and biblical textbooks and commentaries, school plays, poetry, speeches, historical writings, memorials, polemical pamphlets, etc.

However, the essays presented in this volume also show the significance of the writings that remained in manuscript form. Some of these were widely disseminated inside and outside the Society and had a key influence on the changing policies of the Jesuits, especially in the essay on the purity of blood laws. Most of them appear in this book in Polish translation for the first time. The applied method of synoptic reading and placing them in broader contexts allows the reader to grasp their more complex meaning. Also, some extensive fragments of important devotional prints appear here for the first time in the Polish translation by Michał Nowakowski, such as *De ascensionibus spiritualibus* by Gerhart (Gerard) Zerbolt (born in 1367 in Zutphen). I hope that this will become an incentive for Polish scholars to expand their research with lesser-known, albeit key, texts of *devotio moderna*, which shaped the spirituality of a large number of religious communities in these lands, where Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) translated by the Jesuits (also into Polish), was not the only source representing this kind of new spirituality.

Some of the translations used in the following essays introduce new terms for the Polish language, which I hope will spark a discussion and enable the development of new ways of writing about the history of native and translated literature in the early modern period. I look at the history of the Jesuits through the prism of the multi-genre repertoire of their writings. Since the Society was founded in the mid-sixteenth century, the authors I discuss are good examples of the already-mentioned change in the cultural mentality of the Jesuits. Their first generation was trained in Scholastic philosophy and theology but became increasingly familiar with the humanist tradition. The second and later generations created a culture that combined a Scholastic education with imitating Greco-Latin classics, a Renaissance penchant for (especially Ciceronian) rhetoric and epistemic skepticism, and a need to preach the Gospel. Without this unique culture, passed on especially in the network of Jesuit schools – the largest one created in the early modern period – so despised by Catholic and non-Catholic opponents of the Society, there would be no Piotr Skarga (1536–1612), no Jakub Wujek (1541–97), no Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640), no Franciszek Bohomolec (1720–84), no Marcin Poczobut (1728–1810), no Adam Naruszewicz (1733–96), and no Grzegorz Piramowicz (1735–1801). There would be no early modern Polish culture as we know it.