

Adam Rysiewicz

"Zarys dziejów poetyki. Od starożytności do końca XVII w.",
Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz,
Warszawa 1985 : [recenzja]

Literary Studies in Poland 17, 146-151

1987

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

critères des valeurs qui lui sont propres. Les poètes de ces temps manifestaient des façons les plus diverses cette conscience de la communauté et, à la fois la conviction que le processus de l'élaboration de la culture nationale, appartenant à un ensemble plus vaste, est un processus ininterrompu, c'est lui précisément qui a décidé du visage de la culture polonaise.

Rés. par l'auteur

Trad. par *Malgorzata Kallaur*

Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, *Zarys dziejów poetyki. Od starożytności do końca XVII wieku* (An Outline of the History of Poetics. From Antiquity to the End of the 17th c.), Warsaw 1985, 670 pp.

The book by Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, in spite of its title, is not simply "an outline of the history of poetics." Its arrangement, the way it presents the problems and their very choice, the style of its narration, although all of them can be open to discussion, seems to indicate something different. The author tries in her Foreword, by means of the usual rhetorical alibi, to minimize the effects of her work:

The work, which has been called "an outline," indicates thereby that it deals only with some selected groups of facts and that it does it in a sketchy way [...] Thus it is concerned solely with the European poetics, or to be more precise—with the major facts from the history of Greek and Roman poetics, Latin and national poetics cultivated in various European countries (p. 7).

These are true statements, yet one cannot take them at their face value... Especially when we must identify that "sketchiness" with typicality at which the author's argumentation tends consistently to arrive.

The history of poetics, the thinking about poetry, as "outlined" by E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz, covering almost 25 centuries of European culture, is mainly concerned with types. Indeed it is not a picture of particular cases but a wide panorama. A panorama of ideas, categories, terms (once more investigated and interpreted) rather than of persons, thinkers, which does not mean that they do not appear in this book. They do but, so to speak, pedagogically as "encyclopedic,"

“dictionary” entries, numerous and varied, somewhere in the background of that panorama. A personal vision of the history of poetics is here replaced by one filled with ideas and categories. The subject of history is not a Person but the product of that Person, neither is it a personified, endowed not so long ago with magical powers, Epoch. This is indeed a modern approach, an unerring presentation of what was in the history of this discipline most essential, that is to say—its unity, of many threads and varieties, but still a unity.

What is most striking in E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz’s book is a successful attempt to get a synthetic view of the history under discussion. The ideas and trends of that history form a long continuum. Thus the early, “archaeological” myth-poetry would reemerge in the Platonic discourse in the shape of a “poet-diviner,” and later, very strongly so in the Renaissance thinking on the origin of poetry. The concepts of allegory and of allegorical interpretation (allegoresis) borrowed by the Sophists from Theagenes, would appear then in the rhetorical discourse (Cicero, Quintilian), in the Middle Ages they would become the basis of the biblical exegesis, to return once more in the Renaissance and Baroque to the rhetorical source in the form of the allegory-trope, allegory-figure. These particular examples were not isolated, though they appeared in the lateral parts of the panorama. And what about the central part? It was filled with two major systems: Platonism and Aristotelianism. Referring to them the author is selecting the problems and questions from the point of view of their usefulness for the thinking about poetry, of their contribution to the science of poetry, theory of poetry, philosophy of poetry. Of all the terms, ideas, categories, interests of the two thinkers there is only the selection of these elements that is really essential as the context and background to the evolution of poetics during the following centuries.

Plato’s poetics is reduced to three areas: poetry-divination, poetry – an art of imitation, genology, The two conceptions: of the inspired poetry and the imitative one “initiated – says Sarnowska-Temeriusz – different branches in poetics: the art of poetry which codifies the rules and a sort of hermeneutics of poetry which explains the secrets of poetic creativity” (p. 64). And as regards

Plato's genological ideas, the threefold classification of the poet's manner of speaking: narrative (epic), imitative (dramatic), and mixed (lyrical) one they served later as a basis not only for Aristotle's considerations but first of all for those of Diomedes, not to mention the Renaissance poetics. The author discusses the Platonic poetics against its philosophical, social, political background. She lays a special stress on Plato's antisophistic views (indeed the banning off poets from the ideal state is a clear consequence of it) and points to the obvious link, resulting from this fact, between the poet and orator, which demonstrated a pragmatic function of poetry, its psychological role. This rhetoric context, although it was blamed by Plato, would play an important part in the formation of modern poetics.

More extensively has been depicted Stagerite's poetics which does by no means result from an Aristotelian inclination of the author, but has rather to do with the systematized views of the philosopher and with the vitality of his ideas. Here, too, we get a presentation of concepts and categories. Of the three extended subjects, mimesis, tragedy, catharsis, the best documented is the first of them. This is not only because it left the strongest mark in the history of poetics, but also because its explanation, very extensive, did touch at the same time upon many problems and questions which could not be ignored by the subsequent poetics, not simply the Aristotelian one.

The notion of mimesis—says E. Sarnowska-Temeriuz—differentiates the notion of creation; as a result there can emerge the concept of "mimetic creativity." At the same time it also differentiates the notion of artistic production, owing to which there can also be the concept of a mimetic work of art (p. 119).

The notions of producing and of product are at the very basis of Aristotle's ideas on poetry, especially those expressed in his *Poetics*. The author says,

Aristotle's tract speaks of poetic poetry, it states a theory of production principles, of patterns which, activated by the poet's creativity, become a real piece of creation (p. 140).

While interpreting Aristotle's *Poetics*, E. Sarnowska-Temeriuz opts for an interpretation of that text as being a theory of creativity (of producing) and not as a theory of the work of art

(product). In a similar train of thought she interprets also the basic concepts of the Aristotelian poetics: the notion of pleasure, principle of probability and possibility and the related category of relevancy (all of them apparently of rhetoric provenance), although she does notice the sort of interpretation that relates them to the theory of the work of art. A clear differentiation between producing and the product would reemerge a little later in the views on poetry expressed by Neoptolemy of Parion and would become part of the poetics inherited then by the Renaissance and later periods. And the concept of a mimetic work of art with the related categories (probability, possibility, relevancy) would remain there to be interpreted anew by the Renaissance and Baroque poetics. The prominent theoreticians of poetry, J. C. Scalinger, and particularly M. K. Sarbiewski referred to them creatively.

The third vast area of notions and categories to which the ancient poetics owes a great deal was rhetoric. Of course the rhetorical notions and categories do figure in E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz's panoramical "outline", but they do so in a specific way. They appear above the poetical landscape. They are taken account of and interpreted only when they are put—en bloc as it were—into the poetics' discourse. She does see affinity between these two branches, yet she also shows a tendency to give poetics an autonomous status of a separate branch. The rhetorical context appears at its strongest in the Middle Ages in the discussion of versified arts and the rhetorical presentation of medieval grammars (while pointing to their rhetorical origin, particularly the Roman one—Cicero, Quintilian). "Rhetorical poetics" would be cultivated also later, in the second half of the 15th century, in France, by the *grands rhétoriquers*, at once theoreticians and poets, and would be continued in the early Renaissance as well. Through them it found a steady place in the theory of poetry during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Especially did so its categories, such as *inventio*, *dispositio*, *alocutio*, as well as the conviction that the purpose of speech, also the poetic one, is persuasion (*docere, movere, delectare*). The extended theory of *ornatus*, of the noble, musical and figurative vocabulary would provide the modern poetics with a descriptive language in which not only statements on the process of creating poetry would be formulated, but also those on the very nature of poetic product.

Another essential component of this history of poetics, after the sphere of poetical facts (notions and categories) is the sphere of events. The conceptual-categorial description of history has been written here into the picture of time, of epochs. Antiquity, Hellenistic and Roman periods, Middle Ages and the pre-Renaissance, Renaissance and Baroque—so the author is trying to respect the natural order of history, which however is only a sort of technical key arranging the material and making it clear. E. Sarnowska-Temierusz is stressing what was typical in the period's poetics, its dominating ideas. Thus in Antiquity it was the philosophical approach to poetry that prevailed, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods the influence of rhetoric was making itself felt, it was so also in the Middle Ages and in the pre-Renaissance (normalization of poetics), and finally in the periods of Renaissance and Baroque poetics became a separate science with stress laid on what has been called the philosophy of poetry.

In the historical panorama of poetics the period of special importance is Renaissance. It was indeed an era of poetics when its evolution was so many-sided that a discussion on poetry used to be then identified with that on culture. Poetics seemed at that time to transcend what constituted its definition (process of creating poetry and theory of the work of art) getting entangled in various philosophical, anthropological, psychological, pedagogical, social contexts. The author notices this particular feature of the Renaissance poetics, that is as a general information on culture, only incidentally and does so not only in her synthetic description of that science but also while discussing what was in that period essential for the history of poetics: the poet and poetry. In the chapters "What Is the Poet?" and "What Is Poetry?" she asks the questions which had been answered repeatedly by the creators of the Renaissance poetics. E. Sarnowska-Temierusz while summing up those answers puts together all the elements that made up the poetics of that period (defence of the poet and of poetry, function and role of the poet and of poetry, genology, poetical *imitatio*). She tries at the same time to consider in her panorama national poetics, extends not only the list of evidence but also the geography of poetics (which embraces here not only traditionally Italy, but also France, England, Germany, Spain, Netherlands, and Poland), and in doing so she stresses the national predilections (e.g. Italian poetics showed

a distinct inclination for philosophical poetry, whereas the French one for rhetoric).

The "geography of poetics" is connected with the third component of that historical panorama—the persons who figured in it. But this element—as has already been said—is here of encyclopaedic nature, resulting from the compedious character of the book. And the author is in this respect very scrupulous. Her indexes of the creators of poetics refer to the present state of research in this field; they widen the rather stereotype picture of that history which has been functioning also in the academic milieu, in this country, in the absence of synthetic works on this subject. Of course history without the full representation of prominent figures who contributed to it would be of little value indeed. So separate chapters are devoted in the book to the great creators of poetics: Plato, Aristotle, J. C. Scalinger, M. K. Sarbiewski, and G. J. Vossius. The list indicates that E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz did not try to make a special selection in this respect but followed strictly the history of poetics throughout the ages, while taking account also of the extant and typical writings on this subject. It may be a banal remark, yet it should be stressed that she uses numerous quotations in presenting the thoughts and theoretical statements, and she does it, by the way, not only in those particular chapters. Indeed she draws on the rich source material, quoted often *in extenso*. All these quotations from the ancient poetics, while giving us an idea of their literary and intellectual qualities, show also the run of the author's thoughts. But above all they have the value of being choice passages from theoretical and literary texts. So far they have been dispersed in various publications, often inaccessible, and here have been put together. It must be said that many of them are presented to the Polish reader for the first time, in translations done by the author herself.

So *An Outline of the History of Poetics* is an important and useful book, and is so not only for pedagogical purposes. It is a synthesis of the ancient theoretical ideas on poetry, the first book of this kind in Poland. The merits of the author are therefore obvious.

Adam Rysiewicz

Transl. by Ludwik Wiewiórkowski