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"Poetyka i poezja. Studia i szkice staropolskie", Teresa Michałowska, Warszawa 1982 : [recenzja]

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wicz (e.g. chapters devoted to *Pan Tadeusz* and to the Parisian lectures may be found quite controversial); but it seems unquestionable that his illuminating and inspiring book will be reckoned among the best work on Mickiewicz written in the last few decades.

Sum. by *Marek Kwapiszewski*

Transl. by *Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz*

Teresa Michałowska, *Poetyka i poezja. Studia i szkice staropolskie (Poetics and Poetry. Essays and Studies in Polish Renaissance and Baroque Poetry)*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1982.

The subtitle may suggest both a somewhat heterogeneous character of the book and the author's confinement to Polish literature only, but the reader will soon realize that this is not the case; for he is presented with an orderly, distinctly systematic whole, united by the primary idea of the interrelation between poetic theory and practice, and going far beyond the limits of Polish literary culture—the fact that is undoubtedly of some significance for a foreign reader. The book often refers to the European universum of tradition, and in her comparative approach the author shows an imposing orientation in modern European studies in this field. All this makes for the necessity of reading the whole book at once, for a gradual up-taking it by the reader; optional reading of only some selected parts diminishes the possibility of perception and full comprehension of the argument, developing on the basis of earlier information and insights.

The book consists of three parts: I – *Rodzaj i gatunek (Literary Genre and Its Variations)*, II – *W kręgu myśli o poezji (Thinking on Poetry)*, III – *Świat wyobraźni: przestrzeń i czas (Imaginary World: Space and Time)*. Each of these parts, and especially the first two, more closely interconnected, leads progressively, as it were, to a more specific differentiation of the presented material, such a differentiation being manifest not only in the passing from European to Polish poetic theory and practice, but also in the choice the author makes on the way; for in Part II Michałowska takes up—

along with new matters—some of the problems discussed in the previous part, while dismisses others, and either deals with issues that go beyond the information already given or treats this information as a cognitive instrument and focuses mainly on a literary work in all its interpreted richness of meaning. Part III as compared with the foregoing two is a somewhat separate study in so far as it is less concerned with strictly generic problems or, more broadly, with the primary problems of poetic art (e.g. ideological principles of poetics, notion of artistic rules, the mimetic theory, or various conceptions of the poet and his art). Spatial and temporal categories traced by the author in the works of the famous poet of the Polish Renaissance, Jan Kochanowski, and temporal motifs as shown in Polish Baroque poetry are the subjects of two studies contained in this part. Since these studies are—presumably by virtue of the very material treated—the most brilliant of all, it may be well to start the presentation of Michałowska's book with this part, postponing a little the discussion of the first two.

“Kochanowskiego poetyka przestrzeni” (Kochanowski's Poetics of Space) and “Znaki czasu” (Signs of Time) give a pioneer and yet nearly comprehensive view of this important problem, hitherto neglected in our criticism. The author, referring to the vast European intellectual tradition as regards imagination (*imaginatio*), reason (*ratio*) and memory (*memoria*), considers all epistemological and axiological aspects of relevant problems of philosophical anthropology; she is concerned with the ways man perceives the world in spatial forms as well as with the ways he differentiates and understands temporal categories: eternity (*aeternitas*), “eternity created”, i.e. “time of the world as created by God” (*aevum*), and finally—the strictly limited human time (*tempus*). All these concepts, presented in the perspective of historical changes, clearly typologically differentiated, and properly ascribed to definite points in the diachronic sequence, serve as a kind of “net” into which the author catches all ideologically and philosophically meaningful manifestations of the cognitive and creative poetic vision that is sufficiently systematic and coherent. No exhaustive discussion of Michałowska's critical achievement is possible here; we can only point out some main points of her argument. Kochanowski's poetics of space is traced on three planes:

that of the cosmic vision, that of the mythical space, and in the perspective of the earth (seen as both an open space and a closed space), on which a horizontal movement takes place, evolving definite changes and with its structure completing the spherical vision of the universe and the vertical vision of the mythical space; all these combining into a "specific spatial whole," manifest in Kochanowski's poetry.

This whole, says the author, proves to be closely connected with the Renaissance vision of the world. It is deeply rooted in both the classical and Biblical tradition, but at the same time it is responsive to impulses coming from the contemporary philosophy, religion or aesthetics. Yet it is also branded by the poet's individual imagination, shows some of what we perceive as constants of his works. The constituents of this threefold vision of the world appear with different intensity in different formulations in different poems [...] But the very fact of their recurrence in Kochanowski's poetry allows us to presume that what we deal there with are not loose and accidental images, but a definite spatial vision, the structure of which was suggested both by the poet's imagination and by the ideas of the Renaissance (p. 328).

The other study, "Człowiek i czas: wątki temporalne w poezji polskiego baroku" (Man and Time: Temporal Motifs in Polish Baroque Poetry) is concerned with a broader European perspective of the Baroque poetry inspired by specific ideas and concepts of time. Michałowska reconstructs scientific conceptions concerning temporal categories, refers to various ideas of time embodied in mythological personifications, in iconic visions and, above all, in the poetry drawing on iconic representations; she also traces the great motifs of Time, Death and Nonentity. In the concluding chapter she considers the relation of the Baroque thought to the Renaissance heritage, to find an essential difference in anthropological conceptions of time, prevailing in those two epochs respectively. This brilliant and revealing study, based on comprehensive knowledge of many disciplines, is also a demonstration of interpretative powers of the author, a demonstration of erudition coupled with critical imagination and insight.

Part II of the book offers quite a fresh view on some problems and must be regarded as a significant contribution to our literary criticism. To be sure, in recent years there have appeared in Poland many important—and some of them quite illuminating—

works on broadly conceived historical poetics,¹ its particular spheres or problems,² as well as a number of critical studies on Polish Renaissance poetry, oriented towards the historical literary genetics;³ and yet Michałowska's work is conspicuous for its recognition of phenomena that are really relevant, for its methodological determination and also for its sound judgements. She argues especially against the dangerous thesis, frequently found in various discussions of the subject, of the "separation of poetic theory and practice"; we must not, she claims, "arbitrarily question the interrelation between 'the formulated poetics' and practice," and assume that the latter diverges from "formulated theories," deemed powerless against literary conventions used in practice, the relation of these conventions to the poetics supposedly being that either of opposition, or anticipation, or regression, or distortion resulting from false interpretation. Granting the obvious incompleteness of our knowledge concerning conventions as well as modes in which literary theory functioned in the culture of the past, Michałowska warns against the dangerous dualism, manifest in studying poetry separately from theory, and postulates

reflection on cognitive justification and effectiveness of introducing historical categories of poetic art into critical study of literature of the past [...] We easily

¹ E.g. E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz, *Droga na Parnas. Problemy staropolskiej wiedzy o poezji* (*The Path to Parnassus. Problems of Polish Medieval and Renaissance Poetic Study*), Wrocław 1974; Z. Szmydtowa, *Poeci i poetyka* (*Poets and Poetics*), Warszawa 1964; *Poetyka renesansu. Antologia* (*The Renaissance Poetics. An Anthology*), ed. by E. Sarnowska-Temeriusz, Wrocław 1982.

² E.g. B. Otwinowska, "Imitacja – eklektycyzm – spontaniczność" (Imitation – Eclecticism – Spontaneity), *Studia Estetyczne*, vol. 4, 1967; J. Abramowska, "Alegoreza i alegoria w dawnej kulturze literackiej" (Allegorical Exegesis and Allegory in Literary Culture of the Past). [in:] *Problemy odbioru i odbiorcy*, Wrocław 1977; Z. Rynduch, *Nauka o stylach w retorykach polskich XVII wieku* (*Theory of Three Styles in Polish Books on Rhetorics in the 17th century*, Gdańsk 1967; B. Otwinowska, *Modele i style prozy w dyskusjach na przełomie XVI i XVII wieku* (*Prose Models and Styles in 16th- and 17th-century Discussions*), Wrocław 1967; S. Zabłocki, *Polsko-lacińskie epicedium renesansowe na tle europejskim* (*Polish-Latin Renaissance Epicedium Against the European Background*), Wrocław 1968.

³ E.g. J. Abramowska, *Lad i Fortuna. O tragedii renesansowej w Polsce* (*Order and Fortune. On the Renaissance Tragedy in Poland*), Wrocław 1974; H. Dziechcińska, *Proza staropolska. Problemy gatunków i literackości* (*Polish Renaissance Prose. Problems of Genre and Literariness*), Wrocław 1967.

agree, she adds, as to interpreting old poetry in the context of philosophy, social consciousness, religion, literary tradition or poets' personalities. But the postulate of explicating literature through referring it also to a literary theory created within the same culture immediately arouses doubts and provokes sceptical reserve and caution, even among specialists (pp. 140–143).

Her own critical procedure is in accordance with what she postulates: in the studies included in Part II of her book she shows close correlations of theory and practice of the epoch. Especially worth-noting is the study "Poetyka i poezja: problemy interpretacji poezji staropolskiej" (Poetics and Poetry: Interpretative Problems)⁴ where she discusses poetics in Poland of the time, "poetic art" and "imitation" of models. There we find also a chapter offering some propositions concerning the critic's dealing with poetry in the light of poetics, together with brilliant interpretations of some texts.

Along the same guidelines she proceeds in another study "'Praca' – 'wyobraźnia' – 'natchnienie'. Horacjańskie i neoplatońskie idee w poetyce i poezji na przełomie XV i XVI w. w Polsce" ('Labour' – 'Imagination' – 'Inspiration'. Horatian and Neoplatonic Ideas in the Poetics and Poetry of the Turn of the 15th Century in Poland).⁵ This part includes also the essay "'Sztuka' i 'reguły' w europejskiej i polskiej teorii poezji" ('Art' and 'Rules' in European and Polish Poetic Theory),⁶ which concentrates, however, mainly on the theoretical aspect of poetic study and reconstructs the notions mentioned in the title as they functioned at the time. Yet in its comparative scope this chapter is perhaps more congruent with both the character and mode of presentation of the first part of the book, the one dealing chiefly with theoretical issues of the idea of genre.

This part is a great exposition of European and Polish historical

⁴ Reprinted from: *Zagadnienia literaturoznawczej interpretacji (Problems of Critical Interpretation)*, Wrocław 1978.

⁵ A shorter, original version of this study can be found in: *Italia, Venezia e Polonia tra Medio Evo e Eta Moderna. A cura di V. Branca e S. Graciotti*, Firenze 1980, under the title "Les idées néoplatoniciennes et horaciennes dans la poésie et la poétique polonaise à la charnière des XV^e et XVI^e siècles."

⁶ This is a shortened and partly revised version of: "'Sztuka' i 'reguły' w europejskiej i polskiej teorii poezji – 'Reguły' w staropolskiej sztuce poetyckiej" ('Art' and 'Rules' in the European and Polish Theory of Poetry – 'Rules' in Polish Poetics Art). [in:] *Estetyka – poetyka – literatura*, Wrocław 1973.

literary genetics, especially as concerns lyrical poetry, and it is divided into four main studies: "U początków refleksji genologicznej. Antyk – średniowiecze" (The Beginnings of Generic Thought. Antiquity – Middle Ages),⁷ "Koncepcje genologiczne w renesansowej teorii poezji" (Concepts of Genre in the Renaissance Theory of Poetry),⁸ "Pojęcie liryki wobec kategorii rodzaju i gatunku w renesansowej teorii poezji" (The Notion of Lyrical Poetry and the Category of Genre in the Renaissance Theory of Poetry),⁹ and "O gatunku w poetyce i w poezji staropolskiej" (On Genre in Polish Poetics and Poetry).¹⁰ All these reveal the vast knowledge of the author, but they are not intended as informative only; Michałowska attempts to reconstruct the generic notions which in the poetics and theoretical reflections of the past appear as either implicit or fragmentary, vague or insufficiently differentiated, distorted by various influences, transformations, historical changes and interferences. Particularly illuminating is her reconstruction of the notion of the lyrical poetry and its generic status within the Renaissance systematics of literary forms.

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⁷ A revised version of: "The Beginnings of Genological Thinking. Antiquity – Middle Ages," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, 1969, fasc. 1.

⁸ A revised version of: "Genological Notions in the Renaissance Theory of Poetry," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, 1970, fasc. 2.

⁹ A revised version of: "The Notion of Lyrics and the Category of Genre in Ancient and Later Theory of Poetry," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*, 1972, fasc. 1.

¹⁰ A revised version of: "Gatunek staropolski – obiekt i narzędzie poznania historycznoliterackiego" (Genre in Polish Medieval and Renaissance Literature – The Subject and Instrument of Historioliterary Knowledge), *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1975, fasc. 2.

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