

EDITORIAL NOTE

Using literary theory and criticism in studies of literary culture from the Middle Ages to the end of the Enlightenment requires clarification. For the term “theory” in Poland is currently associated rather with structuralism, psychoanalysis and deconstruction than Renaissance poetics and rhetoric. It is hard to imagine that 16th- and 17th-century teachers of poetics and eloquence would consider themselves to be theoreticians of literature (the idea of *bonae litterae* or *belles lettres* just managed to leave humanistic studios), even if they actually were the ones defining and explaining fundamental categories used for description and interpretation of texts. Too many various metatheories obscured the theoretical achievements and accomplishments of humanists who discuss problems of imitation, relations between art and nature or metaphor and irony.

In the tradition that comes from Aristotle, theory was the domain of abstract speculation and reflection on what is general and universal. Even if intellectual consideration of terms preceded concrete creative action (called poietic in the Stagirite’s language, and poetic in its source meaning), the former never used to replace the latter. Temporary separation of theory from practice was only philosophers’ doing and it was conceived to serve even closer reintegration of the two spheres of human activity. This way of thinking was then adopted by humanists, whose theoretical deliberations were justified by the problems that occurred in „artistic” practice. The systematised and normative theories they created usually tended to be sets of definitions, theorems and rules of production of text. They provided a source of essential knowledge about “literature” and designated models to follow. What is more, they had a solid philosophical base that manifested itself in the form of accepted categories referring to particular notions about the functioning of language and creation of new meanings.

The present issue of “Terminus” constitutes the second part of the monograph dedicated to recognising leading currents in the studies in old literature and the reflection on the usefulness (or uselessness) of instru-

ments taken from contemporary interpretative theories for studies of texts that were created in a different social-cultural context. As we mentioned before, early modern theory (or more adequately: knowledge) of literature was more or less systematically explained in textbooks on poetics and rhetoric. The 20th-century discourse on literary theory and criticism, which every now and again falls into deep crisis and declares its own – always premature – death, and in which the separation of theory from practice has long ago become a not-only-discursive fact – this discourse is now recognising its poetical-rhetorical genealogy anew. Thanks to structuralism and its diverse variants (also those which developed in opposition to its chief assumptions) there was a return of poetics understood as the most general theory of all kind of creative practices (from poetics as defined by linguistics to the poetics of experience and back). In turn, authors associated with deconstruction and semiology, which grew on the wave of the great disappointment with structuralism, rediscovered and reinterpreted the key terms from the dictionary of rhetoric (trope, aporia, figure, allegory, irony). Thus the art of elocution, also the one described in diachronic perspective, is today experiencing its renaissance.

Let us now move on to the topics of papers printed in this issue of “Terminus.” Magdalena Piskała discusses some problems concerning the preparation of the critical edition of the heraldic work of Szymon Okolski. One of them is an attempt at describing and arranging the more important intertexts which would be useful in reading the work of the Polish Dominican but at the same time constitute a complex labyrinth of quotes, crypto-quotes and literary allusions. Michał Czerenkiewicz and Wojciech Ryczek’s paper brings deliberations on the main currents in neo-Latin studies in Poland (issues of editing, transcribing and translating neo-Latin texts). Next, in their two-part study, Tomasz Nastulczyk and Piotr Oczko present methodological dilemmas faced by literary historians who use categories drawn from contemporary humanities. The authors also show how expertise in different theoretical discourses is helpful in working out one’s own analytical and interpretative instrumentary and can be used to more fully interpret a concrete text. Paulina Piotrowska prepared an edition of a collection of anecdotes on Demostenes (the following translation of which was prepared in cooperation with Bartłomiej Czarski and Agnieszka Wocial). The collection consists of a compilation of citations from numerous late antique and early medieval authors who depicted interest-

ing episodes from the life of this most remarkable Hellenist orator. In the section of reviews and analyses you will find two papers: Tomasz Górny's text on Judy Tarling's book (*The Weapons of Rhetoric: A Guide for Musicians and Audiences*), as well as Andrzej Probulski and Krzysztof Obremski's *Old Polish Literature Read with Contemporary Humanities*.

We wish you a pleasant and inspiring reading!

Wojciech Ryczek

