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Baroque Pattern Poetry in Poland
In Relation to Theories of Literary Genres

Pattern poetry (also called figured poetry, visual poetry, poems of shaped verse or simply picture poetry) is an important iconographical phenomenon. However, literary critics have usually regarded it as a poetical entertainment and for that reason pattern poetry was either neglected or misunderstood in the past. Even though some interesting books and papers on pattern poetry have been published in the last century, especially after the Second World War, there is still a certain lack of enthusiasm for theoretical analysis of this kind of poetry. The most extensive and valuable works on pattern poetry are only bibliographies with basic descriptions and numerous illustrations.[1] In most scholarly papers a historical outline of this unusual phenomenon is more important than a theoretical analysis, especially concerned with the classification taking into account the theory of literary genres. In this paper I would like to examine some aspects of the relationship between Polish pattern poetry of the 17th century and the theory of literary genres.

It is difficult to formulate a definition of pattern poetry. According to Kenneth Newell "A pattern poem (...) consists of one or more stanzas, each of which is printed upon the page so that its type will outline a recognizable picture to the reader's eye. The picture may be a geometric design, a silhouette of some concrete object, or even an abstract representation of some mood or idea similar to that found in the words of the stanza."[2] This is, however, only a definition of *technopaegnia* — one kind of pattern poetry known from the *Greek Anthology* and imitated in the whole of Europe. This definition is not sufficient because it does not include other kinds of such poems. The same author defines then another type of picture poems called *carmina quadrata* or *carmina cancellata*. They "were box-like verses in which each line had the same number of letters and the number of lines in the verse equaled the number of letters per line. Acrostics, telestichs, and pictorial designs were formed in the lettering by capitalizing or inking in chosen letters with a different color or by drawing in separate outlines."[3] These two definitions do not comprise the whole variety of picture poems. A large number of poetic texts have been described by historians of literature.[4] These descriptions

entitle us to separate another two kinds of picture poems — labyrinths and "architectural poems". Poetical labyrinths are regular compositions similar to a chessboard with letters distributed on it. Such a poem (which may be also circular or spiral) should be read according to a proper order following the rules of a labyrinth.[5] "Architectural poem" is not the best description of the fourth kind of pattern poetry, the most heterogeneous one. Such poems were written mainly in the 17th century — pieces of poetry were put into various shapes, mainly architectural ones, but there were also triumphant gates, buildings, various monuments. There is an important difference between this kind of pattern poetry and *technopaegnia* in which the lines of a poem produce a picture — e.g. wings, an altar, a pipe or an ax. In "architectural poems" various pieces of poetry are put into a picture of a building or a monument and the shape of the poetical lines does not mark out an area of a picture. On the other hand sometimes it is difficult to make a difference between the *technopaegnion* and the "architectural poem", especially in the 17th century. It is important to distinguish between a poem written in a shape of a sword or a banner and a regular poem put into a picture painted before. The other difficulty is — as one of the scholars noticed — that it is sometimes difficult to decide if such a poem is an autonomous literary work or rather a part of an incidental architectural setting with a special poetical program.[6]

The above mentioned classification was based on the study of the most representative examples of the European medieval, renaissance and baroque pattern poetry. It should be mentioned here that in Poland the fourth kind was the most popular one, because Polish pattern poetry of that time was mainly eulogistic or panegyrical. Poems put into the shapes of triumphant gates, coats of arms, tombs or even insignia of a rule of Roman Catholic bishops were for that reason obviously the most common ones. Polish baroque poetry was also religious and theological, so we can find many poems in a shape of a cross and also of a star, which is a symbol of Mary the Virgin. There are also dozens of poems written according to the pattern of *carmina quadrata* and various poetical labyrinths.

In treatises and handbooks of poetics written during that time a notion that comprises the whole variety of pattern poems cannot be found. It is obvious that the role of poetics with its rules and principles was essential in the 17th century both in Poland and in the whole of Europe. Classification proposed in the beginning of this paper is based on the analysis of accessible material, but it is not acceptable from the historical point of view.

The old Polish poetics was theoretically based on traditional Aristotelian notions of *individuum — species — genus* (an individual — a species — a genre).

In practice theory of genres and species in 16th and 17th century Poland was far more complex. Subordination of species to genres (narrative, dramatic and mixed) was purely theoretical. In the 17th century authors of treatises on poetics preferred to isolate a few different notions, each of them having features of all traditional genres. Usually they mentioned the following genres: *poesis lyrica* (lyrical poetry), *poesis elegiaca* (elegiac poetry), *poesis tragica* (tragic poetry), *poesis comica* (comic poetry), *poesis satyrica* (satiric poetry), *poesis epigrammatica* (epigrammatic poetry), *poesis artificiosa* or *curiosa* (artificial or curious poetry). In handbooks and treatises these genres were situated in respect to hierarchy. At first the epic poetry was the most distinguished one but later it was replaced by the so called artificial (curious) poetry based on baroque concepts and formal, technical tricks.[7] Definitions and examples of pattern poems can be found in treatises and handbooks within the section devoted to the artificial poetry.[8]

There are no direct links between Polish theory of visual poetry and reflections that can be found in basic European works dealing with that issue, i.e. in Scaliger's *Poetics*, *The Arte of English Poesie* by George Puttenham and Alsted's *Encyclopaedia*. Puttenham who presented several poems written according to the rules of *technopaegnion* claimed that they had an oriental origin.[9] Alsted's work is more interesting from the theoretical point of view. In his *Poetica* (a part of *Encyclopaedia*) the whole chapter is devoted to *technopaegnion*. One can find there definitions and pictures of poems called by him *amphora poetica* (poetical amphora), *calix poetica* (poetical chalice (cup)), *ovum poeticum* (poetical egg).[10] On the other hand there are several definitions of poems in Alsted's work which cannot be included in the "pattern poetry" — emblems or acrostics — but it is worth mentioning that one can find them in chapters about "artificial poetry" in Polish treatises and handbooks.[11]

Pattern poetry belongs then to so called "artificial" or "curious" poetry. Of course not all methods of shaping poetry were described in Polish treatises. Quite the reverse, this is the best case to prove a statement that the scope of the theory of literary genres and species was not strictly in line with a collection of species existing in the old Polish literature. There were notions having literary equivalents and species having no equivalents in notions.[12] In typical treatises on poetics there are only few notions that may be referred to what we call "pattern poetry". Most pattern poems belong to a large group of literary species of a non-ancient origin (like sonnet or madrigal) that cannot be found in treatises. One characteristic problem may be observed in a Polish book on poetics, *Attica Musa* written by a

Piarist monk Andrzej Krzyżkiewicz (Ignatius a S. Francisco). In a chapter called *De ludis poeticis* various examples of "artificial poetry" were placed and there is also one pattern poem in a shape of a pyramid (defined as an *obeliscus*). On the other hand a significant *admonitio* (admonition) was put in the last part of the book. The author warned of "new poets" who write strange "artificial" poems. Two of them — a banner and a sword — were printed there.[13] They have no names, but we might call them *vexillum poeticum* (poetical banner) and *gladium poeticum* (poetical sword) according to the theory of Alsted. There was no separate treatise on pattern poetry, although it is obvious that most pattern poetry was written under an influence of the Jesuit order and its cultural institutions, especially colleges in which nearly all Polish gentry was educated at that time. The most magnificent book with pattern poems published in 17th century Poland, *Leopardus... Henrici Firley* was written by students of the Jesuit college in Kalisz as an eulogy for a new Roman Catholic archbishop. There are many examples of pattern poems in rhetorical handbooks used in Jesuit colleges. Shaped poems were treated there as a part of a section of epigrammatic poetry. Writing such poetry was a part of rhetorical exercises practiced in these schools. The official Jesuit educational program suggested that lecturers should teach methods of writing poetry — epigrammatic among other genres — and these methods were a part of poetics and rhetoric.[14]

There are however no sources that may be helpful while studying the problem of pattern poetry in the light of the theory of literary genres and species. Is pattern poetry a part of "artificial poetry" or a separate genre? Is it a collection of literary species or only one species with numerous variants? It would be easy to say that there are four different species of pattern poetry i.e. *technopaegnia, carmina cancellata*, labyrinths and "architectural poems" (if we of course have the right to isolate the "pattern poetry" as a separate genre; such a notion did not exist in the past) and that there are various variants of these species. Having made such a decision we are faced with insoluble problems. This provisional classification is anachronistic, because it does not take into consideration historical consciousness of literary genres. What is more, the *carmina quadrata* and labyrinths often intersect and differences between them often rub off. The fourth group is too heterogeneous and it is here that we can imagine all difficulties with any classification.

The most "legally valid" procedure will be to follow the old theories. As I mentioned above, there are not too many theoretical statements of that kind. It is

worth mentioning however that both in Polish and Western European treatises on poetics there is a tendency to define separate shape poems and give them names of objects represented by them. Examples from Alsted's *Encyclopaedia* and Polish handbook *Attica Musa* were mentioned above. This method of "creating" literary genres will make sense only with poems written in a shape of altars, wings, swords, crosses etc. In Polish books with pattern poetry we can find several poems in the shape of a banner, a star, a sword or a cross. Can they be recognized as separate literary genres? Such classification is possible but it makes sense only with books (especially eulogies written in Latin) which consist only of various shaped poems. There is however a group of poetical books written in Polish (by Adam Nieradzki and Adrian Wieszczycki) in which unique pattern poems not imitating popular structures are the compact syntheses of the contents contained in the work. Texts connecting the poetic word and the picture make summaries of the whole work. The typographical structure of the poems in Nieradzki's work is especially interesting and was compared to vanguard, 20th century visual prints.[15] Another example of such poetry called "architectural" is the work by Adrian Wieszczycki ("Archetyp..."). Poems are placed into the figures of a tomb monument and a magnificent obelisk. It would be difficult to analyze them as literary works — connections with the baroque architecture and funeral customs seem to be more important here. It is obvious that such poems can hardly be examined from the point of view of the 17th century literary theory. On the other hand it should be mentioned that in some poetical works written in Polish in which the text is interspersed by pattern poems these poems are not "vanguard" but slightly traditional. This is the case of Wieszczycki and many others like Wojciech Waśniowski.[16]

What solution can be provided to overcome theoretical difficulties concerning theories of literary genres and the classification of various kinds of the pattern poetry? There are at least three ways of connecting a poetical word with a picture. All belong to the genre of *poesis artificiosa* distinguished in old treatises on poetics. The first one may be called *technopaegnion* according to the very old tradition. Within this way of producing visual poems we can distinguish many species. Some of them were mentioned in old treatises. We may suppose that according to this theory every shape becomes a separate species. An important piece of evidence is a history of a species called "pyramid". Pyramid is the only visual species accepted by Krzyżkiewicz and separately described in his treatise *Attica Musa*. The significance of a pyramid as the most popular European species

of the pattern poetry in 16th and 17th century was·proved and much evidence was collected.[17] According to one of the modern theories even one manifestation of a literary species means that it began to exist.[18] I think that there is no contradiction between this statement and the essence of old theory — pyramids and also wings, altars, stars or crosses were separate literary species. Another literary species is *carmen quadratum* or *cancellatum*. This species was examined in old treatises as a one, separate species, although we should take into consideration that it had many variants. The third species is a poetical labyrinth with many variants as well.[19] Finally, we must turn to poems called before "architectural". They cannot be classified from the point of view of old handbooks of poetics. This type of visual poetry cannot be found in them. I think that it is not a part of literature only, because — in opposition to *technopaegnia, carmina quadrata* and labyrinths — it radically exceeds the limits of literature and cannot be examined from the literary theory point of view. "Architectural poems" are usually a part of occasional architecture — triumphant arches and gates, artificial buildings, temporary decorations — and they are beyond the old poetics and modern literary theory. Many such works contain simple and not "shaped" verses placed in an architectural work. I think that such works should be studied from an inter-disciplinary point of view not as works of literature but simply as works of art.

When "architectural" poems are excluded from the world of pure literature, classification of so called pattern poetry will not be difficult. Both old and new theories of poetry can coexist here without contradictions. What is more, sepa-ration of "architectural poems", a magnificent example of the baroque imagery, may create a field for joint interdisciplinary studies of a phenomenon that is beyond literature as one of the best examples of baroque synthesis of various arts.

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Notes

1. J. Adler and U. Ernst, *Text als figur. Visuelle Poesie von der Antike bis dur Moderne*. Veinheim, 1987; D. Higgins, *Pattern Poetry. Guide to an Unknown Literature*. New York University Press, 1987.

2. K. Newell, *Pattern poetry. A Historical Critique from the Alexandrian Greeks to Dylan Thomas*. Boston, 1976.

3. *Ibid*.

4. e.g. J. Adler, "Technopaegnia, carmina figurata and Bilder-reime: Seventeenth century figured poetry in historical perspective", in *Comparative criticism* 4 (ed. E.S. Schaffer). Cambridge, 1982; Higgins, op. cit.; P. Rypson, *Obraz słowa. Historia poezji wizualnej*. Warszawa, 1989.

5. P. Rypson, "Gdańska poezja wizualna XVII wieku". *Rocznik Gdański* 47.1 (1987).

6. Rypson, 1989

7. T. Michałowska, *Poetyka i poezja. Studia i szkice staropolskie*. Warszawa, 1982.

8. T. Michałowska, *Staropolska teoria genologiczna*. Wrocław, 1974.

9. G. Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) (ed. C. D. Willcock and A. Walker). Cambridge, 1936; M. Church, "The first English pattern poems". *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 61 (1946); A. L. Korn, "Puttenham and the oriental pattern poem". *Comparative Literature* 6.4 (1954).

10. J. H. Alsted, *Encyclopaedia septem tomis distincta*. Herborn, 1630.

11. Michałowska, 1974.

12. Michałowska, 1982.

13. A. Krzyżkiewicz (Ignatius a S. Francisco), *Attica Musa*. Cracoviae, 1974.

14. E. Ulčinaitė, *Teoria retoryczna w Polsce i na Litwie w XVII wieku*. Wrocław, 1984.

15. Rypson, 1989; P. Wilczek, "Funkcje wierszy wizualnych w utworze Adama Nieradzkiego "Kirys hartowny starożytnego żołnierza"", in *O literackiej ramie wydawniczej w książkach dawnych* (ed. R. Ocieczek). Katowice, 1990.

16. P. Wilczek, "Barokowa poezja wizualna w Europie i Polsce. Prolegomena", in *Staropolskie teksty i konteksty. Studia* (ed. J. Malicki). Katowice, 1989.

17. U. Ernst, "Europäische Figurengedichte in Pyramidenform aus dem 16. und 17. Jahrhundert". *Euphorion* 76 (1982).

18. S. Skwarczyńska, "Niedostrzeżony problem podstawowy genologii", in *Wokół teatru i literatury (Studia i szkice)*. Warszawa, 1970.

19. P. Rypson, "The labyrinth poem". *Visible Language* 20.1 (1986).