

RHETORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF WOMAN IN THE OLD SILESIAN LATIN TEXTS

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN RETÓRICA DE LA MUJER EN LOS TEXTOS NEOLATINOS DE LA SILESLIA ANTIGUA

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Abstract

The correlation between the rhetoric and the representation of woman takes on a particular importance in the old Silesian Latin texts. To begin with, the identity of Silesian woman has been distinguished in an original way dating back to medieval period. It can be demonstrated by two special material-literary monuments from the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, Saint Hedwig of Silesia's cult and sermons preached by a Black Monk, Peregryn of Opole. Thanks to the discreet rhetorical measures, Silesian woman gains status of a resourceful and self-reliant person. She is even being compared to Saint Mary. The Renaissance is a time of rhetorical disputes concerning the rung women are placed on in a social ladder. In Silesia they were able to stand out and position themselves on a much higher rung thanks to the avid speech given by a woman in the church, publication of the work titled "The catalogue of educated women and girls" (Georgius Martin) and the most feministic encouragement in Europe for that period exhorting women to compete with men (Laurentius Corvinus). In the baroque, monuments represent a very distinctive rhetorical rule called *memoria*, which is a story about a woman depicting her in successive pictures analogically to the 'movie'. On the other hand, the two last centuries of Latin culture in Silesia were marked by literary works of women themselves. Maria Cunitia (Kunitz) unquestionably deserves a special attention. Not only was she a splendid seventeenth century astronomer, but also an active participant of all-Europe rhetorical discussion concerning the best rhetorical style.

Keywords: Rhetoric – women's history – images – Neo-Latin texts – Silesia.

Resumen

La relación entre la retórica y la imagen de la mujer tomó una forma particular en los textos neolatinos en la Silesia antigua. En primer lugar, la identidad de la mujer silesiana se determinó de una manera original en la Edad Media, como lo demuestran los dos monumentos literarios de los siglos XII y XIII, así como el culto de Santa Eduvigis y los sermones del fraile dominico Peregrino de Opole. Gracias a la discreta aplicación de la retórica, la mujer silesiana adquiere el estatus del ser humano ingenioso e independiente y se la pone en pie de igualdad con María. El Renacimiento es una época de las controversias

retóricas sobre el lugar de la mujer en la sociedad, que en Silesia se marcó con el papel activo de la mujer en la Iglesia, con la publicación de la obra “Catalogus doctorum virginum et feminarum” de Georgius Martinus Baldhofenius y con alentar a las mujeres a competir con los hombres (Laurentius Corvinus), lo que parece el acto más “feminista” en la Europa de aquel entonces. Los monumentos de la época barroca de una forma interesante utilizan el principio retórico de la memoria, mostrando la historia de la mujer en la imágenes consecutivas. Los dos últimos siglos de la cultura latina en Silesia se destacan por la creación literaria de las propias mujeres. Cabe mencionar especialmente a María Cunitz, la brillante astrónoma del siglo XVII que también participó en el debate europeo sobre el mejor estilo retórico.

Palabras clave: retórica – historia de la mujer – imágenes – textos neolatinos – Silesia.

1. Πρόλογος

The identity of Silesian women has been shaped in a very original way since the medieval period during which Silesia, as the only European region, received not a male but a female patron, Saint Hedwig of Silesia. Sixteenth century Silesia can take pride in a couple of significant views of women as well as in voices of women themselves. One of the most important opinions addressed to women was given by Laurentius Corvinus who exhorts them to compete with men. Another important example is that of a speech given by teenage Eliza Winkler in the church. In the seventeenth century, in turn, more women were well educated and became authors of the literary texts. It was also at that time when one of the Silesian poets, a renaissance “Nobelista”, renounced his laurel received by the emperor for a woman. Still, Latin source materials established in Silesia contain much more captivating reports on women until the end of the eighteenth century. The majority of the aforementioned texts contain rhetorically organized strategies of oral traditions.

2. The Middle Ages

The oldest Silesian ‘female’ text adopting measures of artistic imagery is a stone-made foundational tympanum in the Romanesque church of Saint Mary in Wrocław which dates back to the mid-twelfth century (Doroz-Turek, 2010: 134). This work-of-art visualizes Maria Włostowicowa, a wife of Piotr Włostowic, offering a model of church to Saint Mary with her son Świętosław. Along the half-rounded edge beyond the sculpture runs a stone-engraved inscription in the majuscule:

HAS MATRI VENIAE TIBI DO MARIA MARIAE

HAS OFFERT AEDES SWENTOSLAUS MEA PROLES.

“This one, I offer to You, Mother of Compassion, //Maria to Maria
This church I offer//Świętosław my offspring”

It is a literary work incorporating some aspects of twelfth century artistry; epigram consistent with the rules of the antique epigrammatical inheritance (Szastynska-Siemion, 1997: 188). The internal rhymes (*aedes – proles*), so called *versus leoninus* are a characteristic feature of this distich. Both the tone of the speech, as well as the stance of carved Maria holding a model of funded church with dignity, place her not below but next to the Citizen of Heavens, from where both of them shed their light and give example of the ascension of an earthborn woman. This suggestion – a significant rhetorical element – results in the acknowledgement of Silesian magnate’s wife as equal to the Mother of God.

A famous French medieval period historian (Fossier, 2007) claims that there has always been a division between male and female activities. In the Middle Ages, as areas to be conquered, sea and forest are *stricte* male-dominated. On the other hand, female, in accordance with the mythological message about the Woman-Mother-Earth is associated with the harvest. That is why male ploughs, regardless of how wimpy posture he is, and female takes care of the harvest, gathers sheaves, takes them to the barn and subjects to further processing until it is suitable for eating. Robert Fossier adds humorously that there is a very important exception to this paved scheme, namely when “woman has to do everything on her own” (Fossier, 2007: 162). However, looking from a Silesian angle, another exception must be accounted for when a husband takes over wife’s duties.

A case like that was described in an article from the thirteenth century titled *Liber Foundationis Claustris Sanctae Mariae Virginis in Heinrichow*. The basic content of this document, or more accurately a set of miscellaneous writings, was a defense of the rights of monastery to its owned land. Not only was a general idea of the problem presented but also were mentioned multiple details which among other things focused on the elucidation of the name of “Brukalice” village. The name was excerpted from the statement uttered by Czech Bugouchwał married to a local peasant woman - „day ut ia pobrusa, a ti poziwai” (“Let me. I will mill and you have a rest”). This famous sentence, considered to be the first statement in Polish or Czech languages, was placed in an interesting Latin context:

[...] erat quidam Boemus nomine Bogvalus. Hic servivit domino duci Boleslao antiquo, qui vide licet dux fundavit claustrum Lubenze. Hic idem dux dedit isto in loco, qui nunc

Brucaliz vocatur, iam dicto Bogwalo de terra ad quattuor boves [...]. Sed sciendum, quia in diebus illis errant hic in circuitu aquatica molendina valde rarissima, unde dicti Bogwali Boemi uxor stabat saepissime ad molam molendo. Cui vir suus, idem Bogwalus, compassus dixit: „sine, ut ego etiam molam; hoc est in Polonico: Day, ut ia pobrusa, a ti poziwai”. Sic iste Boemus vicissim molebat cum uxore, id est vertebat quandoque lapidem sicut uxor. Quod videntes vicini, licet tunc pauci, appellabant eum Bogwal Brucal, inde est, quod sua posteritas vocatur Brucaliz (*Liber* 1268: 24b, 9v.)

„There was some Czech called Bogvalus. He was a servant of Prince Bolezlaus, who funded Lubenze abbey. The prince donated aforementioned Bogvalus four farmsteads in a place which today we call Brukaliz [...]. Because in those times there were nearly no water mills, the wife of Bogvalus oftentimes had to stand by the querns and mill the grain. Pitying her, her husband said: “Let me. I will mill and you have a rest”, which in Polish means: „Day, ut ia pobrusa, a ti poziwai”. Bogvalus together with his wife were working hard by the querns turning the stones. Their neighbours seeing that exclaimed “Bogval Brucal” (the one who mills) and that is where the village’s name comes from”.

The replacement of his wife at the querns, which she used to turn on a daily basis due to lack of any water mills nearby, proved to be so spectacular that the neighbors dubbed him the name which was later used to name the village. It was 1270 and three years earlier, on March 26th 1267, pope Clement IV canonized princess Hedwig of Silesia, simultaneously recommending worshipping her as the main patron of that region.

Thus, the identity of Silesian women illustrated by the rhetoric was shaped in an original way since the Middle Ages when Silesia as the only region in Europe received not a male but a female patron – Saint Hedwig, Duchess of Andechs-Meran, the founder of a plethora of churches and monasteries, the wife of Henry I the Bearded, Duke of Wrocław, and the mother of Henry II the Pious who died wounded in Psie Pole fighting with Tatars. Such an exaltation of a woman, who was also famous for having a great political significance, had strongly influenced the perception of women in Silesia as well as the perception of women themselves and most of all the rhetoric applied to females. One of the many definitions of identity is an act of conforming to someone or something treated as a paradigm to follow or achieve – in this case a person of the princely origin. It’s a universal and timeless phenomenon, still present nowadays, to mention an example of Duchess of Cambridge – Catherine.

Therefore, it is already noticeable in the medieval Silesian literature that women are brave and bold like Saint Hedwig and defend their rights oftentimes portraying indocile and tenacious behavior when it is necessary. They are mothers, who exactly like in the “Hagiography of Saint Hedwig” (*Vita* 1884), save their sons and daughters with a great commitment. An example constitutes a rich bourgeois from Wrocław, a mother of Walter, domina Bertcha, who despite the major accident of her son (nanny slipped and fell with him),

first with hope (*Spes curationis*) seeks help from a physician-surgeon and when the child's condition gets worse, sets off to St Hedwig tomb, still trusting her faith will not let her down (*sperans suo desiderio non fraudari*). She is not put off by the negative feedback coming from so many (*multis consulentibus*) who prophesy the imminent death of her son. In Trzebnica she puts her child on St Hedwig's tomb and somewhat urges the Holy to intervene and cure her son or otherwise he may well die on this grave. She says "heal my son or let him pass away on your grave" (*sana filium meum aut fac quod, priusquam de tuo recedat tumulo, moriatur*). The chronicler summarizes it in an interesting way: he clearly states that she herself just uttered her greatest desire (*matris desiderium*) to which she was entitled as a result of exhaustion and fatigue caused by her son's illness (*taedium [...] de filii nimis languore*). Furthermore, there is another example of a woman who dreams of her disabled daughter being healed. And she achieves this, additionally breaking all the contemporary social conventions, failing to comply with pregnancy behavior recommendations and responsibilities she has to the new heir and against all odds stubbornly taking a great care of her elder disabled child.

To make things more unusual, even such a famous preacher as Peregrine from Opole, the Black Monk appointed the first inquisitor in Poland, grants women the right to independence (Peregrini, 1997: PO 11[T12] v. 75). Reportedly, he also himself remains under the influence of the female Silesian patron – Hedwig, whose cult he strongly promotes. In one of his sermons he describes a disgraceful behavior of men who oftentimes indulge themselves instead of taking care of their families and although at first he admits he doesn't know what kind of advice he should give the women (*Nescio, quale consilium eis dare debeo*), on second thought he draws upon his observations of nature which can inspire even our species to certain behaviors. The example he shares concerns the life of both female and male squirrels which stock together food in their tree hollows before the wintertime. However, it is the male who starts digging out food stocks first and worse still, he doesn't allow the female to use their common stocks. Thus, she tries to use a different set of stocks by searching through another hollow but her male counterpart is faster and stronger and beats her to it. In this case, the only thing left for the female is to make use of her creativity: she listens carefully to the male start chewing the upper part of the hollow and then as he does it she begins scraping it from the underneath creating her own orifices (*foramina*). This certainly compelling rhetorical *exemplum* presented to the audience ends with a facetious punch line. Even nowadays it is hard to imagine a preacher giving such an advice to women and at the end of his sermon jokingly wagging his finger at them not to take his advice too literally, reminding that those "scraped holes" in the connubial possessions cannot be conspicuously large (*interdico Vobis,*

quo non faciatis magna foramina). Concluding his elaboration of *dilectio* in the women's interest, Peregrine interjects their purported words: *bene habeat dominus noster, quo pro nobis ita bene locutus est contra viros*. – so they seem to be saying – “The preacher who spoke in our interest against our men gave as a good advice”.

Both Peregrine's sermons, *De tempore* and *De Sanctis*, were certainly oftentimes listened to and kindled in many women a desire to follow into St. Hewdig's footsteps. Such a choice of living quite an independent life as far as women are concerned was made by Ofka, a daughter of Duke of Racibórz – Przemysław, whose court was visited by Peregrine.

3. The Renaissance

In contrast, at the beginning of the Silesian Reformation an unusual and spectacular, as for that time, phenomenon takes place - the Silesian religious reformers led by Ambrose Moiban allow a young woman, or more accurately a girl, to speak to the audience in the church. Elisa Winkler, who as it turns out had learnt Latin and catechism all along with boys, descendants of the reformatory patrician families, preaches a Christmas sermon in the church, even weaving into it short verses of her own authorship. The same Elisa is also the heroine of one of the chapters of the Moiban's catechism (Moiban, 1537), in which he discusses the rhetoric with a friend Chilianus. *Elisabet puella* as the only girl in a crowd of twenty-nine boys participates in the longest, six-page, dialogue in the whole catechism (the rest being usually 3-page only). *Colloquium VI in quo quartum capitulum huius Catechismi exponitur* is an interview conducted with Elisa discussing her public appearance of oratorical nature during the Christmas holidays. The conversation goes smoothly and the interlocutor wants Elisa to continue her story about the birth of Jesus, now delivering a speech about the resurrection. He knows that Elisa intends to even further her oratory and plans to deliver another speech for the pious virgins gathered in the monastery (*scio te iam meditari orationem alteram de gloriosa resurrectione Christi, quam in coetu piarum quarundam virginum in coenobio dictura es*). Chilianus shares interesting comments about the quality of rhetoric used by Elisa. Not does he only believe that she spoke through the Holy Spirit exclusively but also recognizes her knowledge and skills, all of them actually touching upon five divisions of rhetoric. Most of all, he praises Elisa for her perfect disposition and elocution (*vix quoniam credo tibi omnia ex animo excidisse ... structura orationis illius vehementer placuisse errant, enim mihi omnia distincte apte, ornateque collocata*). At the end he says: "I heard you the most beautiful when you spoke and praised God" (*audivi te pulcherrimam celebrantem et orantem*), and it is

difficult to decide whether he meant the beauty of the rhetorical text or maybe the beauty of a girl.

Around this time, i.e. at the beginning of the sixteenth century, one of the Silesian humanists, Laurentius Corvinus, wrote a wonderful appeal to young Silesian girls urging them not only not to be afraid to take up studying which had been only available for males so far, but also to henceforth compete with men (!). *Pergite cum maribus dulces certare Puellae* - writes Corvinus. Such an opinion was unprecedented in those times and far too poorly exposed in the contemporary literature subject matter – it appears in one monograph only (Gaj, 2010) and a few decades earlier but in a different context as "a contribution to the education of women" (Winniczuk, 1961). Meanwhile, no other humanist had advanced so far in the postulates of freedom for women, including incentives to engage in rhetoric. Admittedly, Thomas More advocated for women's educational rights, which act could be considered very audacious back then, but first words of encouragement for women to compete with men were still uttered in Silesia. Below excerpts from Corvinus's appeal:

Iam discunt tenerae libros adamare puellae
Et sua femineus munera sexus habet.
Artibus ingenium ceu formam cultibus augeat,
Nec tantum doctis nunc licet esse viris
Quae tulit autem colos, nunc librum dextera sumit.
Vult calamum, fusoquae fuit apta, manus
Hac ratione dea, quae de Iovis orta cerebro [...]
Pergite cum maribus dulces certare puellae
Non erit, ut video gloria vestra levis
Propter enim sexus comunia foedera Musas
Difficiles vobis arbitror esse minus (Corvinus, 1537: v.15-21; 27-30)

"Beautiful girls already learn to love books
And now they even have female schools. Girls
Beautify their mind with arts just the same as appearance with efforts
And not only men must be educated right now.
This one, whose hand held the distaff, now is wielding a book in her right hand.
The same hand that held the spindle, now demands a stylus.
Thereby, the goddess born from the brain of Jupiter was formed.
Go on, compete with men, you sweet girls!
There will come a time when I am able to see a fame of yours of considerable weight,
Because due to the common bonds of gender
Muses' classes will be less difficult for you - I'm sure! "(Gaj, 2014: 11)

The same Corvinus famously praises Silesia on behalf of his wife Anna - and by that I mean the poem titled *Carmen Laurentii Corvini, regiae urbis Wratislaviae notarii, valedicit quo Prutenos describitque, quantum sibi voluptatis attulerint sequentes Theophilacti epistolae*

et quam dulcis sit a natali solo extorri in Patriam reditu, describing the journey of spouses from Toruń to Wrocław, a trip indeed initiated by his wife, who "had set the wheels of the car in motion" and is active during the entire journey, while her husband is described somewhere in the background reviewing Copernicus's book in his hand.

Polish literary scholars point out that this is the first inclusion of women in literature on a scale unheard of before (Nowak-Dłużewski, 1966: 30). Returning to the Silesian land Anna says her prayers greeting her homeland (Corvinus, 1537: v. 61-76). Through a rhetorical statement of modesty (in fact she calls herself *indocta* – uneducated) she scores even a greater admiration of the reader who in this piece of art comes into contact with a genuinely enthusiastic while conventional praise of the city. In the midst of Anna's declamation appears a quotation within a quotation. After the initial enthusiastic greeting lines flowing straight from her heart (*pectore*), the wife herself quotes her husband, that being a favorite taught-humanistic Corvinus's style, a conventional decorative material, which at the time of the Renaissance was a desired stylistic element and even a condition *sine qua non* the existence of a literary text would be highly improbable.

At the end of the sixteenth century Joanna Elisabeth Westonia, a poet from Prague, became an acknowledged author of literary texts in Silesia. She was even recognized and praised by such famous humanists as Bartholomeus Bilovius, Baltasar Exner and Georgius Martinus to such an extent that in one of his pieces Exner wanted to dedicate her a poetic laurel – an imperial distinction which can be equated with today's Nobel Prize in Literature. It was the cutting-edge artistry presented by Westonia which, according to Exner, took the literature to a whole new level:

Ad Westoniam
 Vix tibi sunt vitae tria lustra pacta, Ioanna,
 Elisabetha Westonia,
 Atque audes dudum multis certare Poetis
 Quocunque quisquis vult stylo.
 Expertus loquor haec, stupeoque, iuvatque fateri
 Politiore carmine.
 Me victum: hinc victum me trado, tibi que corollam
 Lubens impono lauream.

"A tribute to poet Westonia,
 Joanna, in the three mirrors of life
 Elizabeth Westonia, you haven't yet seen your reflection rife.
 And now you can compete with literally anyone
 Whatever poetic styles they choose to pun.
 I, expert, stand amazed in your glory's light
 It's nice to confess that your poem's erudite.

I declare that I am a loser and broken down.
Hence I will ornament your temples with a laurel crown."(Gaj, 2014: 25).

In contrast, Georgius Martin, also as a tribute to another famous female humanist who was very much into rhetoric as well, wrote a famous "Catalogue of educated girls and women" (*Catalogus doctarum virginum et feminarum*). Therein he introduced more than seventy silhouettes of women by applying an innovative educational criterion with regard to women as far as they were concerned (Martin, 1610). The women he chose to describe were not only beautiful or famous as depicted by Giovanni Boccaccio in his directory, nor were they pious or bold as shown by many other authors of that time but most of all they were educated, also in rhetorical terms. Martin considers women's intellect and autonomous educational rights axiomatically and therefore it seems appropriate to finally appreciate more the contribution of Silesian humanist in *querelle des femmes*, especially that from now on in Silesian literary and occasional texts the epithets like 'educated', 'knowledgeable' and 'accomplished' will be ineluctably associated with the female sex.

4. The seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries – the decline in Latin culture in Silesia

The connotation of erudition with women had affected their more frequent taking up of education as definitely not only a blind fate should be attributed to the fact that in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Silesia more and more women were well educated and became authors of the literary texts. In this period (Bogucka, 1998: 185) a considerable body of female writers makes its appearance in Silesia as opposed to central Poland or Gdańsk. These include in particular Christina Cunrad (Tilesia, 2 X 1591-1525 September 1625), Esther von Baruch (8 and July 28, 1652- 1692), Marianne von Bressler (1693-1726), Dorothea Eleonora von Rosenthal (d. after 1641), Elisabeth von Senitz (1629-1617 II November 2, 1679) and Sophia Dorothea von Trach (d. October 7, 1705).

However, among them Maria Cunitia (Cunitz b. 1610, d. 1664), an outstanding female astronomer, without whom Kepler would have had remained unknown because she had improved his miscalculations, deserves a special attention. Cunitia in *Conclusio* (Cunitia, 1650: 144) of her work entitled *Urania propitia* or "Straightforward astronomy" joined the European debate about the best rhetorical style (!). For the settlement of discussion between the supporters of ramism and Neo-Ciceronians she proposed "the supporters of Tullian elegance", or in other words Ciceronians, the criterion *usus*, "utility", as the most important. Such a criterion must be already accepted at the *invention* stage, that is a preparation of work,

then it must be decided upon how many and what rhetorical means will be the most suitable. A woman articulating the matters of rhetorical theory with such a confidence, at the same time fulfilling her mathematical and astronomical professional interests on a daily basis, and highly accomplished in her endeavors, in a word so perfectly combines the worlds of science and the rhetoric that she would still remain a phenomenon today.

In the eighteenth century, just at the end of the Latin culture in Silesia, a very interesting work of literature describing a female character through the rhetorical theory of *memoria* arose. It advocated organizing images according to *loci*, which resulted in a sequence of images, as if in the movie. Those images are characterized by:

- 1) intense, pathetic, and yet constant liveliness of individual perceptions,
- 2) serial subsequence of perceptions according to the scheme of five points - *loci* (Lausberg 2002: 557).

Such a film sequence of images can be seen in the work of the Silesian hagiographer-rhetorician, Martin Florian Rimpler, who issued twenty-four discourses about the patroness of Silesia, St. Hedwig. The work entitled *Patrocinale Silesiae* first briefly outlines different sequences as if headlines and then it presents them in a very vivid or more accurately a movie-like way. Rimpler develops two aspects of description particularly: documentary information about the origin of Hedwig, her parents and relatives, well known in contemporary Europe, and frequent descriptions of her dress and her way of being. The first element certainly serves as an historical authentication with the second perhaps aiming to revive the character. We can see Hedwig in princely robes, with beautifully arranged hair, dressed accordingly due to her social position. The same Hedwig shuns colored robes, chooses the cheapest ones and does not wear rings or gold. Further in the text she is dressed in black and washes the sick or indulges in prayers as a nun. The design of “changing clothes” is an exotic application of rhetorical principle *variatio* and deliberately does not center the reader’s imagination on a static presentation of the sacred but instead assumes the above-mentioned dynamic, nearly filmic sequence of images.

5. Επίλογος

The completion of this outline of the most representative relationships between the rhetoric and the history of women in Latin Silesia should be composed with the awareness that there

are still many other compelling texts on this subject matter, especially in the occasional literature. Some of them still remain undiscovered. In conclusion, it is worth mentioning a phenomenon of rhetorical agonistics, an oratorical contest (Gaj, 2007: 200) held on the eve of patronal days of individual saints and referred to in many Latin texts nowadays virtually forgotten. For the region of Silesia, in addition to the native saint, Holy Catherine was also held in high regard. Every year great orations were voiced in her honor. Despite the same biographical material, each one of them is distinctive, makes use of different lexicon and argumentation as well as aims to excel and be more innovative than the others, all of that to astonish and inspire the reader. Therefore, at the end of the Latin culture in Silesia something, that today is still of a great importance, came into being – the idea to educate the reader through innovativeness and ingenuity interwoven with reaching to the past in order to create a better future.

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