

BARBARA NIEBELSKA-RAJCA

CONVENTION AS THE SOURCE OF THE AVANT-GARDE  
REMARKS ON THE INVENTIVENESS OF EARLY MODERN POETICS

The insipid polarisation of convention and innovation, the “conflicting forces”<sup>1</sup> in the evolution of art, is one of the most evident literary and aesthetic phenomena. The delimitation of avant-garde, conventional and normative tendencies is a natural research area which offers minimum safety and security to a historian of literature, especially of early modern literature, burdened by the stigma of convention,<sup>2</sup> effectively (?) protecting against ridiculous anachronisms. The tension between normativism and anti-conventional tendencies is equally conspicuous in the poetic theory of centuries ago. Although it was commonly called normative poetics, it implies the prevalence of the element of convention, continuity, a static and classical canon, and the domination of the standard.

Traditionalism and the unquestionable utilitarianism of this binary approach to the history and theory of literature in terms of conventionality and

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Dr BARBARA NIEBELSKA-RAJCA—assistant in the Department of Old Polish Literature of the Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: e-mail: [bniebelska@o2.pl](mailto:bniebelska@o2.pl)

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to the now classical text by Arnold HAUSER, “Conflicting forces in the history of art: originality and the conventions,” in: IDEM, *The Philosophy of Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 367–410. Hauser’s famous assumption is significant and interesting and can be used as a starting point of any reflection on conventions in art history: “We must treat each work and each part of a work as an embodiment of the conflict between originality and convention, between the novel and the traditional” (p. 172). See also: Douwe FOKKEMA, “The Concept of Convention in Literary Theory and Empirical Research,” in: *Convention and Innovation in Literature*, ed. by Theo D’haen, Rainer Grübel, Helmut Lethen (Utrecht: John Benjamins, 1989), 1–16.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g.: Lawrence MANLEY, *Convention 1500-1750* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). As to the question of conventionality, let me mention an interesting study by David Summers on convention in the history of art (“Conventions in the History of Art.” *New Literary History* 13, No. 1 (1981): *On convention*, 103–125).

originality provokes us to reflect on the relationship between what is conventional and what is innovative in the theoretical reflection of the past centuries. It seems tempting to revise the common belief in the antagonism between norm/convention and avant-garde and innovative tendencies in the development of European literary and aesthetic doctrines. However, the reflections presented in this article are not intended to contest the state of affairs. They will not aim at questioning the sense of establishing an unambiguous opposition to convention and novelty in relation to early modern theoretical and literary concepts. However, they will—at least in the intention of the author—try to grasp the specificity of anti-conventionality of old theoretical texts.

The co-existence of both tendencies in the development of early modern theoretical reflection can be actually assumed *a priori* to claim that literary theory, seen as a set of rules and standards for practical implementation, must have the same features as the artistic embodiment of its directives, i.e. it will be either conventional or original. The above statement is a cliché which is difficult to challenge, but at the same time—paradoxically—it shuns simple explanation. The question of avant-garde literary and aesthetic theories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries implies the need to define the type of relationship between their conventionality and originality. I do not mean here the quantitative proportions between norm and innovation, but the phenomenon of the genetic interdependence of novelty and normativism.

Conventionality seems to be one of the most dominant features of modern aesthetics, usually perceived through the prism of classical norms and conventional forms, obligatory canons and restrictive directives which are consistently codified in treatises; all of the above, seen from a contemporary perspective, appear to be limitations of originality. The aforementioned fact that poetic theories formulated from Antiquity through to the enlightened ages are usually referred to as normative poetics, is not really conducive to a change of this perspective. Sixteenth and seventeenth-century theoretical anti-normative statements or innovative proposals are not treated as strictly avant-garde, although most probably those few, subversive theoreticians who questioned the old rules would have nothing against such ennoblement. The novelty of late Renaissance and Baroque poetic concepts, for all their boldness, is fundamentally different from contemporary avant-garde tendencies. What happened in the Mannerism or Baroque periods is difficult to consider today to be entirely contradictory, fundamentally anti-classical and anti-traditional, although at the same time it must be remembered that late

Renaissance and 17<sup>th</sup>-century innovative theoretical constructs could have easily passed for avant-garde when compared to then predominant aesthetic tendencies.

Unlike twentieth-century avant-garde, which resolutely departs from earlier theories and conventions, the innovative constructs of the aesthetics of late Renaissance and Baroque periods are based on patterns and concepts derived from classical tradition. Even the most innovative, non-classical aesthetic propositions are usually captured by Baroque theorists within a classical conceptual network. Therefore, if contemporary criteria were to be belatedly applied to evaluate the novelty of old theories, this fact should be treated as a denial of any ideological or aesthetic originality. However, the important role of conventional, traditional theoretical solutions (usually from Antiquity) in the formation of old aesthetic concepts does not contradict their innovativeness. The determining factor behind the avant-garde character of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century theories is not—as in the case of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century currents—contestation and rejection of tradition, but precisely the way tradition is used. It is the method of reception and interpretation of the classical heritage that determines the innovativeness of a given aesthetic theory. If a concept emerges from a passive adaptation and imitation of the conceptual system of ancient theories—roughly the case of most Renaissance classical poetics—then we deal with the continuity of tradition, and thus with the domination of conventional solutions. On the other hand, the process of shaping theories through dialogue with ancient ones, which may involve reinterpretation and revalorisation, less frequently the repudiation and contestation of the systems of old translates into theoretical innovation and leads to the creation of innovative concepts. In such a case, transformed tradition and convention lay the foundations for an avant-garde construct based on selected and transformed elements of the old normative system.

For the authors of early modern poetics, adherence to the classical norm is an indispensable prerequisite for the process of formulating unconventional concepts. Although the norm constitutes a constraint, particularly painful for the artist in the process of creation, it is a starting point for an anti-normative attitude for a theoretician studying Antiquity. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the norm/convention, especially a restrictive one, that was for theorists of centuries ago (and most probably also for contemporaries) an impulse for avant-garde aspirations. During the Renaissance and Baroque periods, only embeddedness in the theoretical tradition of Antiquity and a perfect knowledge of convention allowed innovative

theoreticians to put forth experimental concepts, integrating the necessary element of classical normativism with avant-garde novelty.

The most striking examples of this type of method of creating innovative concepts are offered by the writings of two Italian experimental theorists: the late Renaissance poetics of philosopher Francesco Patrizi and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century theory of conceit and metaphor by Emmanuel Tesauro. Their ideas can, without the risk of exaggeration, be regarded as extremely innovative and manifestly anti-conventional (especially in the case of Patrizi), founded on radically reinterpreted elements of the classical paradigm and theoretical convention. The fundamental components of the system of literary theory are subject to avant-garde transformations, starting with the mimetic theory itself, through concepts concerning the genesis of the creative act, psychological factors necessary in the process of creation and individual stylistic figures, to persuasive and perceptual issues related to the objectives of poetry. Deep revaluations of the way of thinking about poetry, ascribed to in the 1580s by Francesco Patrizi, usher in the central aesthetic assumption, reiterated in the poetics of the heyday of the Baroque period, according to which “amazement” is the most important goal of poetic creation.<sup>3</sup>

Stark opposition to the slavish and unthinking imitation of conceptual patterns and theoretical dogmas of Antiquity is particularly evident in the attitude of Francesco Patrizi. Not only does he challenge Aristotle’s mimetic doctrine, obligatory since ancient times—a defiance in the era of Aristotelian domination remarkable in itself—but also criticizes those theoreticians who adopt the theory of *mimesis* as a dogma.<sup>4</sup> Patrizi’s assault on mimeticism has all the characteristics of contestation but does not lead to total negation and rejection of the imitation theory (we would need to wait for that a few more centuries, till the time of Duchamp and anti-art), but to a radical reformulation and re-focus of its principal aspects.<sup>5</sup> Patrizi does, however, unambiguously refute the Aristotelian conviction of the equivalence of the poetic process and imitation. Patrizi subjects to meticulous and sometimes malicious criticism the theory which reduces poetry to mimetic actions. This intelligent and defiant theoretician has no qualms about countering Aristotle’s

<sup>3</sup> See e.g.: Baxter HATHAWAY, *Marvels and Commonplaces: Renaissance Literary Theory* (New York: Random House, 1968); Dorota GOSTYŃSKA, *Retoryka iluzji. Koncept w poezji barokowej* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Francesco PATRIZI, “La deca disputata,” in: IDEM, *Della poetica*, vol. II, edizione critica a cura di D. Aguzzi Barbagli (Firenze: Istituto Palazzo Strozzi, 1970), 65.

<sup>5</sup> More on Patrizi’s approach to the doctrine of mimeticism in Baxter Hathaway (*The Age of Criticism. The Late Renaissance in Italy* (Ithaca–New York: Cornell University Press 1962), 9–22).

seemingly unquestionable authority and in his book *La deca disputata* refutes the statements found in the ancient author's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* about imitation as the essence of the poetic act.<sup>6</sup>

Patrizi demonstrates his sceptical approach to Aristotle's ideas in the very titles of his chapters ("Se la poesia nacque per le ragioni da Aristotile assegnate," or: "Se la poesia sia imitazione, Se il poeta sia imitatore"). These titles imply their author's doubts as to the applicability of the imitation theory and at the same time trigger a similarly critical approach on the part of the reader. Furthermore, it is not only Aristotle's aesthetic doctrine that is refuted in Patrizi's writings. His unrestrained mind reacts with equally strong opposition to the statements of Plato, Plutarch or 16<sup>th</sup>-century authors, which are contrary to his vision of poetry as influenced by the universal and obligatory mimesis theory. Patrizi's arguments prove the absurdity of identifying poetry with imitation and indicate a lack of precision and the underlying unambiguity of Aristotle's definition of mimesis, comprising six different meanings of this concept. The theoretician openly admits that after a profound consideration of all the six definitions, he finds them utterly absurd ("caggiono tante assurdità"<sup>7</sup>). Patrizi's central argument against the equivalence of the notions of *poesis* and *mimesis* is the statement that the creation of imitative representations, as characteristic of many artists, and non-poets, can neither be a distinctive feature nor the essence of poetry.<sup>8</sup>

Rejecting the reductionist definition of poetry as a recreation of reality, F. Patrizi embraces the creative aspect of art, stressing on a number of occasions that the poet is no imitator (*imitatore*), but a creator (*facitore*), poetry "being not imitation (*imitazione*), but creation (*facitura*)."<sup>9</sup> According to Patrizi, poetic "creativity" has its source in the experience of "*furor poeticus*"<sup>10</sup> and is inseparable from the activity of a creative imagination, which calls to life non-existent fictions (*finzioni*), "without question more attractive and definitely more amazing than imitated reality. Here we reach the essence of Patrizi's poetics and its fundamental assumption of the essence of poetic activity, expressed through the famous memorable statement: "*il poeta*

<sup>6</sup> See *La deca disputata*, 61–74.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, 73–75, 88–89.

<sup>9</sup> Francesco PATRIZI, *Della poetica* (V. Baldini: Ferrara, 1586). It is worth mentioning that Patrizi was not alone in his convictions about the creative and fictional activity of the poet. A similarly strong apology of poetic creativity can be found in the slightly earlier poetics of Giraldo Cinzio.

<sup>10</sup> Patrizi dedicated to this issue the first book of *La deca disputata*, titled "Del furore poetico," where he invoked the theory of poetic frenzy in a Neoplatonic spirit.

*è facitor del mirabile e mirabile facitore*<sup>11</sup> (a poet is the creator of the marvellous and a marvellous creator). The marvellous (*meraviglia*) is the essence and ultimate objective of poetry in Patrizi's poetics,<sup>12</sup> and the most fundamental criterion of the artistic value of a poetic text. The process of poetry creation does not consist in recreative mimesis, but involves fundamentally creative activities, such as concocting (*finzione*), formation (*formatura*), transformation (*trasformazione*), and transfiguration (*transfigurazione*).<sup>13</sup> Under the theory of the *meraviglia*, the poet has the status of a creator who actively transforms reality. However, Patrizi does not stop at the mere demonstration of the creative aspect of poetry; he defines the poet with his characteristic flamboyance as not only a *facitore*, but also a *formatore*, *fingitore*, or even *trasformatore* and *transfiguratore*,<sup>14</sup> who transforms the matter of words into novel, exceptional and amazing forms.

Identifying poetry with the creation of the marvellous, Patrizi makes a serious dent in classical literary theory. The very ostentatious denial of the identification of poetry with the imitation of reality constitutes the innovation of his poetics, while the concept of the *meraviglia*, combined with the manifestation of the belief in the creative and fictional dimension of poetry, seems to contradict the ancient, conventional doctrine of mimeticism.<sup>15</sup> Opposing the classical concept of poetry, assuming the integration of the demands of *docere*, *movere*, *delectare*, Patrizi recognises the marvellous and

<sup>11</sup> "La deca ammirabile," in: IDEM, *Della poetica*, vol. II, 296. On the poetics of the marvellous, see Elżbieta SARNOWSKA-TEMERIUŠ, *Przeszłość poetyki. Od Platona do Giambattisty Vica* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1995), 366–370; Peter G. PLATT, *Introduction*, to: *Wonders, Marvels and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Peter G. Platt, (Cranbury: Associated University Press, 1999), 15–23 (here we can find references to relevant literature on the marvellous); Jadwiga SOKOŁOWSKA, *Spory o barok. W poszukiwaniu modelu epoki* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971), 171–173.

<sup>12</sup> The highest value attached to the category of *meraviglia* can be seen in the very titles of the books of the treatise on the marvellous: "Che il mirabile è forma e fine della poesia;" "Come e perchè la meraviglia divenne fine proprio della poesia," in: "La deca ammirabile," 329–344; 345–354.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. "La deca plastica" (lib.: *Della poetica finzione*), in: IDEM, *Della poetica*, vol. III, a cura di D. Aguzzi-Barbagli (Firenze: Istituto Palazzo Strozzi, 1971), 18–19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 19: "Ed essendo egli [il poeta], come dimostrato s'è, facitore del mirabile, sarà ancora fingitore, e formatore, e trasformatore di forma mirabile in ciascuna sua poesia."

<sup>15</sup> "E la poesia sarà finzione così fatta; e poema parimenti sarà cosa finta e formata, o trasformata, e in forma e apparenza nuova; e poetica sarà l'arte di ciò fare."

As to the rules of the ancient concept of imitation, see first of all Richard MCKEON, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in: *Critics and Criticism. Ancient and Modern*, ed. with an introduction by Ronald Salmon Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 147–175.

surprise as the fundamental objective of the art of poetry and the exposition of its fictitious character that implies a nearly anarchical liberty of the poetic imagination. Is, however, Patrizi's theory really so contestational, avant-gardist and extremely anti-classical, as his courageous statements such as the assault on mimesis in *La deca disputata* or the apology of creation and the exceptional valorisation of miracles suggest?

After an uncompromising, radical criticism of mimeticism and an enthusiastic apotheosis of the marvellous, one would expect that Patrizi would completely reject not only the theory of mimesis, but also the whole burden of principles and concepts connected with it. On the contrary, he formulates the *della meraviglia* poetics, which is an alternative to mimesis, but he combines this very original, bold theory very subtly (almost imperceptibly under a superficial reading of his arguments) with the principles of probabilism and credibility, which are constitutive for mimesis. It turns out that despite his panache, Patrizi is neither an extremist, uncritical about the liberal artistic creation which is unfettered by any rules, nor an acolyte of the doctrine of the marvellous who treats poetic fiction as an absolute. The theoretician is fully aware of the need to subject marvellous and improbable elements to the elementary principles of probability (if only apparent), which in the reading process assures the reader's approval of the most incredible phenomena depicted in the text.

Therefore, the effect of the *meraviglia* involves a skilful meandering between the *credibile* and the *incredibile*.<sup>16</sup> Adequately constructed, the marvellous is supposed to merge the incredible (*incredibile*), improbable and impossible with the probable, possible and credible (*credibile*), which protects poetry against ridiculousness and lack of logic.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the poet, on the one hand, produces in the mind of the viewer the desired effect of amazement with the novelty and uniqueness of the created phenomenon, and, on the other hand, by treating the miraculous as credible, safeguards himself and provides his works with the necessary minimum of "similarity"

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<sup>16</sup> See Francesco PATRIZI, *La deca ammirabile*, 307–310. It would be in order to quote Patrizi's conclusion, summing up his reflections on the credible incredibility of the *meraviglia* category: "[...] per conchiusion diciamo che il maraviglioso, per sua natura, nè dall'ordine solo de'credibili, nè dall'ordine solo degli incredibili nasca, ma nasce allora quando l'un ordine si mescola con l'altro, e che un credibile paia haver preso faccia di incredibile, o uno incredibile paia haver preso faccia di credibile. Adunque il mescolamento di ambedue, credibile ed incredibile, farà la meraviglia [...]" (310).

<sup>17</sup> See Baxter HATHAWAY, *Renaissance Literary Criticism*, 66–67. Hathaway believes that Patrizi's theory of the marvellous is, in effect, in keeping with the theory of mimeticism.

to reality. The strategy of making fiction probable is supposed to create an apparent probability, so-called para-probabilism, which serves to evoke in the reader an illusory conviction about the possibility of the existence of impossible phenomena. Readers are then subjected to elaborate manipulation: on the one hand, surprised and disbelieving in incredible miracles, they are still inclined to consider them as probable. Readers' ambivalent impressions, which are the effect of the antithetic structure of the marvellous (which is a kind of credible incredulity) are described by Patrizi as a movement of the mind, which makes one believe and disbelieve at the same time ("fa un movimento nell'anima quasi contrario in sè medesimo, di credere e di non credere"<sup>18</sup>).

The suggestion of equipping the miraculous with the appearance of probability is Patrizi's final concession to the classical norm. Unfortunately, the theoretician excludes the existence in a poetic text of completely fantastic elements devoid of even the slightest traces of credibility, which would not only destroy the inherent logic of the text, but most probably disturb the most desirable effect of surprising the readership. The guarantee of the success of poetic persuasion, which Patrizi achieves by taking into account the principle of probabilism, is at the same time an aspect of his theory which turns out to be fundamentally classical and in line with the doctrine of mimesis he fights against. In this way, the category of probability becomes an element of normativism in an innovative concept, a necessary dose of convention in what was then an avant-garde structure. Something similar can be observed in the work of the Polish theoretician Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, who reveals a special predisposition to the category of the marvellous, but at the same time consistently recommends making it probable through negotiation with the *opinio communis* or through paralogism.<sup>19</sup> It was apparently too early to completely free products of the creative imagination from the fetters of the norm of probabilism and conventional reliability.

The theory of Emmanuele Tesauro, one of the most original and innovative theorists of the Baroque, foreshadows such creative freedom. Particularly promising in this respect seems to be the statement from his *Filosofia morale...*, surprisingly courageous for an old theory, that could be treated not only as a proclamation of the "creative function of language,"<sup>20</sup> but also as

<sup>18</sup> *La deca ammirabile*, 365.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dorota GOSTYŃSKA, *Retoryka iluzji*, 75–97; Barbara NIEBELSKA, "Cudowność, paralogizm, koncept," in: *Koncept w kulturze staropolskiej*, ed. Ludwika Ślęka, Adam Karpiński, Wiesław Pawlak (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2005), 33–45.

<sup>20</sup> Jadwiga SOKOŁOWSKA, *Spory o barok*, 251.

a manifesto of creative liberalism or actually a demonstration of anti-normativism. Tesauro grants the poet the right to deviate from the rules of art, a right that is non-existent in the classical convention. He allows the poet to violate the rules of grammar:

He who sins against art voluntarily does not sin against it [...]; it is even the subtlety of art to sin against art. The sloppiness of language is embarrassing for a grammarian when this sloppiness is the daughter of ignorance, but whoever violates the laws of grammar for the sake of teaching, creates bad grammar, but is not himself a bad grammarian. Therefore, a genius appears [...] even in an error, and a metaphor, when it loses clarity, assimilates an idea and grammar becomes poetry.<sup>21</sup>

Are, then, the standards of poetic art useless in the face of the linguistic inventiveness and genius of the artist? The spectacular statement that an intentional and deliberate offence against art testifies to its finesse and, moreover, demonstrates the *ingenium* of the “sinner,” seems surprisingly fresh and relevant in spite of the passage of time. This type of observation could be easily applied in one of the avant-garde contemporary concepts. Tesauro departs far from the dogmatic remarks contained in René Rapin’s classicistic normative poetics, extremely sceptical about the potential of an ingenuity liberated from the rigour of norms, claiming that “although poetry is the work of talent, this talent, if not subject to rules, is a pure caprice, unable to produce anything that is sensible.”<sup>22</sup>

The theory of Tesauro and the Baroque conceptists is the opposite extreme. The *ingenium*, which E. Tesauro emphatically calls “a particle of the Divine Mind” (*particella della Mente Divina*),<sup>23</sup> is both the creative and a rationalising element, a disposition which allows the violation of the principles of poetics and grammar and simultaneously determines the logic and inner coherence of the work. However, the *ingenium* is responsible for the most

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<sup>21</sup> “Non pecca contra l’arte chi pecca volontariamente contra l’arte [...] anzi talvolta è finezza dell’ate il peccar conta l’arte. L’improprietà della lingua è vergognosa al grammatico quando l’improprietà è figlia dell’ignoranza; ma chi a bello studio rompe le leggi grammaticali fa una cattiva grammatica, ma non è cattivo grammatico. Anzi talvolta in error si mostra l’ingegno [...] come nella metafora, che, quanto perde di proprietà, acquista d’ingegno, e la grammatica divien poesia”—quoted after: Emanuele TESAURO, *La filosofia morale derivata dall’ alto fonte del grande Aristotele Stagirita* (Torino, per Bartolomeo Zavatta, 1672), 407. The Polish translation after Jadwiga Sokołowska (*Spory o barok*, 251).

<sup>22</sup> Quoted after: Elżbieta SARNOWSKA-TEMERIUŚ, *Przeszłość poetyki*, 422.

<sup>23</sup> *Il Cannocchiale aristotelico o sia idea dell’ arguta e ingegnosa elocutione, che serve a tutta l’arte oratoria, lapidaria e simbolica, esaminato co’prncipi del divino Aristotele* (Torino, per Bartolomeo Zavatta, 1680), 83.

unexpected, anarchic, seemingly illogical (or apparently logical) associations and combinations of significance in a metaphorical construction; due to their value of desirable novelty in the reception process they produce the effect of surprise, marvellous and amazement. The *novità* that stimulates the readers' mind and emotions, one of the most avant-garde aesthetic categories of Baroque, an inalienable property of adequately constructed metaphorical and conceptual structures, is precisely the effect of the activity of the *ingenium*.<sup>24</sup> Treated as an absolute by the Baroque aesthetic, the *ingenium*, an innovative element in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century theory of metaphor and concept, was not put forth by Baroque theoreticians, but had been a staple of classical poetics since Antiquity.

The categories of the metaphor and the *ingenium*,<sup>25</sup> the pillars of Tesauro's poetics, are no doubt constructs that can be seen as avant-garde, yet they did not come into being through negating earlier conventions, but via updating and transforming notions from Aristotle's texts dedicated to literary theory. Besides, the Italian theoretician himself readily demonstrates the source of his inspiration, mentioning the name of Aristotle in the very titles of his treatises. The titles may be misleading, as they are yet another exegesis of ideas of the philosopher from Stagira, while the reality masked by them proves a new aesthetic system, constructed on the basis of radically modernised components of Aristotelian theory. The case of Tesauro's poetics is, then, in some measure similar to the case of Patrizi's theory. For all their differences, there is no denying that both the avant-garde constructs are born out of reinterpreting tradition. Namely, Tesauro's interpretation of the metaphor of the *ingenium* is heavily indebted to Aristotle, while Patrizi's poetics of the marvellous owes a lot to both Aristotle and Pseudo-Longinus.<sup>26</sup>

However, the revaluations of classical convention, made in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century theory, seem to be slightly deeper than those proposed by Francesco Patrizi in his poetics of the marvellous. Theorists of *concettismo*, including Tesauro, do not stop at the very presentation and demonstration of the creative

<sup>24</sup> For more on the category of novelty and its function in 17<sup>th</sup>-century poetics see Giuseppe CONTE, *La metafora barocca. Saggio sulle poetiche del Seicento* (Milano: Mursia, 1972), 95–97.

<sup>25</sup> See Ezio RAIMONDI, "L'ingegno e metafora nella poetica del Tesauro," in: IDEM, *Letteratura barocca. Studi sul Seicento italiano* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki 1961), 1–32; Mario ZANARDI, "La Metafora e la sua dinamica di significazione nel 'Cannocchiale aristotelico' di Emanuele Tesauro," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 157 (1980): 326–329.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Serena SALOMONE, "Influenze del 'Sublime' ps. Longiniano sulla 'Deca ammirabile' di Francesco Patrizi da Cherso," *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 19 (1966): 101–107.

aspects of poetic craft, but in fact contrast the art of the *ingenium* (*arte de ingenio*) against poetry seen in a classical spirit, treated as a system of principles and prescriptions.<sup>27</sup> Prerogatives of the ingenuity of a creative mind are in 17<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics far superior to those of the preceding centuries. This does not mean, however, that the authors of theories of conceit, in the name of meeting the demand for novelty, accept creative anarchy, which would not take into account the reactions of the audience. Conceptual and metaphorical constructions are primarily intended to surprise the reader, to create the effect of the marvellous, which Tesauro explicitly calls “the mother of art” (*madre dell’arte*).<sup>28</sup> Therefore, due to the persuasive effectiveness of the text, it is necessary to use the method described by Tesauro as a *cavillazione ingegnosa*, “ingenious fallacy,” based on apparent logic (paralogism), instilling in the reader a fallacious conviction that conceitist illusions, while not truthful, are at least probable.

As we can see, the conventional classical directive of probability had not yet been completely repealed, although paralogism is undoubtedly a significant step towards liberating poetic art from the limitation of the rule of probability. Perhaps a total rejection of the probabilistic dogma was not possible in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries due to such an important role of persuasion in the art of the day, excessive concern for the emotional and intellectual stimulation of the mind of the viewer, or finally due to the ambition, characteristic of Baroque, to evoke above all a reaction of admiration. The question about the motives that determine the fact that avant-garde theorists made various kinds of concessions in favour of the classical convention of probability certainly requires deeper reflection. It is impossible not to notice that although para-probabilism and paralogism are extremely interesting, they undermine the avant-garde overtones of Patrizi’s and Tesauro’s poetics. The former mitigates the excessive fictionality and unreliability of his innovative marvellous by the principle of credibility, while the latter moderates the excessive exuberance of ingenious metaphorical and conceptual connections by the principle of paralogism.

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Examples of Patrizi’s and Tesauro’s original theoretical construct prove that conventional notions or traditional doctrines of literary theory need not

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<sup>27</sup> See Dorota GOSTYŃSKA, *Retoryka iluzji*, 98–99.

<sup>28</sup> Emanuele TESAURO, *La filosofia morale*, 378.

stand in the way of innovation but, on the contrary, when adequately selected, revised and updated can inform new avant-garde structures. Innovative concepts set within a classical framework are, at the same time, an argument against the stereotypical opposition of the aesthetic of Renaissance and Baroque, as they reflect a truly evolutionary and smooth transition from the classical to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century paradigm. Interestingly, for all its novelty, this latter paradigm retains many of the substantive features of the preceding system. The innovative quality of old poetics is no doubt the result of the “conflict between originality and convention,”<sup>29</sup> yet this conflict does not mean an ordinary polarisation of forces but involves unique synergies of convention and novelty. This integrated cooperation of innovation and traditions results in a most unique avant-garde aspect of early modern concepts of literary theory. For better or worse, depending on our aesthetic preferences, the then avant-garde, despite all kinds of deviations and unorthodox aspects, is still part and parcel of the broadly construed classical idiom.

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CONVENTION AS THE SOURCE OF THE AVANT-GARDE  
REMARKS ON THE INVENTIVENESS OF POETICS OF THE PAST

Summary

Early modern theoretical-literary treatises, defined as normative poetics, are usually connected with the dominance of the convention and normativism, with obligatory rules, canonical concepts and restrictive directives hampering originality. The present text tries to revise the conviction that convention is a dominant tendency in the development of the old theoretical thought; it tends to show the avant-garde aspects of early modern poetics and to present the relations between what is conventional and what is innovative in the most original theoretical texts of late Renaissance and Baroque. Examples of two avant-garde modern poetics—Francesco Patrizi's theory of the marvelous formed at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the 17<sup>th</sup> century Emanuele Tesauro's conceptistic theory—show that tradition and convention are necessary elements of inventive theories. The avant-garde of poetics of the past, contrary to the avant-garde of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is not born from the defiance of the earlier theories but is formed by way of modernizing and transforming them. Old inventive theories—despite all the departures from tradition—are still part of the classical paradigm. Hence, the avant-garde character of late-Renaissance and Baroque theoretical reflection consists in a peculiar synergy of convention and novelty.

**Key words:** early modern literary theory, convention, inventiveness, poetics of wonder, conceptism, probabilism.

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