

A close-up photograph of a marble statue, likely a classical figure, holding a large, unrolled scroll. The statue is light-colored, possibly white or light pink, and is set against a dark background. The focus is on the hands and the scroll, with the rest of the figure blurred.

DE GRUYTER

Sandra Richter

A HISTORY OF POETICS

GERMAN SCHOLARLY AESTHETICS AND POETICS
IN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT, 1770-1960

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German Scholarly Aesthetics and Poetics
in International Context, 1770–1960

With Bibliographies by
Anja Zenk · Jasmin Azazmah
Eva Jost · Sandra Richter



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Preface

A history of poetics, a device for orientation I know not.¹

Poetics has always been a key to the history and systematic order of the humanities: the renaissance ‘poeta doctus’ proved his scholarly knowledge and stylistic competence by writing a poetological treatise. In the 19th century, poetics was seen as the core area of the humanities – as the ‘logic’ of the humanities. Nevertheless, we know astonishingly little about the different national histories of poetics; even less can be said about international developments and exchanges. Wilhelm Scherer is still correct when he states that a history of poetics is lacking.

These deficiencies originate from the conflicting nature of poetics itself: on the one hand, poetics participates in the general history and theory of science and the humanities but is neglected to a large extent by these fields of study. The reason is simple: poetics deals with poetry – and not with the ‘hard sciences’. On the other hand, poetics is close to the study of literature, to criticism and its history. But critique tends to focus on its ‘beautiful object’ and to ignore its own history, especially after the end of ‘great theory’ in the final decade of the 20th century. Facing so many difficulties, this study on German poetics in its international context cannot be anything but an expedition into uncharted territory. Only a few islands, the aesthetics of the ‘big thinkers’ of course, are well studied.

This study can build on this research but is designed to discover the lesser known texts. In order to do so, the study will focus on scholarly, ambitious aesthetics and poetics up until the point at which poetics become discredited in the 1960s. By then, poetological thinking tended to regard works published under the title of ‘poetics’ as not being scientific enough and preferred the term ‘literary theory’ instead. Literary theories from the 1960s to the present day are examined and presented by the

1 Wilhelm Scherer: *Poetik* [1888]. Mit einer Einleitung und Materialien zur Rezeptionsanalyse. Ed. Gunter Reiss. Tübingen: Niemeyer (dtv) 1977, p. 29: “Eine Geschichte der Poetik, ein Hilfsmittel zur Orientierung kenne ich nicht.”

Centre of Literary Theory at the University of Göttingen (director: Simone Winko; <http://www.simonewinko.de/arbeitsstelle.html>).

Furthermore, this study will only occasionally consider didactical school poetics or literary poetics. School poetics will be dealt with in a separate study by Anja Zenk who was a member of my Emmy Noether research group on 'Poetological Reflection. Poetics and Poetological Lyric Poetry in Aesthetic Context' from which the findings presented here result. Literary poetics were studied in other publications of the group:

By myself:

- (published under my maiden name Sandra Pott) *Poetiken. Poetologische Lyrik, Poetik und Ästhetik von Novalis bis Rilke*. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 2004.
- (published under my maiden name Sandra Pott) *Poetics of the Picture. August Wilhelm Schlegel and Achim von Arnim*, in: *The Image of Words. Literary Transpositions of Pictorial Ideas*, ed. by Rüdiger Görner. Munich: Iudicium 2005 (Institute of Germanic Studies X), pp. 76–90.
- (published under my maiden name Sandra Pott) *Poetologische Reflexion. "Lyrik" in poetologischer Lyrik, Poetik und Ästhetik (19. Jahrhundert)*, in: *Lyrik im 19. Jahrhundert. Historische Gattungspoetik als Reflexionsmedium einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Germanistik*, eds. Steffen Martus, Stefan Scherer, Claudia Stockinger. Bern: Lang 2005 (Publikationen zur Zeitschrift für Germanistik NF 11), pp. 31–60.
- *Lyrik im Ausgang aus der Stummfilmzeit: Claire Golls *Lyrische Filme* (1922)*. In: *Literatur intermedial*, eds. Wolf Gerhard Schmidt, Thorsten Valk. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 2009 (Spectrum Literaturwissenschaft 19), pp. 67–86.

By Gunilla Eschenbach: *Imitation und Parodie. Poetologische Lyrik und Poetik im George-Kreis* (submitted with Hamburg University).

By Eva Jost: *Dichtung als Sensation. Die populäre Moderne*: Otto Julius Bierbaum.

Some parts of this publication are further developed in the following contributions and articles by myself:

- (published under my maiden name Sandra Pott) *Von der Erfindung und den Grenzen des Schaffens. Fallstudien zur Inventio-Lehre in Poetik und Ästhetik*, in: *Imagination und Invention, Paragrana 2* (2006), eds. Toni Bernhart, Philipp Mehne, pp. 217–242.

- (published under my maiden name Sandra Pott) International, nationale und transnationale Poetik: Hugh Blair auf dem Kontinent und einige Bemerkungen über den Transfer poetologischen Wissens seit 1790, in: *Triangulärer Transfer: Großbritannien, Frankreich und Deutschland um 1800*, Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift 56/1 (2006), eds. Sandra Pott, Sebastian Neumeister, pp. 99–114.
- Unsichere Schönheit. Der Ursprung der Ästhetik aus der Kritik des Skeptizismus. In: *Unsicheres Wissen. Skeptizismus und Wahrscheinlichkeit, 1550–1850*, eds. Carlos Spoerhase, Dirk Werle, Markus Wild. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter 2009 (*Historia Hermeneutica* 7), pp. 159–178.
- Anschaulichkeit versus Sprachlichkeit. Ein paradigmatischer Scheingegensatz in Ästhetik und Poetik (ca. 1850 bis 1950), in: *Die Künste und ihre Wissenschaften im 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Oliver Huck, Sandra Richter, Christian Scholl. Hildesheim (forthcoming).
- (with Hans-Harald Müller) Nationale Philologien – europäische Zeitschriften. Zur Rezeption von Poetik und Literaturtheorie in den wissenschaftlichen und literaturkritischen Zeitschriften zwischen 1880 und 1930, to be published in the papers of the conference on European Philologies, VW-Foundation. Osnabrück University, April 2007 (forthcoming).
- Wie kam das Bild in die Lyriktheorie? Präliminarien zu einer visuellen Theorie der Lyrik, in: *Das lyrische Bild*, eds. Nina Herres, Csongor Lörincz, Ralf Simon. Munich 2008 (forthcoming).

For the generous support and funding the group has received in the Emmy Noether programme, I wish to thank the German Research Foundation. During the years of research necessary for a study like this the junior research group was hosted by various institutions: by Hamburg University (Institute of German Studies II), King's College London (German Department) and Stuttgart University (Modern German Literature I). We wish to thank all three Universities for their hospitality. Many colleagues are responsible for the warm welcome and the fruitful time that the group spent in Hamburg, London and Stuttgart. I can only name a few of them: Jörg Schönert did his utmost to support and help the group intellectually as well as administratively. Peter Hühn was a corner-stone for the integration of any English content. Hans-Harald Müller, whose principal field of research is on empirical poetics around 1900, became an intellectual counterpart for the group. The colleagues and friends from the research group 'Narratology' at the Univer-

sity of Hamburg (German Research Foundation) as well as Philip Ajouri (Stuttgart University) contributed to our interests by their own research. Lutz Danneberg and his 'Research Centre of Historical Epistemology and Hermeneutics' (Humboldt University Berlin), Simone Winko, Christoph König's 'Network Philologies in Europe' (University Osnabrück) and Marcel Lepper (German Literature Archiv Marbach) enriched the project through many discussions.

I am in great debt to Jasmin Azazmah, Saskia Bodemer, Mara Delius, Gunilla Eschenbach, Kristof Gundelfinger, Eva Jost, Tim Kopera, Deirdre Mahony, Petra Mayer, Oliver Krug and Yvonne Zimmermann. Without them, this manuscript would not exist. Gunilla Eschenbach and Eva Jost did some of the research on individual scholars. Saskia Bodemer, Mara Delius, Tim Kopera, Oliver Krug and Kristof Gundelfinger helped to find and analyse the material. Deirdre Mahony helped with proof-reading. Anja Zenk was responsible for the bibliography of poetics and was helped by Jasmin Azazmah, Eva Jost and myself. Last but not least, I wish to thank my curious students at Hamburg University, who stimulated this book by continuous questioning. The book was, however written in London, therefore its language is English.

Stuttgart 2009

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I. Introduction

In his famous book on *Truth and Method* (1960) Hans-Georg Gadamer reports a big shift in historiography: the scientification born in 19th-century poetics. This scientification is not only said to have introduced logic and the natural sciences but also to have colonised the humanities under the flag of objectivity. According to Gadamer, one person is especially to blame for this colonisation and he directly attacks him: Wilhelm Dilthey, Gadamer writes, against his own better knowledge, subordinated his poetics to the ideal of the natural sciences. Although Dilthey himself never forgot the romantic idea of 'spirit' ("Geist") and, in his letters to Wilhelm Scherer, practised ways of scholarship which Gadamer esteems, Dilthey was blinded by the ideas of logical conclusion, of 'induction' and objectivity.¹ As a consequence, Gadamer argues, Dilthey neglected the core ideas of the humanities: 'individual tact' ("individuelle[n] Takt"), 'culture of the soul' ("seelische Kultur"), authority and tradition.²

Indeed, in his early writings on poetics Dilthey announced his aim to rebuild the humanities on the basis of empiricism and psychology.³ But in contrast to what Gadamer asserts, Dilthey's goal was not to extinguish individuality. On the contrary, Dilthey hoped to be able to prove it. For this reason the poet, his experience, his fantasy, in short everything that distinguishes his extraordinary personality, nature and talent from non-creative people, became Dilthey's field of study. Through the study of the poet's experience Dilthey sought to find a 'systematic poetics' – a poetics that shows the laws of individuality and therefore serves as the 'logic' or the 'general science' ("allgemeine Wissenschaft") of the humanities.⁴

Gadamer is also wrong in a second aspect. He accuses the 19th century alone and especially Dilthey of having established the reign of the natural sciences in the humanities. History proves to be more complicated: the 'scientification' of poetics can be traced back (at least) to

1 Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: Mohr 1960, p. 12.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller: Dilthey gegen Scherer: Geistesgeschichte contra Positivismus. Zur Revision eines wissenschaftshistorischen Stereotyps. In: *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 74 (2000) 4, pp. 685–709.

4 Wilhelm Dilthey: *Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters: Bausteine für eine Poetik*. In: *Philosophische Aufsätze*, ed. by W.D. Altenburg: Pierer, 1887, p. 107.

Christian Wolff's rational psychology (1727)⁵ and to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's reflections on aesthetics as a discipline (*Aesthetica*, 1750/1758). Wolff and Baumgarten focused on one question: how to judge emotions? While Wolff dedicated his psychology to the examination of cognition, Baumgarten grounded a new doctrine on Wolff's system: according to Baumgarten 'sensitive cognition' ("cognitio sensitiva") is analogous to reasonable judgement.⁶ Matters of taste and imagination in turn become the touchstones of aesthetics as well as of the philosophy of cognition and judgement – a development with a long afterlife in 19th-century poetics and aesthetics until Dilthey.

Taking this complex constellation into account I will show how complicated the late 18th-, 19th- and early 20th-century history of poetics is, thereby building on the increasing research interest in aesthetics and poetics. The last seven years have seen the publication of various large-scale 500- to 700-page anthologies on aesthetics of all kinds. To name only a few of them: *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics* (2001, ²2005) aims at a comprehensive overview which includes histories of aesthetics, the individual arts as well as current issues.⁷ In contrast to

5 The book is known as 'German Metaphysics' but published under the title: *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt*. Christian Wolff. Frankfurt: Andreä & Hort, 1727; see Matthew Bell: *The German Tradition of Psychology in Literature and Thought, 1700–1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2005, pp. 22 f; Jean-François Goubet and Oliver-Pierre Rudolph (eds.): *Die Psychologie Christian Wolffs: Systematische und historische Untersuchungen*. Tübingen 2004 (Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung 22).

6 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten: *Aesthetica*. Repr. ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1970. (Frankfurt a. d. Oder 1750). Baumgarten was not the only one to formulate such an attempt. His disciple Georg Friedrich Meier developed a similar theory. See Meier's aesthetic chief work "Die Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften und Künste" (3 parts, Halle 1748–50. Reprint of the 2nd ed. 1754 at Hildesheim/New York: Olms 1976), in which he summarizes his aesthetic views. Cf. also "Frühe Schriften zur ästhetischen Erziehung der Deutschen" (3 parts), ed. by Hans-Joachim Kertscher and Günter Schenk. Halle Saale: Hallescher Verlag 1999–2002. Cf. also Jean-François Goubet and Gérard Raulet (eds.): *Aux sources de l'esthétique: Les débuts de l'esthétique philosophique en Allemagne*. Paris 2005. (Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 2005; Collection Philia); Stefanie Buchenau and Elisabeth Décultot (eds.): *Esthétiques de l'Aufklärung: Akten des Kolloquiums 'Esthétiques de l'Aufklärung (1720–1780)'*. In: *Revue Germanique Internationale* 4 (2006).

7 Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. 2nd ed. London, New York: Routledge 2005 (1st ed. 2001).

this, *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (2003) identifies general and specific issues with a focus on the method of aesthetical study.⁸ Last but not least, Blackwell publishers present a double-sided account of aesthetics: the anthology *Continental Aesthetics* (2001)⁹ followed by the companion *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. The Analytic Tradition* (2004).¹⁰ Both studies give the impression that a geographical line could be drawn between two entirely different traditions of aesthetics, one aiming at metaphysics and hermeneutics ('the Continental tradition'), the other at the analysis of art and its perception ('the Anglo-American tradition'). This impression is misleading, not only historically but also systematically.¹¹ 19th- and 20th-century aesthetics has been both analytical and hermeneutical or metaphysical, regardless of the country of origin.

This book is, in part, written against general assumptions about 'the tradition of aesthetics' and broad geographical denominations; rather, it aims to show how little we know about aesthetics, starting with the sub-field of aesthetics that is poetics. Not only key developments of poetics will be examined but also its results as well as its unresolved problems. Some of them appertain to the development of the 19th-century national philologies.¹² These national philologies still participated in the reflections on poetry that had already been developed in the light of a European 'res publica litteraria'. Yet national philologies also tended towards specific national canons of literature and towards a more or less specific national poetics. In this volume I will deal with the history of German poetics and ascertain whether or not this 'national' poetic thought shared at least some systematic knowledge about poetry as well as about its production and perception with other national or even local

8 Jerrold Levinson (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2003.

9 Richard Kearney and David Rasmussen (eds.): *Continental Aesthetics: Romanticism and Postmodernism. An Anthology*. Cambridge: Blackwell 2001. See also the smaller but more focused volume by J.M. Bernstein (ed.): *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 2003.

10 Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugham Olsen (eds.): *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition*. Cambridge: Blackwell 2004.

11 On this problem see the helpful review of 'Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art' by Roger Pouivet. In: *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (2005) 1, pp. 88–94.

12 See the contributions in Frank Fürbeth, Pierre Krügel, Ernst E. Metzner and Olaf Müller (eds.): *Zur Geschichte und Problematik der Nationalphilologien in Europa: 150 Jahre Erste Germanistenversammlung in Frankfurt am Main (1846–1996)*. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1999.

traditions of poetological thinking.¹³ For that purpose, I will firstly ask how to explain poetics (chapter 1). Secondly, a few words will be said on its periodisation (chapter 2). Thirdly, a brief remark on method will stress my particular aim (chapter 3).

13 Studies on comparative poetics are rare – even more so if the transfer of knowledge is called into question. More or less inspired by a comparative approach are Georges Saintsbury: *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe: From the Earliest to the Present Day*. Edinburgh, London: Blackwood 1961. (3 vols.); René Wellek: *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750–1950*. New Haven, London: Yale Univ. Press 1950 sq. (4 vols.); Jean Bessière, Eva Kushner, Roland Mortier and Jean Weisgerber (eds.): *Histoire des poétiques*. Paris: PUF 1997; Lubomír Doležal: *Occidental poetics: Tradition and progress*. Lincoln, Nebraska [et al.]: Univ. of Nebraska Press 1990.