



The Problems of Literary Genres. Origins¹

Every cloud has a silver lining.

Shortly after the war, when the Department of Literary Theory was founded at the newly established University of Łódź (1945), Stefania Skwarczyńska, the then head of the Department, initiated efforts to compile *Słownik rodzajów literackich* [*Dictionary of Literary Genres*]² and found official support for the project among the authorities and members of the reactivated Łódź Scientific Society. In 1947, the commission and the editorial board of the *Dictionary* were appointed, and its draft was prepared and presented during a meeting held by the First Department of the Łódź Scientific Society (Skwarczyńska 1947: 4). In 1951, another document was produced, showing how advanced the preparatory work was — a collection of notes and guidelines for the authors of dictionary entries.³ “The task of drafting and compiling the *Dictionary* in detail was to be completed according to a six-year plan” (Ostrowski 1992: 80), which was presumably intended to facilitate this unique and very cost-intensive endeavour. By then, thirty articles had already been written to the order of the editorial board and about 3,500 “slips with genre and para-genre headwords” (Gazda 2006: IX) had been collected. Although Gazda noted that these were “overly transient and hardly systematic” (Gazda 2006: XII), they still bear testimony to the

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² The story of this endeavour was recounted by Grzegorz Gazda (Gazda 1992: 86–95), Witold Ostrowski (Ostrowski 1992: 78–84), and Stefania Skwarczyńska (Skwarczyńska 1985: 281–316).

³ Ostrowski refers to a typescript signed by Skwarczyńska entitled *Informacje i wskazówki dla redaktorów i autorów “Słownika rodzajów literackich”* [*Information and guidelines for Editors and Authors of “Dictionary of Literary Genres”*] (Ostrowski 1992: 78), a document kept in the archives of Grzegorz Gazda (Gazda 2006: IX).

effort and commitment of those involved in the preparation of the publication. They also prove that it was intended to be a comprehensive work, encompassing world literature, including folk art and various forms of applied literature.

“Then came difficulties, resulting from various political circumstances and personal factors at that time” (Ostrowski 1992: 80). In May 1952, Skwarczyńska was deprived of her chair and the Department was suspended. Apparently, Poland’s first university department of literary theory had already aroused the ire of employees of the recently established Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Skwarczyńska felt that the department mainly upset Maria Renata Mayenowa and Maria Dłuska, who were “deeply offended that I dared to break their monopoly on literary theory and poetics.”⁴ As a result, when in early 1957 a group of editors in Łódź led by Skwarczyńska attended a conference held by the Institute of Literary Research to seek support for the idea of publishing a pilot volume of *Słownik rodzajów literackich* [*Dictionary of Literary Genres*], they were met with silent opposition rather than approval. Due to this reluctance, the formidable yet viably structured project seemed doomed to failure at that point.

This situation also affected others. Having received neither a guarantee of publication nor the agreed royalties, Dr Stanisław Łukasik — a Romanist who at the time had already penned a number of entries for the *Dictionary* — felt so resentful that he sued the Łódź Scientific Society as this was the institution with which he had concluded the contract. In order to defuse the dispute and, above all, to save the hard work done by the whole team, already at an advanced stage of development, and also to prevent the appropriation of the idea or some of the materials prepared,⁵ towards the end of January and early February of 1957 a decision was made to publish a biannual magazine entitled *Materiały do słownika* [*Materials for the Dictionary*] instead of the *Dictionary* itself. It was to contain articles on genology, as well as critical reviews and digests of Polish and foreign genology-related publications.

Officially, this new initiative was the brainchild of the Łódź Scientific Society, whose then Secretary General, Professor Jan Dylík, signed a number of official documents relative to the establishment of this periodical. However, it was the former members of the Editorial Committee of the *Dictionary* and its editors who were behind it. Undoubtedly, the decision to transform a monograph into a periodical must have been taken by Skwarczyńska. Ostrowski claims that “the nature and title [of the new periodical] were devised by Professor Skwarczyńska upon approval from the board of the Łódź Scientific Society” (Ostrowski 1992: 82). However, her notes and correspondence with Jan Trzynadłowski from February 1957 clearly indicate that her only intention was to publish *Materiały do Słownika* [*Materials for the Dictionary*] on an irregular basis. It was Trzynadłowski who first proposed the creation of a biannual (“lacking the rigours of a regular

⁴ In a letter to Juliusz Kleiner of 23 March 1957, she describes them thus: “Dames [...] Mayenowa, Dłuska”. The original letters I refer to and quote from are all dated 1957 and can be found in the University of Łódź Library in the Section on Social Life. I do not provide the dating of the letters in the main text, while in the footnotes I use the following format: the author’s surname followed by the day and month (whenever Stefania Skwarczyńska is the addressee), and for her letters: “Skwarczyńska to...” followed by the day and month.

⁵ “In *Materiały do Słownika* [*Materials for the Dictionary*] we would like to submit at first this part we drafted for the conference on the *Dictionary* held by the Institute of Literary Research. However, we are apprehensive that this material may be *truncated*” (Skwarczyńska to Kleiner, no day data [March]).

journal,”⁶ yet issued periodically). He also presented a draft of the contents and layout,⁷ suggested that the name should not be *Materiały...* [*Materials...*] but “*Zagadnienia teorii literatury* [*Issues of Literary Theory*] followed by *Półrocznik poświęcony problematyce teoretycznoliterackiej* [*A Biannual on the Theory of Literature*] or something along those lines,” and hinted that the publication should be international in nature (Trzynadłowski, 11 February). The presumption as to the authorship of the concept is confirmed by Skwarczyńska herself in a letter to Kazimierz Budzyk of 23 March 1957: “Contrary to all appearances, it was not me who came up with the idea for this periodical, but more on that someday.” This shows that Skwarczyńska accepted the proposal and with great energy participated in its refinement and implementation. However, it is also evident that most of the conceptual work was conducted by Trzynadłowski, who then was already employed by the University of Wrocław and had an editing post at the Ossolineum Publishing House (of the Ossoliński National Institute) in Wrocław, which later greatly facilitated the resolution of formal issues related to structuring the new periodical.

In early March, a three-person editorial board was appointed comprising Stefania Skwarczyńska, Jan Trzynadłowski, and Witold Ostrowski. At the same time, as early as late February and March, Skwarczyńska sent out letters to almost thirty people whom she deemed to be “the absolute cream of our philological world” (Skwarczyńska to Kleiner, 23 March), asking them to join the editorial board, but also to voice their opinion on the projected journal. She also corresponded internationally, inviting literary scholars from, inter alia, Belgium, Britain, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union, thus pursuing the idea of making the biannual an international publication. By mid-April, Trzynadłowski had prepared a questionnaire on the journal, which contained brief information on its purpose, the layout of the content, and — most importantly — a question about the title. It was sent out — stamped by the Ossolineum as the future publisher — to the same people with whom Skwarczyńska had previously corresponded. The main asset of the questionnaire was that the responses would now represent official opinions on this innovative publishing project.

Although a few recipients did not respond at all (including Kazimierz Wyka, which worried Skwarczyńska, who had hoped for his support so much that in her letter of 23 March she even asked Kleiner to intervene⁸), many approved of the idea and declared

⁶ In a letter of 11 February 1957, he writes: “First and foremost, I find it crucial to make this publication a continuum so that it has a permanent position in the publishing schedule, at the same time attracting a constantly expanding readership. The idea is to make it clear that it is a regular thing, not a publishing ephemera. To my mind, the best format would be a biannual (like the linguistic-focused *Onomastica*). When numbered continuously as follows: Year I Vol. 1, Year I Vol. 2, Year II Vol. 1, Year II Vol. 2, etc., a biannual is already journal-like, but with no formal and administrative rigours of a journal *sensu stricto*” (Trzynadłowski, 11 February).

⁷ “What should the internal layout of the volume look like? I guess it should contain the following sections: 1) Treatises, 2) Materials for the *Dictionary*, 3) Reviews and Reports, 4) Correspondence and Polemics. As the materials for the *Dictionary* are to be an integral part of each issue, this section should be most voluminous (approx. 6 sheets). The rest should be divided up so that the first section is about 2 sheets in size, as should be sections 3 and 4 combined. Obviously, this is a purely estimative division [...]” (Trzynadłowski, 11 February).

⁸ “No reply from Professor Wyka yet. If you should happen to see him, would you be so kind as to inform him that it would give a fine testimony in overcoming the monopolistic tendencies of the Institute of Literary Research if he be willing to take a stance...”

themselves willing to assist and cooperate as editors and authors. Kazimierz Budzyk expressed his appreciation even twice, which was quite surprising as he was in a personal dispute with Skwarczyńska at that time.⁹ On 16 March, he stated: “This will be the very first attempt by Polish literary studies to venture outside their own backyard, of which — by the way — I now have a much better opinion, having recently paid a ‘visit’ to the USSR.” In early April, he added: “The current state of affairs is that the only established theoretical-literary academic centre is ultra-formalist [...] Your journal has the potential to become a scholarly counterweight to this formalist milieu.”¹⁰ Stanisław Pigoń was visibly delighted that “the turmoil of the *Dictionary of Literary Genres* will finally be resolved, having been stalled for too long” (Pigoń, 17 March). Definite refusals were a rare occurrence, the only one preserved in the archives being a reply from Maria Dłuska.¹¹ As for the polite refusal by Maria Renata Mayenowa, the other “ultra-formalist” from the Institute of Literary Research, it is mentioned in a note by Skwarczyńska, who was in the habit of both compiling lists of addressees and scribbling brief remarks next to their names regarding the content of letters sent and received.

A number of people, however, expressed doubts or even questioned the validity of the new journal. Tadeusz Grzebieniowski, Kazimierz Żygulski and Marian Serejski stressed its imitative nature, arguing that it would only replicate the topics covered by already existing periodicals, and postulating that articles on genology and entries to the *Dictionary* should be published there. Serejski also wondered whether genology would interest Western European scholars (Serejski, 18 April). In a similar vein, Pigoń — who had previously supported the new publishing initiative — now rather arbitrarily claimed that with no knowledge of the output of Western European literary academics, one could not ascertain that they would be interested in the research of their Polish counterparts, in which case the journal “would fail to gain major importance abroad” (Pigoń, 26 April). In addition, Żygulski expressed his concern about whether there would be enough content for a periodical with this narrow an area of expertise. Stanisław Pigoń and Czesław Zgorzelski even prophesied that the systematics of literary genres — no matter how meticulous — would lead to a rapid exhaustion of research material and the equally prompt liquidation of the periodical (Zgorzelski, 29 April).

⁹ This was due to a misunderstanding (quite difficult to explain today) following a statement made by Skwarczyńska on the liquidation of the Department of Literary Theory at the University of Łódź in early 1957. In a letter of 16 March 1957, Budzyk reproaches Skwarczyńska for allegedly implying in *Życie i Myśl* that he had been against the existence of the Department. He claims that he had never adopted this stance, adding (in an accusatory tone) that Skwarczyńska’s words had been printed while his counterstatement was never published, leaving a false impression among the readers of *Życie i Myśl* as to his conduct in the circumstances that led to the dispute. Skwarczyńska sought to resolve this conflict, but in a letter to Kleiner, she wrote with some spite about the ambiguous attitude of Budzyk, who “would like to, but his honour does not allow him, because I have accused him of harming me!” (Skwarczyńska to Kleiner, 23 March).

¹⁰ Budzyk is obviously referring to the Institute of Literary Research (Budzyk, 2 April).

¹¹ “Thanking you for the kind offer to participate in the Editorial Board and to collaborate as an author in the biannual journal *Z Genologii Literackiej* [*On Literary Genology*], I must insist that you count on neither on my part. The sheer burden of time would not allow me to do so. Moreover, this matter is not in the scope of my interest, as I am already involved in the publication of *Poetyka — zarys encyklopedyczny* [*Poetics — An Encyclopaedic Review*]” (Dłuska, 21 March).

Zgorzelski also expressed reservations over the “inadvisable” (as he put it) dominance of theoretical over historical-literary issues. However, there were also opinions that the journal should be specifically theoretical-literary in nature as it ought to consider not only genological, but all the issues addressed by the modern theory of literature.¹² Trzynadłowski also shared similar doubts, when in late June he wrote to Skwarczyńska:

I am constantly preoccupied by the thought that addressing the broader spectrum of issues within the field of literary theory is inevitable, which has become even more blatant now that I am reviewing Professor Kleiner’s book.¹³ As for the priority of genological issues, that’s agreed; but I suppose it should be a priority but not to the exclusion of other issues. My fear is of the various practical traps when one opts for exclusivity. Please, give your final word on this matter. (Trzynadłowski, 24 June)

Skwarczyńska must have replied within a month, as in the letter of 23 July, Trzynadłowski expressed joy that she had resolved his doubts about the excessively “harmful” narrowing of the scope and the resulting exclusion of realms of literary theory not strictly linked to genology.

Another major issue was the name of the biannual. On 11 February, still at an early stage of title selection, Trzynadłowski proposed “*Zagadnienia teorii literatury* [*Issues of Literary Theory*], followed by a subheading: *Półrocznik poświęcony problematyce teoretyczno-literackiej* [*A Biannual on Theoretical Literary Matters*].” However, he later conceded: “Indeed, the title *Z zagadnień teorii literatury* [*On the Issues of Literary Theory*] is not the most fortuitous” (Trzynadłowski, 3 April). In her correspondence written by the end of March, Skwarczyńska used the titles *Z genologii literackiej* [*On Literary Genology*] and *Zagadnienia genologii literackiej* [*Issues of Literary Genology*].

Any title that would include the word “genology” was rejected by Roman Ingarden, who in his letter to Skwarczyńska rather colloquially stated: “I’m really not too keen on *genology*. Don’t we have a Polish word instead?” (Ingarden, 7 March), and by Mieczysław Brahmer, who claimed that “genology” was a term that “immediately introduces a whiff of pedantry and erudition,” thereby making the title “unpalatable” for any historian of literature (this initial criticism would later be justified by his concern about giving the title a perfect wording). He suggested that the journal would benefit more from “a symbolic title like the pre-war *Helikon* in Hungary, the contemporary *Diogenes* in Paris, or our *Meander*, for instance *Scaliger. Rocznik poświęcony zagadnieniom teorii literatury* [*Scaliger. A Yearbook on Issues in Literary Theory*]” (Brahmer, 20 March). In reaction to these views, Skwarczyńska wrote to Kleiner: “I have my doubts about the title, having received negative comments from Professors Ingarden and Brahmer. The latter even proposes a symbolic name along the lines of the long-gone *Helikon*, of which I am not really

¹² This opinion was shared, inter alia, by Mieczysław Brahmer (23 March), Kazmierz Budzyk (2 April), Julian Krzyżanowski (12 March), Henryk Markiewicz (10 April), and Stanisław Pigoń (26 April).

¹³ Skwarczyńska asked Trzynadłowski to prepare, for the first issue of the journal, a review of Juliusz Kleiner’s genological views, formulated in his treatise *Studia z teorii literatury* [*Studies in the Theory of Literature*]. However, Trzynadłowski questioned this idea for a long time, arguing that Kleiner was a theorist “in a broader sense” (Trzynadłowski, 14 October). The article was published under the title *Poglądy Juliusza Kleinera na rodzaje literackie* [*Juliusz Kleiner’s Views on Literary Genres*] within *Na marginesie “Studiów z zakresu teorii literatury”* [*On the Margins of “Studies in Literary Theory”*].

fond” (Skwarczyńska to Kleiner, 23 March), while in a letter to Trzynadłowski (dated 28 March), she for the very first time used the title *Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich* [*The Problems of Literary Genres*]. Other scholars who submitted their suggestions for the title were Marian Plezia: *Litterarum genera* — as it “will attract classical philologists” (Plezia, 15 April); Jerzy Schneider: *Genetyka literacka. Zagadnienia i materiały* [*Literary Genetics. Issues and Materials*]¹⁴; and Kazimierz Budzyk: “Poetics — or something along these lines” (Budzyk, 2 April). The title *Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich* [*The Problems of Literary Genres*], which had first appeared a few weeks before, was also adopted by Trzynadłowski in mid-April in the said questionnaire. The date of the final selection, however, must be 23 July 1957, when — in a letter to Skwarczyńska — he concluded: “Let’s stick to the title (and its scope) *Zagadnienia rodzajów literackich* [*The Problems of Literary Genres*].”

Despite these doubts and many other uncertainties (and indeed, disputes), the pressure to make difficult decisions quickly, and the resistance of some literary theorists, in the second half of 1957 — just a few months after the first debate on how to break the impasse in which the initiators and editors of *Słownik rodzajów literackich* [*Dictionary of Literary Genres*] had found themselves due to the reluctance of the scholars working for the Institute of Literary Research — intense, regular work on the contents of the first issue was already in progress, and a brochure for *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* [*The Problems of Literary Genres*] was also compiled. In early 1958, this advertising leaflet, which boasted three language versions, was sent out to a large number of literary research centres and university libraries in Poland and abroad. Not only did it combine a commercial aspect with an invitation to collaborate, but it also heralded the first issue of the new periodical, which would appear later in 1958.

Since then, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* [*The Problems of Literary Genres*] has been issued regularly and without interruption for 61 years¹⁵, publishing — as its originators intended — *Materiały do Słownika* [*Materials for the Dictionary*] as well as dissertations, studies, and reviews, preserving the original layout. The concept of *Słownik rodzajów literackich* [*Dictionary of Literary Genres*] was eventually implemented half a century after its inception, when Grzegorz Gazda (in collaboration with Słowinia Tynecka-Makowska) published *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* [*Dictionary of Literary Forms and Genres*] comprising over six hundred entries in 2006. Thus, what could have ended in failure not only was but still “is in constant development [...], achieving a difficult — for it had seemed unattainable — victory” (Skwarczyńska 1985: 281).

¹⁴ We know of Schneider’s suggestions as they were mentioned by Trzynadłowski in a letter to Skwarczyńska, where he briefly commented: “The term *genetics* seems unbecoming as it is taken straight from biology, I presume” (Trzynadłowski, 18 April).

¹⁵ Today — 66 years [Editor’s note].

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