

Przemysław Pietrzak

Generic Consciousness in the Polish Theory of Genres*

I think I should start with a few circumstances which seem crucial in order to understand the Polish theory of genres in literary studies.

Although generic terminology as well as the tendency to classify literary forms appears in the oldest Polish poetics, the attempts to make these aspects into a separate field of studies founded on their own theory and a systematic perspective coincide with the beginning of the 20th century¹. These are the first works by Stefania Skwarczyńska (born in 1902), published in the thirties together with her book *Teoria listu* [Theory of a letter].² We may conclude then that the Polish theory of genres emerged at a moment when for more than one hundred years

* This publication has been prepared as part of the following NCN (National Science Centre) research grant: NCN 2014/13/B/HS2/00310 “Wiek teorii. Sto lat polskiej myśli teoretycznoliterackiej” [The Age of Theory: A Century of Polish Theoretical Literary Studies].

¹ The first genuine Polish *artes poeticae* date back to 17th century (earlier they were usually written by foreign scholars at Academy of Cracow). These are above all arguments by Kazimierz Sarbiewski, e.g. *De perfecta poesi, sive Vergilius et Homerus* (1626) and *Poeta nowy (The New Poet)* by Łukasz Opaliński (1652-61). Also numerous anonymous treaties were written in several Jesuit Colleges of Lwów, Poznań, Lublin and other Polish towns of this time. In 18th century one may find generic terminology in canto II and III of *Sztuka rymotwórcza (The Art of Rhymes)* by Franciszek Ks. Dmochowski (1788). See T. Michałowska, *Staropolska teoria genologiczna*, (Wrocław: Ossolineum 1974), p. 14. Of the same author: *The Beginnings of Genological Thinking. Antiquity – Middle Ages*, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (1969/70); *Genological Notions in the Renaissance Theory of Poetry*, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 2 (1969/70); *The Notion of Lyrics and the Category of Genre in Ancient and Later Theory of Poetry*, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (1972); *The Earlier Notion of ‘Poem’ and Genological Problems*, *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 1 (1986). See also E. Sarnowska-Temierusz, *Przeszłość poetyki: od Platona do Giambattisty Vica*, (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1995).

² I give the basic works by Stefania Skwarczyńska from this period: “O pojęcie literatury stosowanej,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (1931); “Istota improwizacji i jej stanowisko w literaturze,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1931); “Próba teorii rozmowy,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1 (1932); “Ze studiów

the genre had been considered a problem. On one hand, it could no longer be a universal classifying category. On the other, the scope of linguistic facts being read and treated as literary ones became wider. The first aspect is probably the result of the Romantic and Symbolist heritage, including also the avant-garde movements at the beginning of the 20th century. The latter – the consequences of the dynamic development of the press and journalism in the 19th century, which introduced new forms into literary circulation, e.g. columns and features, chronicles, reviews, interviews, and reportages. The French tradition of the theory of genres is quite different. It has its roots in the age of Classicism, in the poetics of the 17th and 18th centuries. It accounts for the completely opposing attitudes to the problem of genre in Polish and French studies in the last century. If the first associates genre with Classical norms and restrictions, the second sees its heterogeneity, fluidity and borderland character. Withdrawal from the Classical paradigm will then be considered within French theory as the total collapse of generic divisions and a turning to the (post)modern idea of the “text”, “writing” (*l'écriture*) or “discourse” (Blanchot, Derrida, Barthes, Foucault), while for Polish scholars, genre – seen in its instability, the diversity of its elements – will still remain a useful instrument, necessary for literature, its understanding and interpretation.³ Because of its considerable influence on Polish literary studies, we should also refer here to the German theory of genres that arose in the Romantic period. Even though it takes its terminology and divisions from the Italian and French tradition (certainly with roots in Antiquity), yet it seeks new substantiation for them. Thus, Hegel and Schiller transfer generic features from the area of textual construction (questions of style, composition, theme, and the like) to the field of philosophical anthropology (founded on the relationship between the cognitive powers of the subject and the world).⁴

o istotności oraz istocie rodzajów literackich,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 3 (1936); *Teoria listu* (Lwów: Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1937).

³ I mean the crucial ideas included in the following works of the French philosophers and scholars: Maurice Blanchot, *Le livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959); Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions du Minuit, 1967); Michel Foucault, *L'Ordre du discours: leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973).

⁴ See Georg W. F. Hegel's theory of genres in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Fr. Frommans Verlag, 1954). I used the Polish translation: G. W. F. Hegel, *Wykłady o estetyce*, trans. Janusz Grabowski and Adam Lam, vol. 3 (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967), 382–684. See also Friedrich Schiller's considerations on satire and pastoral in his argument *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* from 1795 (in Polish translation: Friedrich Schiller, “O poezji naiwnej

This has several consequences. Polish scholars have concentrated on the forms that go beyond the narrow field of *belles lettres* (Skwarczyńska's "applied literature" or Wierzbicka, Dobrzyńska and Witosz's theory of linguistic genres), as well as on borderland works combining elements of different genres, often representing such disparate areas as fiction/documents, literature/other arts.⁵ Instead of a genre being considered a stable configuration of necessary elements, we receive a concept reminiscent rather of a set based on a prototype with open, fluid borders (Grzegorz Grochowski's "textual hybrids", or the *silvae rerum* as described by Skwarczyńska, Ryszard Nycz, and Hanna Gosk).⁶ This only seems to resemble Barthes' idea of "text". A fundamental element of the latter is the intertextual quotation that aims to disintegrate the whole, while the decisive element of the former is the genre as an architext (following Genette's terminology). Even though denied and parodied in the dialogical structure, still it evokes the tradition retained in the readers' consciousness.

A particular genre in dialogical confrontation with other genres usually does not remain merely a configuration of aesthetic conventions. It is hardly ever referred to only for itself. It usually serves as a sign of something more: the period when it was invented and well recognised, the thematic scope attributed to it, the vision of human beings, or the particular world view within a system of values. It is probably the German language tradition mentioned above that meets here with a wide response. After the Romantic era, it was continued by Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, 1872), while in the following century by the Swiss literary scholar, Emil Staiger, and in a way by Hans Robert Jauss.⁷ The fact

i sentymentalnej," in F. Schiller, *Listy o estetycznym wychowaniu człowieka i inne rozprawy*, trans. Irena Krońska and Jerzy Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1972) 340–362.

⁵ Teresa Dobrzyńska "Delimitacja tekstu pisanego i mówionego," in *Tekst. Język. Poetyka: zbiór studiów*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1978); Anna Wierzbicka, "Genry mowy," in *Tekst i zdanie*, ed. Teresa Dobrzyńska and Elżbieta Janus (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983); Bożena Witosz, *Genologia lingwistyczna: zarys problematyki* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005).

⁶ Stefania Skwarczyńska, "Kariera literacka form rodzajów bloku silva," in *Wokół teatru i literatury. Studia i szkice*, ed. S. Skwarczyńska (Warszawa: Pax, 1970); Ryszard Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne: problem konstrukcji tekstu* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1984); Grzegorz Grochowski, *Tekstowe hybrydy. Literackość i jej pogranicza* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2000); Hanna Gosk, "Sylwa ponowoczesna. Fragment, autobiografia, konwencja literacka," in *Pisać poza rok 2000: studia i szkice literackie*, ed. Andrzej Lam and Tomasz Wroczyński (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2002).

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872 (*The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, trans. Douglas Smith, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, 1961 (*Basic Concepts of Poetics*, trans. Janette C. Hudson,

that the Polish theory of genres is indebted in general to German philology is manifested at least by the very category of *rodzaj* (mode, kind), which corresponds with *Grossgattungen* as distinguished by Goethe and Hegel, and perceived as universal, i.e. lyrical, dramatic, and epic poetry (literature). This is something rather seldom encountered in the English or French traditions, where the genres are not usually grouped into broader classes. But the influence goes far beyond this two-level-division and also applies to, so to say, “anthropological dislocation”, i.e. conceiving a genre as a specific world view shaped by human beings and thereby considering it as an interpretive “manual” for a text (Balbus). It is enough to refer to the “life genesis” of the genres worked out by Skwarczyńska directly from ideas from the Romantic period and later concepts in Germany.⁸ It was probably the same tradition that must have influenced the Russian philologist, Mikhail Bakhtin, in his writing about the “memory of the genre” in his reflexions on menippea, Socratic dialogue, and the novel.⁹

The natural consequence of all this – of seeing a genre as a necessary element in communication and understanding, but also as a sign pointing to the particular context of its functioning – is a question about its space in literary and linguistic consciousness. I mean the consciousness of specialists – scholars and critics – but also the knowledge of that vast majority of readers without adequate education; the relationship between the latter and the “scientific” theory of genre, its evolution within history; the way in which generic consciousness not merely regulates the process of interpretation, but also defines the borders for higher level terms, such as literature and fiction.

What I am going to do below is to provide a short characterisation of a few chosen manners in which the problem of consciousness appears in the Polish theory of genres. I will concentrate mostly on the works of three scholars: Stefania Skwarczyńska (born in 1902), Edward Balcerzan (1937), and Stanisław Balbus (1942).

*

Pensylvania State University Press, 1991); Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* 1967 (“Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” in H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1982).

⁸ Stefania Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze, vol. III* (Warszawa: Pax, 1965): 227–247. She refers here to the following authors and their works: Johannes Andreas Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1930), Robert Petsch, *Wesen und Formen der Erzählkunst* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1934), Emil Ermatinger, *Das dichterische Kunstwerk* (Berlin – Leipzig: Teubner, 1921), and others.

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (London – Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 101–181.

To begin with, we should notice a strict, I think, relationship between the problem of generic consciousness and inquiries on the border phenomena in the formal sense of the word: multigeneric texts with a vague reference (combining elements of fiction and documents), literary works arising from different artistic experiences (music, painting, photography, film, and the like), but also created as the results of generic parody, pastiche, collage, and stylisation. The necessary condition of their “functioning” in linguistic, literary and artistic communication must be the actualisation of modified elements in the consciousness of the author and receiver. In short, one must know what is being parodied, denied, or referred to as a model. If it is a genre, it serves as a sign recognisable for both sides of the reading act. Its misrecognition influences our understanding to at least the same degree as proper identification. I omit here the question of so-called “appropriate” deciphering of the sense in a particular text. What really matters is the very fact of the relationship between a certain direction of reading the text and the recognised (or supposed by the receiver) generic form.

It was Stefania Skwarczyńska who first drew attention to multigeneric forms in the 3rd volume of her *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze* (Introduction to Literary Studies), edited in 1965 and including also the ideas elaborated by her much earlier. Discussing the “literary genesis of the genres”, she writes about “counter-genres” as a result of the dialogical confrontation between an old form and a new one:

A counter-genre crystallises when the attacked ideological sense of a particular genre makes a characteristic feature of its structure or when this feature is attributed to it by the reception of this genre, contemporary to the process of crystallisation. [...] a demand for recognisability of the matrix genre in the new structure is achieved through a tendency to preserve the same specification in all structural fields (e.g. in the field of the object, its conceiving, etc.).¹⁰

A few years later, Edward Balerzan –under the distinct influence of Skwarczyńska – discusses in his book *Przez znaki* [Throughout the signs, 1972] three attitudes among the Polish poets of the interwar period toward the genres. One is the “post-Romantic variant”. It assumes a continuous extension of a range of generic forms available for writers with the models remaining so far outside the field of literature. Before we refer to a proper quotation, we need to stress that for Balcerzan, both a scholar and a poet, a genre forms “a model of a communicative situation”:

¹⁰ Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp*, 258.

A poet may or even must discover the outlines of communicative models by elevating any 'genre-like' types of colloquial, journalistic or scientific discourse, or any others. [...] Each poem must somehow find itself here, create a certain set of relationships between itself and at least the elements of the communicative stream. For today, for a moment, for now. It must, if it is to become a clear utterance. Hence, a huge repertoire of allusions, kinds of 'instructions' and footnotes, several stylisation devices, 'orientations to the words of others' [Bakhtin!]. A model of a communicative situation for a particular work seems more distinct if it stands out more clearly from another model, referred to in a quote unquote manner. And – which happens quite often these days – compromised.¹¹

And last but not least, 25 years later Stanisław Balbus in his article *Zagłada gatunków* [The Extinction of Genres, 1999] juxtaposes a paradigmatic model of a genre with a hermeneutic one. The essence of the latter is that a particular work must

[...] in different ways indicate various signals of generic references. The point is that these signals are usually numerous and they do not in the least have to remain in a complementary arrangement. And the indexes of these references may be really diverse – starting from names of genres arbitrarily introduced to the headings of texts, ending with various types of thematic and also 'constructional' allusions, both with a generic orientation in the literary tradition.¹²

There is one common thing for all three quotations above: presented in a conflict involving categories of genres, taking place within the framework of a particular work, assuming the reader possesses the appropriate knowledge, as he or she should recognise the allusions to the genres retained within the tradition (not necessarily of the *belles lettres*). Thus, the reader's consciousness appears here as a cultural memory shaped by previous readings, individualised or supervised by various institutions. Moreover, while this memory guards the proper understanding of a work, the genre is its safeguard. This is probably why Polish researchers from younger generations – although occupied with literature from the second half of the 20th century, usually characterised by them as radically decentralised and amorphous – nevertheless preserve an important role for signals of the text's generic attribution (put in the titles or initial parts

¹¹ Edward Balcerzan, *Przez znaki: granice autonomii sztuki poetyckiej na materiale polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1972), 162–163.

¹² Stanisław Balbus, "Zagłada gatunków," *Teksty Drugie* 59 (1999): 34.

of a work). Ryszard Nycz (born in 1951) writes in his *Sylwy współczesne* [Contemporary Silvae Rerum, 1984]:

It seems that it is indeed the genre that opens to a writer the particular possibilities of shaping a text and to a reader a framework method of reading which includes the most general and the most fundamental instructions for textual coherence.¹³

He seeks references to the common knowledge of the author and receiver in a generic allusion:

To single out the fundamental form is a simple verbalisation of knowledge shared by the participants of a communicative act; knowledge of the generic classification of a huge prose work deprived of overt generic information.¹⁴

This research thread – of the genre as a programme for reading – may be observed as early as in Skwarczyńska's *Introduction...*, mentioned above. She distinguishes here “generic objects” as structures existing in real linguistic facts, and “generic notions” as well as “generic names”, as representatives of the former. These are notions which indeed form the equivalent of the objects within the consciousness of scholars, critics, but also of popular readers. The relationship between these spheres is not in the least symmetrical, and various deviations (described by Skwarczyńska as simple mistakes) are not merely the results of popular consciousness. But another aspect seems crucial at this point:

They [generic notions – P. P.] also provide the researcher of particular literary works with a significant key to defining their substantial sense and giving an appropriate interpretation. A generic definition of a text, one or another, means for instance a statement on the fictiveness or non-fictiveness of the world presented in it, on one or another motivation for the plot, the construction of the characters, on the reason for this or that style. A change of the fundamental generic classification of a particular work leads to a change in its substantial sense.¹⁵

The same can be found in Balcerzan's writing:

In other words, a genre facilitates reception, guarantees ‘comprehensibility’ [a reversion of ‘incomprehensibility’ – “niezrozumialstwo”, a term invented by Karol Irzykowski in 1919], and makes precisely these words organised

¹³ Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne*, 25.

¹⁴ Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne*, 26.

¹⁵ Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp*, 316.

in precisely such a way understandable. It is a mutual facilitation, in which it [the genre] supplants both the poet and the reader.¹⁶

Almost twenty years later, analysing Białoszewski and Parnicki's prose and Różewicz's plays, he states the following:

Incidentally, let us notice that generic instructions are by no means 'art for art's sake' for classification collectors, since they have a practical communicative value, as they always become *a scenario for reading*: many more of them could be installed.¹⁷

In all these quotations, one may observe a sort of dislocation that following Balbus could be defined as hermeneutic: a genre is no longer understood here as merely a classification instrument, serving at best to put the literary process in order and important just for a narrow group of specialists. The fundamental mode of literary existence – i.e. reading – is recognised here as a process shaped by the generic aspects of a particular text. Thus, a genre would be a specific “structural unit” of the reader's consciousness and thereby a filter supervising the understanding, interpretation and evaluation of a text.

In the mid-1970s, Michał Głowiński formulated his theory of styles of reception, which was eventually fully developed in his article *Świadectwa I style odbioru* [Testimonies and Styles of Reception, 1977]. In a way resembling the then arising cognitive sciences (although completely independently), he transferred the notion of style, very charged in the long researching tradition since antiquity, from the textual field to that of reading strategies. In other words, from the world of objects to the methods of viewing them (exactly what Lakoff and Johnson did at almost the same time with the figure of the metaphor¹⁸). Putting aside the discussion on the differences between style and genre, in a way quite interesting, I would like to note that at least some of the styles distinguished by Głowiński could be equally well presented as “response genres”. This particularly applies to the allegorical style, described as “the conviction that a literary work is characterised by a specific two-dimensionality”, which

¹⁶ Balcerzan, *Przez znaki*, 142.

¹⁷ Edward Balcerzan, “Nowe formy w pisarstwie i wynikające stąd porozumienia,” in *Humanistyka przełomu wieków*, ed. J. Koziński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, 1999), 370.

¹⁸ See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

may even turn into belief in its Aesopian nature.¹⁹ Thus, one may say that looking for hidden content turns a text into a parable or Aesopian fable. The process of allegorisation applies to the text as a whole, not merely several of its elements as in the case of allegory conceived as a figure. The same probably refers to the expressive style that assumes

the continuous presence of the author and each element may be interpreted [...] as a manifestation of his or her intimate life, of his or her exceptional and by nature unique inner situation.²⁰

These words provide us with almost direct references to the intimate writing, with such genres as the confessional, autobiography, or intimate journal.

These two examples are enough to illustrate a direction followed – especially in the 1970s – by some of the Polish scholars interested in one way or another in the problem of reception. It was characterised by a conviction concerning the relative independence of reading from inherent textual properties and by the belief that its separate order can be presented as systematic (not in individual cases but in the social dimension of a particular literary period). One of the methods of achieving this goal was using a category of genre which could be seen even as a form imposed on a real textual structure. Let us also note that according to the profile of the Polish theory of genres described above, this generic map in the model of a reader's consciousness is by no means limited to the sphere of *belles-lettres*. In addition, this sphere itself provokes this:

There are more and more texts making a 'collage' from various generic norms – the more contradictory, the better – from lyrical poetry and columns, feature articles coupled with autobiographical vivisection, autobiography and metafictional codes, reporter's notes and a draft of some fictive novel, and interspersing all of them with descriptions of non-existing scientific and literary works.²¹

Another diversifying factor should be added here. One can hardly disagree with Janusz Sławiński writing about the necessity to work out "a social stratification of reading norms", which describes the "coexistence of various alternative or even competitive systems of reading in a particular

¹⁹ Michał Głowiński, "Świadectwa i style odbioru," in *Style odbioru: szkice o komunikacji literackiej*, ed. M. Głowiński (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1977), 128.

²⁰ Głowiński, "Świadectwa i style odbioru," 131.

²¹ E. Balcerzan, "Nowe formy," 371.

moment.”²² There is no reception “in general”, nor interpretation “as such”. The same applies to the consciousness of literary genres. Apart from their historical and national/cultural changeability, one should also consider social variants connected at least with the type of education which prepares one for the difficult task of operating a text. First of all, it refers to popular mass consciousness, ultimately the most widespread among the readers.

For well-known methodological reasons – unlike a critic, for instance, a popular reader usually does not leave marks of his or her reception – even if “wide generic consciousness” becomes the object of research, this occurs, so to say, *a priori*. It is usually reconstructed on the basis of mass culture products and on the assumption (only to a certain degree justified) that they do not disrupt their receivers’ “horizon of expectations” (according to Jauss’ terminology). Edward Balcerzan, for example, in his *New Forms in Writing...* provides a detailed characterisation of the “popular order and elitist chaos”: a tendency toward clear, strongly disjunctive and completely serious formal divisions within popular music, films, literature, which strongly contrast with the heterogenous, deceptive, and almost amorphous achievements of “high” art. The first one has to satisfy the consumer’s appetite “without any deception”, while the latter – on the contrary – should continuously expose a reader to the risk of choosing an interpretive path, it should require from him an increased effort at identification (“what’s it really all about?”).²³ Another path, starting with field observations and going on to describe the real perception of various texts by a popular reader, was chosen on a broader scale probably only by Skwarczyńska.²⁴ The author of *Introduction...* conducted a kind of amateur milieu interview, completing it with an analysis of the reactions upon reception of famous literary phenomena registered here and there (i.e. *The Trilogy* by Sienkiewicz or the radio novel *Matysiakowie*). What sort of conclusions did she reach? Apart from their expected poor knowledge of such notions as the novel, a story, lyrical poetry, comedy, as well as their tendency to replace such notions with private informal taxonomy based on accidental features (long/short, funny/sad, interesting/boring), Skwarczyńska noticed another tendency, i.e. to consider aesthetic categories in an emotional and evaluative manner (something “good” must be “funny” and “touching/moving”). Generic notions arising unconstrainedly (usually named associated with easily recognisable details, such as e.g. the names of books series – famous

²² Janusz Sławiński, “O dzisiejszych normach czytania (znawców),” *Teksty* 15 (1974): 17.

²³ E. Balcerzan, “Nowe formy,” 363–373.

²⁴ Skwarczyńska, *Wstęp*, 331–335.

Polish “tigers” or later “harlequins”) immediately create a hierarchy where emotional or didactic qualities are the main criterion for the evaluation of a particular text. In addition – and this is what the scholar pays most of her attention to – the category of fiction is treated here in a specific way. On one hand, it is “veracity” that becomes a virtue, on the other – it is literary fiction that is read as “facts” (i.e. “of life”). The best known example of such a factual reception of a text in Polish literary history came in the form of the celebration of holy masses on behalf of various characters from Sienkiewicz’s 19th-century historical novels. Skwarczyńska finds a contemporary equivalent (in the 1960s): numerous letters sent to characters from the radio novel *Matysiakowie* addressed to the Polish Radio.

Finally, she formulates a hypothesis that modern mass media perform an important role in erasing the borderline between fiction and a “journalistic account”. The elements representing these two different spheres stand here side by side. However, in the eyes of this conservative scholar all this makes “the most striking deviation from generic notions in wide generic consciousness.” This is what distinguishes Skwarczyńska when compared to the researchers of the younger generation, like Balcerzan, Balbus, or Nycz. For them, textual structure is an open set of various literary allusions, which appeal to our private knowledge of literary genres and may set up various generic associations. On the other hand – in contrast to Stanley Fish and his neopragmatism or Roland Barthes and his *l’écriture* – these associations are limited by the text. A literary work points to a certain range of such associations.

Abstract

The very idea of the generic consciousness seems crucial for any generic studies, whether in literature, arts, writing, or – in cognitive perspective – in any human behaviour. The reasons of its importance for literary theory are: 1) it reveals a way the literary genres function, 2) thus it proves the indispensibility of a category of a genre in the process of reading, understanding, and reception of a particular work or group of works, 3) it accounts for several theoretical and historical problems in literary studies, e.g. fact/fiction opposition, evolution of the particular forms, interpenetration of literature and other forms of elite/popular writing, 4) therefore it raises the question of literary and non-literary genres, where the non-literary forms (usually linguistic) seem to be a source of the literary ones; they also regulate understanding of novels, poems, comedies etc.

I would like to point to all those aspects in selected writings of Polish scholars such as Stefania Skwarczyńska, Edward Balcerzan, Stanisław Balbus, and others.

Key words: literary genre; non-literary genre; poetics; literary theory; generic consciousness