

# Invented Genres – An Overlooked Problem in Genre Theory?

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A poetics of the moment would appear to postulate the end of, or at least a limit to, the problems traditionally assigned to genre theory. After all, a literary genre enables us to find constants among literary elements, to look for invariants amid literary variability: common, constant, and intersubjective traits – a kind of model, representing the idealization of the real, the momentary, of a given literary work. Examining the problems of genre theory from the perspective of certain individual works has often given rise to various doubts; indeed, there have been numerous literary aesthetics that ruled out entirely the viability of a taxonomy of generic forms – above all, the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce comes to mind. And although there are currently substantial numbers of literary scholars who are likewise strongly opposed to genre qualifications (for example, deconstructionists or poststructuralists inspired by the later Roland Barthes), genre theory itself has, in key discussions of it, moved far beyond quarreling (reminiscent of the medieval dispute on universals) between “realists” and “nominalists.” The following discussion does not concern this type of anti-normative literary aesthetic, but rather focuses attention on a phenomenon that may lead to a reformulation of some of the postulates of genre theory – hence the reference in this article’s title to Stefania Skwarczyńska’s classic treatise of a half-century ago (*Niedostrzeżony problem podstawowy genologii* [The Overlooked Fundamental Problem of Genre Theory]). I would like to declare at the outset that the problem to be discussed here is certainly not one of the fundamental questions in the theory of genres; it is rather situated on the periphery of this area of literary scholarship. Nonetheless, this problem is, I believe, quite relevant and is usually overlooked or passed over in silence; it relates to the possibility of accepting authorial “inventions” within genre theory – works that simultaneously display innovation and are exceptional in terms of their genre at the level of the individual work or a group of works by the same author, and can thus be identified as a specific authorial “genre of the moment.” It thus concerns cases in which poetic license encompasses the theory of genres, a situation where literary *inventio* is transferred to the paradigmatic level, particularly visible in the literature of the past century.

Previously, the relationship between work and model was generally one of annexation (faithful execution of a model structure), as in previous normative versions of poetics, or sometimes of the modification or rejection of a model (as in the diagnosis sometimes made of contemporary poetry as being beyond genre). Edward Balcerzan expounded on these issues, and proposed three possible forms of presence for genres in poetry: classical, meaning as a set system, codified and closed; post-Romantic, in which change is mandatory, evolutionary or revolutionary; and avant-garde, extremely inventive, in practice indicating the fundamental impossibility of genre classification: “An authentically innovative lyric poem takes shape outside the system of genres. It is always a unique artistic discovery. It cannot be multiplied.”<sup>1</sup> This last, avant-garde classification might seem to be an almost Utopian theoretical concept – Balcerzan placed most of the poems assigned to the avant-garde, as traditionally understood by literary historians, in the post-Romantic category, and thus used only the work of his favorite poet, Przyboś, to illustrate transformations of genre models and extremes of invention without predecessors or successors. Michał Głowiński also did not exclude the possibility of works not belonging to accepted genre taxonomies, as lying outside or beyond genres: “a literary work can be something exceptional, unrepeatable, unique, not fitting into the rules of genre that apply in a given era – let us consider, for example, Irzykowski’s *Pałuba* in the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century novel. [...]”<sup>2</sup> He further expanded the diagnosis of genrelessness to include contemporary poetry (in an essay written in 1965): “the most elite domain of literature, which poetry is today, has almost entirely freed itself from all genre specifications.”<sup>3</sup>

Years later, Balcerzan returned to his former guidelines, expanding the repertoire of non-generic examples in the category of the avant-garde to include the works of Parnicki, Białoszewski, Różewicz, Cortázar, and Ajgięgo, while adding the following significant remark:

Sometimes, one would like to answer the question: “what genre is that?” by treating the titles of works as the name for their genre [...]. We can thus say that *Donosy rzeczywistości* (Denunciations of Reality) belong to the genre of “denunciations of reality,” and *Model do składania* (Composition Model) represents the genre “composition model,” while “card index” (kartoteka) is the genre that Różewicz’s *Kartoteka* (Card Index) *Kartoteka rozrzucona* (Ransacked Card Index) bring into being [...]. Let us repeat: the creation of “disposable genres” leads to the dissolution of genre theory as it existed in centuries past and exists in the most recent experiences of mass culture.<sup>4</sup>

These and other concerns motivated the Poznań scholar to undertake the conception of a “New Theory of Genres” (later called a “multimedia genre theory”), adapted to contemporary cultural reality and based in a completely different, universal communicative paradigm. Similarly,

<sup>1</sup> E. Balcerzan, “Sytuacja gatunku” (The Situation of the Genre) in *Przez znaki. Granice autonomii sztuki poetyckiej. Na materiale polskiej poezji współczesnej* (Through the Signs. The Borders of Poetic Art’s Autonomy. A Study Using Contemporary Polish Poetry), Poznań 1972, 169.

<sup>2</sup> M. Głowiński, “Gatunek literacki i problemy poetyki historycznej” (The Literary Genre and Problems of Historical Poetics), in *Problemy teorii literatury* (Problems of Literary Theory), vol. 2, ed. H. Markiewicz, Wrocław 1987, 134.

<sup>3</sup> Głowiński, “Gatunek literacki i problemy poetyki historycznej” (Literary Genre and Problems of Historical Poetics), 135.

<sup>4</sup> E. Balcerzan, “Nowe formy w pisarstwie i wynikające stąd porozumienia” (New Forms in Writing and Resulting Forms of Understanding) in *Polska genologia literacka* (Polish Theory of Literary Genres), ed. D. Ostaszewska, R. Cudak, Warszawa 2007, 261.

other theorists of genres have observed in recent years that a revision of our understanding of the concept of genre is long overdue, including the need to incorporate pre- and para-genre forms.<sup>5</sup> Attempts have been made to resolve the crisis in the ability to apply labels as a means of ordering contemporary literary scholarship, which results from the dynamic changes that have occurred in literature in recent decades, by drawing methodological inspiration from new literary theories, more broadly – humanities theory (for example, linguistics, cultural anthropology, media studies, feminism), and creating new proposed paradigms, such as Balcerzan’s multimedia genre theory, mentioned above, or pragmalinguistic efforts invoking Bakhtin’s speech genres (such as Anna Wierzbicka’s). The search for a “more receptive form,” corresponding to the positioning of contemporary cultural reality and literary texts’ outside traditional genres, has led to a new taxonomy of genres that recognizes mixed and borderline genres, intertextual relations, interventions, the intersection of genre forms (I. Opacki), diversified literary forms (such as the *Silva rerum* that Ryszard Nycz has referred to), genre hybrids (G. Grochowski), transdisciplinary activity in the humanities (Clifford Geertz’s blurred genres), and so on. Still, what Balcerzan called “disposable genres” have been overlooked by particular genre theory concepts, or at best have remained at the margins of theorists’ pursuits, especially theorists of the avant-garde and post-avant-garde. The **momentary genre**, as I am provisionally calling it, is thus closer to literary historical discourse; it has been treated as a species of literary *parole*, rather than a systematic form of *langue*. That was no doubt a result of the belief, constitutive of the ontology of genre, in heteroidentification, the necessity for genre to occur as a continuing series: “Without mechanisms of imitation (adaptation, pastiche, travesty, translation) it is difficult to imagine the existence of genres.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to secure the existence of the momentary (inventive) genre in our thinking about types of literature, we do not need to build a new paradigm of genre theory, I think it suffices to allow the possibility for self-identification, the declaration of an authorial series – a group or cycle of works by one writer. Furthermore, the perspective from which the seemingly oxymoronic momentary nature of a genre can be recognized within even a single work already exists in a previous conception of the formative principles of genre. Stefania Skwarczyńska – the conceptual founder of the contemporary Polish theory of genres – maintained, contrary to the then-current consensus on the necessity of repetition, that a single manifestation of a genre in a particular work was sufficient to permit us to speak of the existence of “an object of genre theory,” and a larger number of such works would merely strengthen the scholar’s confidence in his genre diagnosis.<sup>7</sup> It should be added that the existence of such an “object of genre study” did not, in that conception, signify the possibility of constructing a “concept of genre theory,” though it did indicate the possibility of even

<sup>5</sup> See R. Cudak, “Sytuacja gatunków we współczesnej poezji polskiej a perspektywy genologii” (How Genres Are Situated in Contemporary Polish Poetry and Genre Theory Perspectives), in *Genologia i konteksty* (Genre Theory and Contexts), ed. C. P. Dutka, Zielona Góra 2000, 37.

<sup>6</sup> E. Balcerzan, “W stronę genologii multimedialnej” (Toward a Multimedia Theory of Genres), *Teksty Drugie* (Second Texts) 1999, 6, 10.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Skwarczyńska, “Niedostrzeżony problem podstawowy genologii” (An Overlooked Fundamental Problem of Genre Theory), in *Problemy teorii literatury* (Problems of Literary Theory), vol. 2, 106-107. A similar stance, but which also takes into account its conceptual antecedents, was presented several decades later by Stanisław Balbus: each work, he claims, potentially creates its own poetics, and can be perceived as a genre in embryo, being an embodied artistic form – see S. Balbus, “Zagłada gatunków” (The Annihilation of Genres), *Teksty Drugie* 1999, 6, 27.

a single work's capability of self-definition.<sup>8</sup> Such a view would thus represent a different stance from Balcerzan's postulates concerning the avant-garde: recognizing the possibility of an avant-garde genre occurring within, for example, an authorial cycle of works and the genre potential for generating imitation residing in a single work (the possibility of repetition, transformation of its rules). At the same time, in the work by Skwarczyńska I have cited, there arose a question important for this discussion, that of a genre's self-naming – that is, the author's designation for genre “discoveries,” together with the creation of terms by genre theorists. Skwarczyńska warned that “a purely ‘concocted’ typological structure such as Romain Rolland's ‘musical novel’ is not a literary genre.”<sup>9</sup> The regulating theory of genres that Skwarczyńska developed was marked by quite rigorous terminological purism – as she went on to add:

In the poetics of almost every literary current we can easily find genre terms that appear to be meaningful but incur our suspicion as to their scholarly legitimacy; we may cite here Romantic myth, paramyth, arabesque, the famous *roman-fleuve*, the anti-novel, or even the highly ambiguous grotesque. The theory of genres is too ready to open its doors to these pseudo-terms, whether those summoned forth by a frivolous, impressionistic approach to the object of genre study, or those that are pure verbal fictions, most often dreamed up by authors themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Let us leave aside that “frivolous approach to the object of genre study”; I would like to examine those “concocted” cases, those “verbal fictions” excluded by this scholar.

## Proof of Existence

Such designations have usually attracted scholars' attention in the course of a survey of one author or artistic formation – they are nothing exceptional in the history of literature, particularly where the avant-garde, with its proclaimed cult of formal innovation, including in the domain of genres, is concerned. Among the most well-known examples, we can thus name the futuristic “frescoes and futuresques,” “futureams,” “futurospectra,” “namopanics” and so on that Grzegorz Gazda refused to honor with the title of “objects of genre study,” citing Skwarczyńska's terms.<sup>11</sup> However, in the case of Julian Tuwim's homologous *śłowiec* (“songwords”) and *mirohlady* (“worldpots”), Henryk Pustkowski comes out strongly in favor of assigning them the status of genres, perceiving as he does their continuation in contemporary (early 1970s) linguistic poetry: “Let us reiterate that what is specific about these names is that they present an object of genre study [...]” Pustkowski went on to add:

<sup>8</sup> The concept of the “object of genre study” has been one of the most discussed elements in Skwarczyńska's theory; her polemic with the idea of differentiating objects from concepts and genre designations is one of the main currents in a book devoted to discussing her theory – see S. Dąbrowski, *Teoria genologiczna Stefanii Skwarczyńskiej (próba analizy i krytyki)* (Stefania Skwarczyńska's Theory of Genres [An Attempt at Analysis and Criticism]), Gdańsk 1974.

<sup>9</sup> S. Skwarczyńska, “Niedostrzeżony problem,” 107.

<sup>10</sup> S. Skwarczyńska, “Niedostrzeżony problem,” 111.

<sup>11</sup> See G. Gazda, “O gatunkach polskiej poezji futurystycznej” (On Genres of Polish Futuristic Poetry), in *Z polskich studiów slawistycznych* (From Polish Slavicist Studies), 4. *Prace na VII Międzynarodowy Kongres Slawistów w Warszawie 1973* (Works at the 7th International Congress of Slavicists in Warsaw), [part 2]: *Nauka o literaturze* (Scholarship About Literature), ed. M. Janion et al, Warszawa 1972, 236-237.

Tuwim's *słopiewne* or songword efforts appear to show a conscious attempt to build a lyric genre – a poetic confession of faith, what one would like to call an immanent confession – executed in the material of poetry itself rather than announcing or formulating rules to be carried out in future literary actions. [...] *Mirohłady* or worldpots are a kind of model genre, revealing the work's "linguistic" features at the morphological level.<sup>12</sup>

Years later, Pustkowski would be more careful in his formulation of genre theory capacity, distinguishing *mirohłady* (now no longer a genre in his view) from *słopiewni* (to which he would tend to award the rank of an object of genre study).<sup>13</sup>

The tradition of avant-garde linguistic experiments was taken up by a master of genre innovation – Miron Białoszewski, the creator of such forms as "noises," "clusters," "discharges," "denunciations," "flows," "leaks," "bothers," "liedowns," "brawls," "slapdasheries," "bing-bangs," "dreameries," "yawnings," "scribblings," "frivols," "homericks," "faramouches," "flutterups," and so on. A large number of these quasi-genre terms are neologisms, accentuating the experimentation and innovation at the level of form – as well as expressing the situational and spontaneous (momentary) nature of existential states and speech acts.<sup>14</sup> Interpreters of these strange poetic cycles of Białoszewski's have noted their paragenic character, meaning their inability to fit into a particular genre.<sup>15</sup> Michał Głowiński called them "homemade, amateur genres,"<sup>16</sup> while Wiesława Wantuch in her analysis of the poet's system of genres underscored the self-reflexive approach that these bold forms take to genre: "Our data on the genre of 'brawls' is provided by the practice of poems under that name. In this way, the reader's expectations, stirred at the outset, are then corrected during the process of reading. The concept is realized when we recognize the object of genre study."<sup>17</sup>

Witold Wirpsza is another important poet whose work is located in the linguistic current in poetry. Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, in her analysis of the specificity of his work with regard to genre, distinguished a group of self-reflexive poems that engage the reader in a game at the metaliterary level, simultaneously representing the author's development of a genre. She defined these self-referential workshop poems as "personal genres" that, she claims, constitute the author's response to the decline of traditional genre distinctions in contemporary poetry:

<sup>12</sup>H. Pustkowski, "Próba gatunkowego określenia 'mirohładów' – 'słopiewni'" (Attempt at a Genre Definition of *Mirohłady* and *Słopiewni*), in *Z polskich studiów slawistycznych* (From Polish Slavicist Studies), 45-246. Roman Ingarden found Tuwim's cycles so intriguing that he devoted a study to them before the war, in which he situated them at the borderline of literature – see R. Ingarden, "Graniczny wypadek dzieła literackiego" (Borderline Instance of a Literary Work), in Ingarden, *Szkice z filozofii literatury* (Sketches from the Philosophy of Literature), Kraków 2000, 89–96.

<sup>13</sup>See H. Pustkowski, the entries "Mirohłady" and "Słopiewnie" in *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Forms and Genres), ed. G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska, Kraków 2006.

<sup>14</sup>A survey of such genre neologisms can be found in the last chapter of A. Świrek's *Z gatunkiem czy bez... O twórczości Mirona Białoszewskiego* (With or Without Genre... On the Work of Miron Białoszewski), Zielona Góra 1997.

<sup>15</sup>See J. Sławiński, "Miron Białoszewski 'Leżenia'" (Miron Białoszewski "Liedown"), in *Genologia polska. Wybór tekstów* (Polish Genre Theory. Selected Texts), ed. E. Miodońska-Brookes, A. Kulawik, M. Tatar, Warszawa 1983, 527-528.

<sup>16</sup>See M. Głowiński, "Białoszewskiego gatunki codzienne" (Białoszewski's Everyday Genres), in *Narracje literackie i nieliterackie* (Literary and Extraliterary Narratives), Kraków 1997, 174.

<sup>17</sup>W. Wantuch, "Miron Białoszewski w poszukiwaniu gatunków lirycznych" (Miron Białoszewski In Search of Lyrical Genres), in *Polska genologia. Gatunek w literaturze współczesnej* (Polish Genre Theory. The Genre in Contemporary Literature), ed. R. Cudak, Warszawa 2009, 374.

We may thus have an era in poetry of “personal genres” in which the author comes to an understanding with the reader on his own responsibility? These would not be genres in the strict sense of the term, but forms resembling genres and aspiring to recognizability in the context of a given author’s work. [...] If there exist genre names, if a repeating group of rules arises, a specific grammar that repeats within one body of work, an imposed or planned mode of reading – as is true of the proposals by Wirpsza I have referred to – we can risk asserting that at least some of his ideas have the ambition of establishing genres.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar fashion, Piotr Michałowski, in his genre analysis of Szymborska’s poetry and contemporary poetry in general, distinguishes among several kinds of genre references those which constitute a small group of “formal inventions,” defined by him as “authorial inventions,” where the main strategy is the principle of correction, whereas there are no neologistic genres of the type we find in the Futurists’ or Białoszewski’s work. Unfortunately, Michałowski does not develop these remarks more broadly and does not illustrate his reasoning with examples of particular works. He also declares “disposable genres” to be “formal inventions” in the broader genre landscape, but again does not explain what he means.<sup>19</sup>

To continue with the work of Szymborska, we should observe that “personal genres” can also be found in explicitly humorous areas of her work, of which the following forms devised by the Nobel laureate may serve as examples: *lepiej* (put-downs), *moskaliki* (amuse-louches), *rajzerfiberki*, *odwódki* and *altruitki*, to name a few (I refer to those included in the recently published collection *Błysk rewolwru* [The Flash of the Revolver]).<sup>20</sup> Stanisław Barańczak was also no stranger to such literary games, as demonstrated by, among other things, the personal theory of genres presented in his book *Pegaz zdębiał* (Pegasus Struck Dumb), such as *obleśnik* (slimelet), *monsteryk* (monsterick), *poliględźba* (polyglop)– whose title evokes a previous collection of poetic curiosities by Tuwim.

This substantial bunch of examples permits us to state that we can observe (at least in poetry) the phenomenon of an author’s concept of making the genre a form of bold authorial creation. The comments quoted above were generally formulated within analyses of a particular author’s work rather than in the theoretical reflections of scholars of genre, or if the latter, they were dropped casually – Włodzimierz Bolecki in his short introduction to the issue of *Teksty Drugie* devoted to genre studies wrote about the common belief in the “uselessness of taxonomies of genre driven

<sup>18</sup>J. Grądziel-Wójcik, “‘Gry gatunkowe’ na przykładzie poezji Witolda Wirpszy” (“Genre Games”: A Case Study in the Poetry of Witold Wirpsza), in *Genologia dzisiaj* (Genre Studies Today), ed. W. Bolecki, I. Opacki, Warszawa 2000, 85.

<sup>19</sup>See P. Michałowski, “Gatunki i konwencje w poezji” (Genres and Conventions in Poetry), in *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy o literaturze* (Disputed and Undisputed Problems in Contemporary Literature Scholarship), ed. W. Bolecki, R. Nycz, Warszawa 2002, 311, 315 (this article was also included in Michałowski’s book *Głosy, formy, światy. Warianty poezji nowoczesnej* [Voices, Forms, Worlds. Versions of Modern Poetry], Kraków 2008, 80-81, 85).

<sup>20</sup>[Translator’s Note: These rhyming genres are even more untranslatable than are the others referred to in this work; but we should cultivate more such novel forms in English as well. “Lepiej” are two-line poems disparaging the place where the speaker is or some aspect of it; “moskaliki” are four-line poems beginning “Who said that [nationality]” and either disparaging that nation or otherwise debunking some claim allegedly made about it (*moskalik* is also pickled herring, popular as an appetizer or cocktail snack); “rajzerfiberki” are two-line disparagements of cities; “odwódki” are what they sound like, i.e., one-liners referring to experiences with different kinds of alcohol; and “altruitki,” from altruism, are two-line pieces of helpful advice. T.D.W. ]

by the efforts of writers (particularly poets) to create many texts in disposable genres [...].”<sup>21</sup> It is rather difficult to agree that said belief is common however, since probably the only true genre theorist who remarked on the problem of “disposable genres” in the wider context of the theory of genres was Romuald Cudak, in an article written a decade later.<sup>22</sup> Cudak, in his brief discussion of such works, defined them, like Grądział-Wójcik, under the collective rubric of “personal genres” (also including among them, however, such hybrid genres as Konwicki’s “pseudodiary”).

The terms cited here, varied in their origins (disposable genre, genre of the moment, home-made genre, personal genre, formal invention, and more) but referring to basically the same practice, though they accent diverse aspects of it, may, I propose, be grouped together under the name of **inventive genres**. “Disposable genre” (Balcerzan) is inadequate in that it can refer to a cycle of works, and even in the case of a single work the author may become attached to his literary “invention” and continue it in the future (as is the case with Różewicz’s “card-index”), or find successors who continue it (as in the case of the hearty imitation of Szyborska’s *moskaliki*<sup>23</sup>). “Personal genre,” on the other hand, appears to suggest concealing the work’s genre innovation from the reader, analogously to personal irony, when in fact that is not always the case; sometimes the new genre is manifestly evident in the poem or cycle’s title. The designation I have suggested is not entirely free of ambiguity either, and perhaps the name “authorial genre” would in some ways be more appropriate, but that term has already occurred in theoretical discourse with a different meaning.<sup>24</sup>

The general term “inventive genre” underscores the existential paradox of these literary constructs, genres bearing the distinctive stamp of invention; they represent new artistic forms, ostentatious creation at the level of literary *langue* – and yet are strongly marked by influence. The reference to invention in the name underscores the constitutive feature of the inventive genre – the shift of the accent on formal invention to the genre paradigm, not only breaking with convention, but creating a new convention, though one deliberately “wrong” in relation to tradition. Inventive genres are characterized by the self-referentiality of the created model (serving as its own primary interpreter). Michał Głowiński has underscored that genre is an element of literary convention – in the case of inventive genres, this becomes a game with the convention of genre itself as such (and its many diverse distinctions), present in the herme-

<sup>21</sup>W. Bolecki, “O gatunkach to i owo” (This and That About Genres), *Teksty Drugie* 1999, 6, 5.

<sup>22</sup>See R. Cudak, “Genologia i literatura współczesna. Prolegomena” (Genre Theory and Contemporary Literature. Prolegomena), in *Polska genologia* (Polish Genre Theory), 35-37.

<sup>23</sup>In connection with this, Balcerzan discusses it as an example of a new genre – see E. Balcerzan, “W stronę genologii multimedialnej,” 10-12.

<sup>24</sup>This term (*gatunek auktorialny*) was used by Halina Grzmil-Tylutki, borrowing from Franz Stanzel’s idea of “authorial narration” (*narracja auktorialna*) in her typology of genres, inspired by French discourse theorists and Bakhtin’s speech genres. In Grzmil-Tylutki’s formulation, authorial genres signify the self-categorizing of texts performed by their authors or editors, who, however, respect conventional genre terminology when they do so (examples here are column headings, terms such as “prologue” or “introduction,” as well as the genre designations cited in titles, such as the ode, sonnet, ballad, and others). The naming practices for authorial genres represent, in Grzmil-Tylutki’s understanding, a recategorization of the text, that is, a change of the parent typological context – for example, when a letter is used in an advertisement, an anecdote in a toast, etc.). The problem of authorial literary genres that concerns me is not dealt with in her work. See H. Grzmil-Tylutki, *Gatunek w świetle francuskiej teorii dyskursu* (Genre in the Light of French Discourse Theory), Kraków 2007, 128-146.

neutic space of sender and receiver.<sup>25</sup> The author creates his or her own creative model (or significantly modifies an existing one) and thereby engages in play with the audience's "horizon of expectations" in relation to genre – thus transferring the communicative interaction onto a clearly metaliterary level. Works placed under the label of an inventive genre are marked by a high degree of awareness of form (and the imposition of their own peculiar rigors) – even when the language and structure appear to be chaotic, as in Białoszewski's work – inviting the reader to take part in a game with convention and deconventionalization. In addition to this, inventive genres are always characterized by some degree of ludicity, a pseudoapology for tradition in the name of anarchy (often full of humor and a playful relation to the reader) – a different approach to playing out the banal opposition between traditionalism and innovation than the usual taking of sides (i.e. classicists and passéists vs. Romantics, the avant-garde, so-called "barbarians," and so on). An inventive genre name does not rule out assigning a work to traditional genre forms, but as an artistic genre practice it represents a significant proposal from the artist: the inventive genre name constitutes a crucial interpretative clue, more important and apt than would be a traditional genre qualification; it is a **semasiological** factor, and that is one of the main aspects of an inventive genre.

Accepting the principle of the existence of inventive genres may arouse various kinds of methodological doubt (for instance, as I have indicated, they fit into Skwarczyńska's conception, though authors' intentional genre designations are excluded from that conception), but even if we pronounce them to be para-genre forms, there is no reason to eliminate them from contemporary genre theory, which has recently been reformulated and draws inspiration from divergent sources. Together with the relaxation (expansion) and reformulation of genre rules, we can observe a greater tolerance for invented terminology, and thus for inventive genres, as can be seen in the example of the *roman-fleuve*, rejected by Skwarczyńska as a type of novelistic genre, but today universally accepted. The conception of inventive genres allows us above all to avoid essentially unresolvable divagations in genre theory relating, for example, to whether songwords are more qualified to be called a genre than worldpots, and to what degree...

### "Manufacturing" Genres

I should like to strengthen my case for establishing the category of inventive genres by presenting another example of this sort of literary creation, fostered by Maria Peszek. This artist is perceived primarily as a singer-songwriter, particularly in the context of her iconoclastic and shocking songs, but her artistic contribution is, in fact, considerably more varied and rich. The daughter of a well-known Kraków theater family, the future singer-songwriter first began a traditional stage career, collaborating with, among others, Jerzy Grzegorzewski, receiving several prestigious theatrical awards, and delivering a number of memorable performances in televised plays. She also experimented with new media, appearing, for example, in a video-opera. Peszek later drew on these experiences by creating ambitious spectacles that often became performance art, acting in music videos for her songs, and developing multimedia projects to coincide with each new album. When in 2008 she released her second album, entitled *maria Awaria* (maria

<sup>25</sup>This hermeneutics of genre was underscored by S. Balbus in "Zagłada gatunków."



Breakdown), the singer also became known as the author of *bezwstydnik* (shameless one, or: scandal sheet), a volume of poetry that complemented her musical project. I referred earlier to Peszek's artistic background because the example of this collection of texts also reveals literature's transformations through interactions with various forms of media and new communicative situations, in the face of which the traditional approach to genres is quite helpless (one reaction among many to this change in the cultural situation of literature Balcerzan's concept of multimedia genre theory). Peszek's book of poems, aside from its autonomous literary value, can also reveal literature's relationships with other media in an interesting new context.

I have used the traditional term "book of poetry" here, although that designation is not ideal for Peszek's publication, since it should more precisely be called a poetic-photographic album that imitates an intimate literary diary. It contains not only the text of the songs from the album, often in alternate versions, printed in an experimental typography, but also additional poems and one- or two-line "poetic samples" intertwined with photographs that artistically comment on the book's written content, showing the artist in seemingly private, though often choreographed situations, underscoring the intimate and simultaneous intentionally provocative and artificial nature of the book. *bezwstydnik* thus consists not only of songs from the album *maria Awaria*, but also "marifaceted" items, works originally written as letters to the magazine *Elle* or "mad macramé" (*nędzne frędzle*), a kind of epigrams (also referred to as "dream salutation collocations").

The title of Maria Peszek's collection of texts is a neologism, referring to its textual content, taken from the word for a shameless, forward person, and at the same time, through its associations with written genres in Polish that also end in the suffix "-nik," forming a combination of "diary" (*dziennik*) and "shamelessness" (*bezwstyd*): in English, we might call it a kind of "scandal sheet." The "scandal sheet," as one might guess even before having read it, is a work resembling an intimate diary, even indecent in some of its contents, revealing the author's personal life, and simultaneously provoking and breaking customary taboos. Such a presupposition on the reader's part finds confirmation in the dictionary definitions printed on the title page, presenting a juxtaposition of real and fictional meanings, and at the same time astonishing the reader with additional connotations:

**bezwstydnik (shameless one / scandal sheet)**

bot. shameless stinkhorn phallus impudicus

coll. person without shame, libertine, profligate, debauchee

lit. literary form characterized by documentary quality and confessional poetry associated with notes in an intimate diary rejecting the concept of shame and postulating radical reasoning typical of mystical hedonism<sup>26</sup>

The first of the definitions listed does not appear by chance or through mere definitional thoroughness. The stinkhorn is a type of mushroom that grows in the shape of the male sexual organ (hence its "indecent," shameless appearance), and furthermore, the Polish word for stinkhorn, "sromotnik," is an Old Polish word meaning a person who sows scandal and arous-

<sup>26</sup>M. Peszek, *bezwstydnik*, Warszawa 2008. I have an original manuscript of the book. Here and elsewhere, I do not cite the exact location, due to the lack of page numbers.

es shame. If we consider the second of the meanings cited (“person without shame, libertine, profligate, debauchee” – all synonyms for reprobate, depraver, perverter) we then see another feature of the book – it contains bold subject matter in terms of morality and eroticism, related, however, to a certain kind of pleasure and enjoyment. It is also no accident that the entire collection ends with the poem “toadstools” (*muchomory*): (“to get rid of mental ghouls / I cook a soup from toadstools”), which one can associate with stinkhorns (though in fact they are two quite different kinds of mushrooms, as toadstools belong to the *Amanita* family).

This pseudo- or quasi-definition, seemingly from an encyclopedia, is completed by another definition, this one entirely and strictly a work of fantasy, explaining the meaning of “mystical hedonism”:

**mystical hedonism**

from the Greek hedone = pleasure; artistic current deriving directly from the magical vulgarism proclaiming independence of conscience; see also geometry of screwing / catechism

This encyclopedic joke is meant to give an impression of Peszek’s complex aesthetic, encompassing her specific ideology, themes, authorial position, genre profile, and so on, as well as functioning as a coverall for specialized terms that are only fragmentarily mentioned (“see also geometry of screwing / catechism”). We can also treat the “scandal sheet” as an inventive definition of a **genre form** encompassing specialized **subgenres** (the three types of poetic expression signaled in the book: “maria Breakdowns,” “marifaceted” poems, and “mad macramé”). >From the perspective of traditional typology, these “scandal sheets” can mostly be categorized as erotic poems, most often grouped under the general heading of lyric poetry within the sub-heading of love poetry, though that remains an imprecise genre designation, one which gives rise to further definitional problems.<sup>27</sup> “Scandal sheet” as a genre manifests a specific kind of erotic poetry that deals with unrestrained, often corporeal sexual pleasure, transgressing linguistic and social boundaries of sexual expression. In *bezwstydnik* we find erotic poetry presented much more boldly than in the song lyrics on the album, and many readers were quite upset by it. It is, however, presented in a poetic intonation, expressing emotional states and governed by an oneiric poetics. Sex and dreams are related concepts in this poetry, through the principle of metonymic contiguity in people’s intimate lives. The problem of social (because they are presented theatrically, but also in a more general sense) gender roles and the transgression of social taboos by the subversive subject in *maria Awaria* directs us unambiguously toward the problems addressed in the field of gender studies (consider, for example, the poems “suka” (bitch) and “list kobiety do redakcji elle” (a woman’s letter to the editors of *elle*)).

Let us concentrate for a moment on Peszek’s genre specialization, which reveals the essence of her work in all its complexity. The “scandal sheet” is a quasi-genre invented for one-time use to describe a particular collection of texts, using a fictional genre definition and the inclusion of three “subgenres,” clearly demarcated both formally and thematically. The inventive genre designation for the book signals something more than simply one-time instances of poetic

<sup>27</sup>As the absence of the term “erotic” from basic anthologies testifies: for example, *Słownik terminów literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Terms) edited by J. Sławiński or *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* (Dictionary of Literary Types and Genres) edited by G. Gazda and S. Tynecka-Makowska.

speech, free of conventionalization, since they bear the status of a poetic cycle. The bold subject matter of the poems is reflected in the new, inventive form of erotic poem, also implying social provocation. To the seasoned reader, the names “Maria Breakdowns,” “marifacured” poems or “mad macramé” may recall, in their concision and linguistic adroitness, “liedowns,” “yawnings,” or “frivols.” I am deliberately invoking Białoszewski’s inventive approach to genre, because we find the closest analogy to Maria Peszek’s “scandal sheet” precisely in the work of that poet. Those eccentric and amusing genre names by the author of *Szumy, zlepy, ciaggi* are usually pseudonyms for the basic formula of his work – an intimate crypto-diary which is simultaneously a poetic creation distinct from the writer’s real, narrowly private, intimate diary.<sup>28</sup> In Peszek’s texts, as in Białoszewski’s, everyday life can be perceived as a dominant theme – in the “scandal sheet” it is embodied through a momentary genre. These impressions record momentary feelings, thoughts, reflections of reality – such as, for example, in the poem “skwar\_ek” (crack ling; a description of an urban heat wave) or “szczur” (rat; describing a mood on a cloudy day). This poetry is also linguistic – concentrated on wordplay, creating different kinds of neologisms, organized overall by rhyme, and using primarily spoken language, though unlike Białoszewski’s “chatter,” here it is mainly used to express intimacy.

Maria Peszek’s book displays one other trope inspired by the avant-garde, however, which has been overlooked in discussions or reviews of her recent work – the practice of poetic collaboration. Some texts on both of Peszek’s first albums and in the book *bezwstydnik* are credited as “feat. pjl,” a formulation revealed in the book to mean “featuring peter-jörg lachmann.” This credit directs us toward a forgotten neo-avant-garde poet from the generation of ‘56 (the generation of the journal *Współczesność* [Contemporary Life]), Piotr Lachmann, also a noted video theater artist, who worked in the past with both Jan and Maria Peszek.<sup>29</sup>

Maria Peszek’s invocation of the formula of such inventive genres represents a search for a more universal form, corresponding to contemporary cultural reality, including the entanglement of literary forms with media and performance, in a situation where traditional genre terms relating to literariness, theatricality, or musicality are simply insufficient. And, indeed, in this she follows a precedent set by Białoszewski, who was likewise an “active poet,” a performer – as his theatrical activities or the “chatter” of his poetry, recorded on tape, to later be remixed with musical accompaniment for release in 2014 as the four-CD collection *Białoszewski do słuchu* (Białoszewski for Listening) attest. Genres function as social institutions, reflecting not only artistic ideas but also the ideology of a given society, the historical moment.<sup>30</sup> One can therefore conjecture, as in the case of Peszek’s “scandal sheets,” that the lack of genre normativity, the blurring of the model’s clarity, and inventiveness can be expressions of rebellion, of social apostasy and a desire to polemicize with the society’s dominant

<sup>28</sup>See M. Głowiński, *Białoszewskiego gatunki codzienne*, 175.

<sup>29</sup>Piotr/Peter Lachmann is a curious figure, with a dual ethnic heritage (hence my keeping the artist’s preferred alternation of names) – poet, essayist, translator and theater director, born in 1936 in the German city of Gleiwitz (now the Polish city of Gliwice), a Silesian German who remained with his family in postwar Poland and made his poetic debut in Polish, before emigrating to Germany, where he published poetry in (among other places) Iwaszkiewicz’s magazine *Twórczość*, and translated Georga Büchner, Paul Celan, and E.T.A Hoffmann into Polish, as well as rendering Miłosz, Andrzejewski, Czapski, Kołakowski, Ingarden, Witkacy, and Różewicz (a friend of his) into German. In the 1980s he returned to Poland and created an unusual experimental video theater, *Poza* (Beyond), in Warsaw.

<sup>30</sup>See also T. Todorov, “O pochodzeniu gatunków”, trans. A. Labuda, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1979, 3, 313.

ideology. We are dealing here with **literature understood performatively** – such an inventive genre would be a form of activism, desiring change, exerting influence on the reader, and simultaneously accompanied by theatrical activity and a multimedia context, approaching the idea of experimental art (performance art) – similar, in fact, to what took place at the beginning of the twentieth century with the performances of the early avant-garde movements (the texts of the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, are difficult to interpret without taking into account the performative aspects of those formations' work and their theatricality).<sup>31</sup>

### Questions (and answers)

The scholarly proposal of constituting the concept of an inventive genre naturally leads to many questions and doubts that need to be discussed. I will briefly discuss some of them. There is the question of generic universality – the examples cited above are usually short forms, belonging to lyric poetry (though the examples of “card-indexes,” Parnicki's novels, or *Pałuba* would tend to indicate heterogeneous kinds of works). Recognition of the inventive genres I have discussed was made possible by the self-identification of works occurring in some kind of configuration (such as a cycle), representing the equivalent of the traditional principle for genre formation – repeatability. Can a singular work also be encompassed by the formula of the inventive genre – for example, Irzykowski's *Pałuba*? After all, aside from the lack of a clear paragenic title (though the idea of palubosity or palubicity was coined by Schulz), Irzykowski undoubtedly created that work in full consciousness of his genre innovation being one element in his formal experiment. What is more, *Pałuba* saw its line continued in the self-referential novel (above all in Andrzejewski's *Miazga* [Pulp]); similarly, Camus's *The Fall*, drawing from Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground*, initiated a series of texts in Polish literature based on the notion of a spoken monologue and a specific existential problem. Can older genres, marked by the traces of a particular author's work (of which the most famous would surely be the *essais* of Montaigne) be embraced by such a formula as well? And does the essay fit to the same extent as, for example, Anacreontic verse? And vice versa – if Różewicz's “card-index” had its ranks of imitators, would it cease to be an inventive genre, becoming simply a fully recognized genre? And does the category of inventive genres demand a deeper change in our theoretical thinking about literary forms? For the hitherto phantasmatic status of these works in genre theory is reminiscent of the situation in Stanisław Lem's story about the dragons of probability, who, as we know, do not exist, but each in its own way ...

<sup>31</sup>I have written more broadly on the media and performative context of this work in the article “‘bezwstydnik’ Marii Peszek – literatura jako performans” (Maria Peszek's “scandal sheet” – Literature as Performance) in *Literatura w mediach. Media w literaturze III. Nowe wizerunki* (Literature in the Media. Media in Literature III. New Images), ed. K. Taborska, W. Kuska, Gorzów Wielkopolski 2014, 115-134.

# KEYWORDS

## Polish literature

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### INVENTIVE GENRES

#### ABSTRACT:

In this article, the author considers the possibility of creating in genre studies a separate category of a genre of the moment – the inventive genre (*gatunek autorski*). He cites theoretical attempts within Polish genre studies to analyze the problem of how to accommodate authorial “inventions” within the study of genres – referring to works that manifest innovation and are exceptional with respect to genre, whether at the level of an individual work or a group of works by the same author, capable of being identified as a specific inventive genre. The point of the inquiry is thus to address instances of “one-time genres,” cases in which poetic license extends to the category of genre, situations where literary *inventio* is transferred to the paradigmatic level, particularly visible in the literature of the last century. Such analyses have been most evident in surveys of a particular author’s work – especially avant-garde and neo-avant-garde authors, including the Futurists, Julian Tuwim, Miron Białoszewski, Witold Wirpsza, and in humorous poetry by Wisława Szymborska and Stanisław Barańczak. The newest examples of inventive genres in the article are works collected in Maria Peszek’s book of poetry entitled *bezwstydnik* (scandal sheet), which also represents an intriguing example of how this kind of innovative genre specification can function in media and performative contexts.

# *Poetics of moment*

# Maria Peszek

genre

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