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## On the Necessity of Comparative Analysis in Genre Studies

Among the many methodological suggestions favoured in modern comparative studies there seems to be a conflict of two cognitive points of view: the “old” literature-oriented one and the “new” culture-oriented one. However, the contrast does not stem from the seemingly visible shift of focus, but it is rather of a systemic nature. It is connected with the increasingly vocal belief that comparative studies “[...] encompass [...] the intrinsically diverse area of culture while literature is indisputably just one of the elements in the vast, ever growing and diversifying area of culture” (Kasperski 75). Marking literature as the point of reference fundamentally changes its reception, as well as its role and potential. By adopting the culture-oriented perception of literature, it becomes one of the many units of culture, along with philosophy, the visual arts, music, politics, and many other products of human imagination and/or activity. According to Michał Kuziak, such an approach to comparative studies “[...] might allow us to retrieve the lost experience of multiculturalism [...]” (19). It is therefore a modern project of comparative studies worth implementing in Poland<sup>1</sup>, all the more so considering the long tradition of multiculturalism in Polish history (for example, the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

Moreover, a comprehensive perspective allows one to observe not only the links between the said fields of humanities, but also broader cultural processes, including both elite and mass phenomena. Currently, their descriptions contain the notion of ‘discourse’, which – understood in socio-cultural terms<sup>2</sup> – brings attention to shared tendencies captured in various oral or written utterances. It allows one to indicate the ‘interactive nature’ (Duszak 20) of different texts. Taking the idea even further, Mieczysław Dąbrowski notes that “[...] individuals have to resort to the role of commentators functioning in a system of discourses, thus expressing their own stand but also subjugating themselves to the discourses existing in their more or less immediate environment” (15). From this angle, the comparative discourse studies that he proposes seem not only a modern

<sup>1</sup> An interesting attempt to introduce culture-oriented comparative studies in Poland was made in the work *Słowacki postkolonialny*, edited by Michał Kuziak.

<sup>2</sup> The comprehensive notion of discourse has been discussed in many works such as: Howarth, *Discourse: Discourse variation across communities...*, ed. Okólska & Kowalski; and Gunnarsson, *Professional Discourse*.

strategy in comparative studies, which encompasses a vast area of culture, but mainly a number of many individual experiences. The experiences we all share, if only by participating in the cultural life, consuming (i.e. listening, reading, watching) selected cultural texts or phenomena and thinking about them.

However, the older terminology, such as 'comparative literature' and 'comparative literary studies,' continues to influence perception of the discipline. In Poland, it is still associated with literary theory and researched within philological faculties<sup>3</sup>. It is especially significant when we consider some educational institutions in Western Europe and the United States, where centres of comparative studies centres operate as independent faculties (e.g. the Faculty of Comparative Studies at the Ohio State University), and thus the domination of literary studies is restricted, at least from institutional point of view. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that the allegedly outdated perspective, which does lead to an unequal approach to other fields of humanities and, consequently, limits interdisciplinary studies, is also connected with the *tradition of close reading and interpretation* – a tradition worth preserving. This is especially true for close reading or hermeneutics and, in the case of comparative studies of different literatures, due to the required proficiency of being able to read source texts in at least three languages<sup>4</sup>. More advantages were the effect of rejecting "influenceology", which evidently burdened twentieth-century studies and, besides taking the blame for obsolete subject matter, it was also one of the main arguments against comparative studies as a discipline<sup>5</sup>. Moving away from focusing solely on mutual literary influences and interrelations, as well as thorough analysis of the text, are unquestionable assets to contemporary comparative literary studies, also in Poland. Note, for example, the erudite publications by the centre of comparative studies in Kraków (especially the series *Komparastyka polska. Tradycja i współczesność*<sup>6</sup>). It is interesting and noteworthy that the said works by no means

<sup>3</sup> The following departments gather academics specializing in comparative studies at Polish universities: the Department of Comparative Studies within the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw; the Department of Comparative Literary Studies within the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University; departments and centres of comparative studies within various Philology Faculties at the University of Wrocław etc.

<sup>4</sup> Linguistic competence in comparative studies is highlighted by many Western academics, whose papers were collected in an anthology *Niewspółmierność. Perspektywy nowoczesnej komparatystyki*, ed. Bilczewski. See: the article by Saussy "Exquisite Corpses from Fresh Nightmares: Of Memes, Hives and Selfish Genes".

<sup>5</sup> A concise account of the twentieth-century crisis in comparative studies and arguments against the discipline were given by Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková. See: "Wstęp", *Antologia zagranicznej komparatystyki literackiej*, ed. Janaszek-Ivaničková, 8–12.

<sup>6</sup> See some works from the series: *Dziedzictwo Odyseusza. Podróż, obcość i tożsamość, identyfikacja, przestrzeń*, eds. Cieśla-Korytowska, Płaszczewska; *Archipelag porównań. Szkice komparatystyczne*, ed. Cieśla-Korytowska; *Oblicza Narcyza. Obecność autora w dziele*, eds. Cieśla-Korytowska, Puchalska, Siwiec; *Woronow, Roman tyzna korespondencja sztuk: Stendhal, Hoffmann, Baudelaire, Norwid*; Pawlikowski, *Mistyka Słowackiego*, ed., introduction and comments by Cieśla-Korytowska; Sokalska, *Opera a dramat romantyczny*; M. Siwiec, *Roman tyzm i zatrzymany czas*; *Literatura a malarstwo, malarstwo a literatura. Panorama myśli polskiej XX wieku*, eds. Królikiewicz, Płaszczewska, Puchalska, Siwiec; *Przeźrenie komparatystyki. Italianizm*; *Persefona, czyli dwie strony rzeczywistości*, eds. Cieśla-Korytowska, Sokalska.

exhaust the potential of the traditional model of comparative studies, i.e. that rooted in literary studies. I could point out at least one area so far neglected by comparative studies, namely the branch of poetics dealing with literary genres and sub-genres.

The comparative aspect is present in genre studies if only in the very process of relating a work of literature to the formal model it realizes, refers to, or challenges. Such an understanding of the relationship between text and genre (constituting its archetypal text or prototype) was outlined in the already classic definition of intertextuality put forward by Ryszard Nycz in *Tekstowy Świat*:

"[...] the genre-related quality of the text is perceived as a kind of intertextual attribute achieved through stereotypical representation of the applied genre norms. It can be present and recognized by the reader only on the premise that there is a set of intertexts – partly potential, partly topical in literature – with which the analysed text shares qualities, which are both structural, semantic, and pragmatic" (69).

This simple truth draws attention to the fact that regardless of the controversies and methodological disputes surrounding the discipline or dominant trends, comparative potential can be found in virtually all domains of literary studies and can be effectively used in substantial analyses. Frankly speaking, one does not need fluency in three or more languages in order to achieve that. In other words, the comparative approach and its benefits seem more a question of sensitivity and scholarly insight rather than raising standards far above individual capabilities (in this sense, arguments against practitioners of comparative "know-it-all" remain valid<sup>7</sup>). Having said that, I personally believe that this sensitivity would be better employed in practical reading skills and, in the case of literary studies, in conducting research towards a greater understanding of the theory and history of literature. There I would still see a chance for comparative studies focused on literary texts, but using modern tools and conceptual framework. The results could be interesting also as a point of departure (this time one of many) for culture studies, say genre-oriented cultural studies, but this time expanded into various cultural domains (connected with language, image, sound etc.).

Yet, I would like to stress that the application of the comparative method, if only to genre studies, may lead to numerous illuminating and much needed insights. In this paper, I want to concentrate on presenting only a few representative examples, which are by no means exhaustive, but nevertheless allow one ascertain the importance of the notions they illustrate. I find the literature of Romanticism, with its creative attitude

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<sup>7</sup> The criticism often stems from a misunderstanding of the principles and aims of comparative studies (sometimes perceived as a "know-it-all" discipline imposing excessive and thus unrealistic requirements on its practitioners). More on that issue can be found in the abovementioned anthology edited by Bilczewski. However, it is advisable to read this text with considerable skepticism.

rooted in liberty and originality, especially conducive to analysis. The dominant notion of that period was the idea of an open form constructed by means of unhindered absorption of miscellaneous genre elements (such as elegy, song or ballad) or formal elements (lyric, epic or drama). The genre's identity is thus questioned. On the one hand, traditional literary forms (such as the sonnet, ode, epic, tragedy etc.) are still present, but they are reassessed<sup>8</sup> and, notably, liberated. This newfound liberty can be traced through new components (both genre-based and aesthetic, in artistic expression), including those which subvert the genre structure established in previous periods. Moreover, in the hands of the Romantics, some familiar genres assumed functions traditionally attributed to other genres. Such was the case of the sonnet, which was at times elevated to the status of the epic poem. The idea was to not only imbue this particular lyrical genre with epic features (descriptions, narration etc.), but also to create a cohesive collection capable of telling a whole story, one that was important to a certain community or nation and possessed the force of war chronicles (for example, *Sonety wojenne* by Stefan Gątczyński). Such a collection could also resemble a quasi-documentary (for example the journey-inspired *The Crimean Sonnets* by Adam Mickiewicz). Such modifications have impact on the perception of a genre, pollute it, and draw attention to its highly interactive nature. Consequently, in order to identify its current "genre core"<sup>9</sup> we must take into account contextual genres it interacts with (in the case of the Romantic sonnet, that would mean the epic poem, documentary, or chronicle, and possibly many others).

Conversely, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of new forms (such as the poetic novel, digressive poem, folk tale, and Romantic drama) formed on the border between traditional literary forms. Apart from an open structure, they execute the principle of associative content arrangement or, according to Marek Stanisiz, "imaginative' argumentation" (271). Moreover, on an aesthetic level, they often introduce the effect of dissonance, deriving, for example, from a combination of the tragic and the comic, the glorified and the grotesque etc. In consequence, genre-focused analysis should be based on those contextual genres and styles/languages<sup>10</sup>, the elements of which are present in the given forms. I would like to illustrate this argument with the notion of the folk tale, the flexibility of which was observed by its very first critics and readers.

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<sup>8</sup> Romantic disputes about the epic poem and drama are presented and analysed in: Maciejewski, "Epos jako wartość", *Poetyka. Gatunek – obraz. W kręgu poezji romantycznej; Szturc, Teoria dramatu romantycznego w Europie w XIX w.*

<sup>9</sup> The term was coined by Ireneusz Opacki. See: "Ballada literacka – opis gatunku", *Ballada*.

<sup>10</sup> The term "style/language" is used here as defined by Stanisław Balbus in *Między stylami*.

Krzysztof Stępnik argues that:

“they identify the folk tale with a mobile form realized in various genres. Actually, it is this mobility that spurs the critics’ disbelief and makes them question the artistic value of the folk tale. As its genre constants are somewhat transparent and relatively unstable, it is the mobile, receptive, “convenient” and thus, as many critics argue, opportunistic form that constitutes the essence of the folk tale” (19).

As a result, the primary consistent marker of style is a colloquial, oral narrative structure, and the only natural type of a narrator is a nobleman-storyteller. Such a flexible genre structure means that the folk tale can be created not only at the intersection of prose (*vide* rhyming folk tales by Wincenty Pol, Władysław Syrokomla, Antoni Edward Odyńec, and Teofil Lenartowicz, just to mention the most eminent authors), but also on the border between various genre forms. In many folk tales, we can find examples of works interacting with lyrical genres (such as a song), epic genres (novel, poetic novel, parable, legend etc.), dramatic genres (e.g. plays), and syncretic genres (such as a ballad). By precisely identifying genre contexts of the Romantic folk tale and placing them on a common comparative ground, it is possible to grasp the web of connections and the accompanying mechanisms (the overlapping or domination of some genre models etc.). They influence both the overall (assumed, abstract) shape of a given genre and the practical form of its execution. This way, knowledge about the processes conducive to creating new genre models in Romanticism is expanded into further findings and conclusions, while new questions can prove a challenge and/or point of departure for subsequent generations of scholars.

Finally, there is a large group of Romantic works which function without any distinctive genre identification, such as poems by Maurycy Gosławski (1802–1834). Jacek Lyszczyna in his monograph on Gosławski stresses the genre hybridity of the poet’s rhymed epic (*Podole*, pub. 1828; *Tęsknota*, written in 1827–1833; *Odstępca albo renegat. Fantazja*, unabridged version pub. 1859; *Banko. Fantazja*).

“[...] the question of typological association [...] of this type of work becomes simply invalid. For we cannot speak of its<sup>11</sup> *typological association* understood as being listed under a particular literary genre, but only of its *typological structure*, meaning the coexistence of various typological and, consequently, also genre patterns within the work itself and within its structure. In this case, an analysis of typological structure is not aimed at identifying the appropriate type that the work should be listed under, but rather at determining and describing the arrangement of the internal patterns and conventions, their correlations and interrelationships, as well as their impact on the interpretation of the text as a whole” (81).

<sup>11</sup> This is particularly applicable to the poem *Tęsknota*, but to a large extent also to other works by Gosławski.

I believe that the most efficient analysis of those poems is a comparative study placing them in the context of the genres (and their representative texts) that they interact with, thus demonstrating shifts and modifications within the genre pattern. In this way, we can avoid the helpless act (and a scholarly fiasco) of resorting to such a broad term as typological and genre syncretism. In the case of Gościński's *Podole. Poemat opisowy w czterech częściach* (Eng. *Podole: A Descriptive Poem in Four Parts*), which according to all experts exceeds the framework of a descriptive poem (contrary to the genre identity declared in the subtitle – see: *Słownik literatury polskiej XIX wieku*, the entry on the “descriptive poem”), the relevant contexts are the poetic novel, the folk tale, and some lyrical and dramatic forms<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, *Wacław* by Stefan Garczyński can be situated in the context of the poetic novel, Romantic drama, descriptive poem, and confessional poetry. (This text is discussed fully in: Wnuk, “W kręgu romantycznej genologii...”). Interestingly, this issue applies not only to particular works or certain Romantic forms. Quite the contrary, the tendency pervades all Romantic works. It becomes conspicuous even in the pre-Romantic period, when two given genres – the descriptive poem (its agrarian variety in particular) and the idyll (pastoral) – gradually gravitate towards each other, also in terms of generalized thinking about the genres (for instance by Hugo Kołłątaj, Franciszek Morawski, and Kazimierz Brodziński<sup>13</sup>), who all accord those forms higher literary merit than was previously the case) and begin to share artistic premises and elements of composition<sup>14</sup>.

Describing the said genres requires more tools than just the theory of the evolution of forms developed by Ireneusz Opacki and his school<sup>15</sup>. This approach is limited to the diachronic aspect (and in this area it is efficient) and cannot be employed in synchronic research aimed at showing interactions and mechanisms of the parallel

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<sup>12</sup> For further information on this subject, see: *Słownik literatury polskiej...* For instance: “The four parts of *Podole* are so distinct from one another in terms of subjects and topics of descriptions, genre structures, types of narration, and yet they form one logical, organic and complete unity. So there are: *Piękność Podola* – a descriptive poem with its typical narration mode, *Wesele gminne podolskie* – a sequence of scenes with dramatized descriptions of the people, its customs, songs, rites, *Klęski Podola* – an insight into history through folk memory, which preserves history in stories and legends, presented by means of an epic narration situated within a dramatic setting and modelled on the poetic novel and the folk tale. Finally, *Pożegnanie* – a personal statement of the narrator, a speaker-like figure focusing the reader’s attention on his memories, experiences, and emotions”. (36)

<sup>13</sup> See: *Słownik literatury polskiego Odrodzenia*, the entry on “pastoral”.

<sup>14</sup> See: Witkowska, “*Stawianie, my lubim sielanki...*”. She argues, “A descriptive poem has never before so openly manifested its bonds with the idyll as it is visible on the level of petty ideals and visions of happiness, comfort, and beauty of life. Except, it remains conscious of the values of work and utility. Thus, it is an idyll of good farmers. It is based on an undisturbed harmony of interests between the lord and his feudal subjects. The master respects the peasants and protects their interests, and they in turn are devoted workers and advisors” (106).

<sup>15</sup> Currently, the theory of the evolution of genres is used by Witold Sadowski in his study of the litany – *Litania i poezja*.

overlapping of several genre patterns. The comparative studies of literary genres advocated here is also an attempt to explain the notions of genre and typological syncretism, as well as to describe its manifestations and mechanisms for combining different components within one work. The other idea behind this kind of comparative approach is a desire to trace the network of genre references and understand the choice of particular elements. I believe this method could be successfully applied to contemporary literature, where the appearance of such forms as *silva rerum* or genres connected with the emerging new media (such as the hypertext novel) provokes new questions about the texts' genre identity and its characteristics. The last example enables one to break away from an "outdated" literature-oriented domain and expand comparative studies into all areas of culture, ones that abound in semiotic contexts, interacting with the hypertext novel and other Internet-inspired genres.

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Roussanka Alexandrova-Nowakowska, *Space 3*