

Things to Be Read. The 70th Anniversary of the Department of Literary Theory at the University of Lodz (1945–2015)

People and legends — that is what makes the history of an academic institution. Nevertheless, pinpointing the moment when an individual becomes a legend is not an easy task — it is not necessarily the flicker between life and death, neither a social advancement, nor academic promotion. Nevertheless, reading about the history of an institution differs significantly from writing about it. When faced with the latter, rarely do we have the opportunity to write about people whom we know personally. Therefore it is not difficult to stray into a rather sentimental mood thus creating a panegyric similar to dozens of the like that have already been created on similar occasions. In order to avoid such a tendency, one should rather make the reader acquainted with the described individuals — to follow the history of the institution and the people who had created it. Although to some of those individuals I refer later on as legends, the presented story is deeply rooted in actual history that can be easily documented with adequate sources¹. Therefore, the origins of the word *legendus* are put on the shelf and all we are left with is its literal meaning: things to be read (what is emphasized here on purpose).

The Department of Literary Theory at the University of Lodz was established seventy years ago. Those were seven decades of hard work, passion and commitment by many individuals. I, personally, had the honour to meet only a small number of them. At the beginning, the institution was strongly influenced by Stefania Skwarczyńska² — a professor, theatrolologist, comparatist, “the first lady of Polish literary theory” and a legend. Providing a list of a great number of her works and publications does not serve as an explanation of why Professor Skwarczyńska shall be deemed a legend — after all, accomplishments and awards do not immediately secure a place in the hall of legends. When we think of prof. Skwarczyńska, rarely do we compile a list of references to her works in our minds (at best, we think of her most renowned publications from a familiar academic field: *Teoria listu* [Eng. *The Theory of the Letter*] 1937, *Z teorii literatury cztery rozprawy* [Eng. *Four Studies on Literary Theory*] 1947, two

¹ The article presented article is drawn on an extensive list of references that served as the basis for another jubilee publication *Historia i trwanie. 60 lat Katedry Teorii Literatury — Instytutu Teorii Literatury, Teatru i Sztuki Audiovizualnych Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego (1945–2005)*, Lodz 2005.

² Stefania Skwarczyńska, 1902–1988, Ph.D. 1925, Ph.D. hab. 1937, Prof. Ordinarius 1957.

volumes of *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze* [Eng. *Introduction to Literary Studies*] in 1954 and the third volume in 1965, *W kręgu wielkich romantyków polskich* [Eng. *Great Polish Romantics*] 1966), but rather imagine a beautiful and charismatic woman surrounded with a cloud of cigarette smoke, who easily captures the attention of students, no matter what their sex or age is, and inspires them to such a degree that this image prevails also in the minds of the next generations.

Stefania Skwarczyńska and the notion of literary theory seem inseparable: in 1937, University of Jan Kazimierz in Lviv — the first Polish doctoral thesis in literary theory; in 1945 — the first university department devoted to literary theory. Although since 1939 Skwarczyńska was the head of the Department of Literary History and Theory at the Free Polish University, it is the year 1945 (when the University of Lodz and the Department of Literary Theory were established) that is considered also the beginning of our institution.

In order to grasp how the Department established by Skwarczyńska looked like in the late 1940s and 1950s, we shall first recall memories not available at hand for people born and brought up in the age of (almost) ubiquitous freedom of speech and the freedom to conduct academic research. Let's just say that due to political pressure, the activities of the Department of Literary Theory were once 'suspended'. Only after the so-called Polish thaw³ it became possible to grant Stefania Skwarczyńska the title of Professor Ordinarius (1957) and to resume academic and didactic work at a legally acknowledged institution. This moment in the history of the Department clearly shows the importance of the Lodz centre and contributes not only to the legend of the Department but also to the legend of Professor Skwarczyńska herself.

The next decades are known for extensive research in the fields of film and theatre, which eventually had a strong impact on how the Department of Literary Theory is later perceived by the next generations of students and academics. In 1959, the Department of Film Studies was established and Bolesław W. Lewicki⁴ whom was appointed its head — the Department was the first academic centre for film studies in Poland. In 1967, the Department of Drama and Theatre emerged from the Department, and was then headed by Stanisław Kaszyński⁵. The three abovementioned legendary individuals formed the so-called "Lodz experiment" that later developed into the "Lodz model". Here we may find the origins of the Department that currently operates as the Institute for Contemporary Culture — an open, interdisciplinary centre. *Innovativeness* seems to be therefore a *traditional* approach of the institution (if such a paradoxical relation may exist), and the history of the Department clearly shows that it actually works well. The "Lodz model" of academic and didactic work, adopted later on by other Polish academic centres, was based on the idea that literary studies constitute the terminological basis and act as a starting point for the debate on relations between literature, theatre and film. Such a comparatist approach would not be possible if it was not for the cooperation of people who were open-minded, ready to face any challenges, committed and charismatic. Just as Stefania Skwarczyńska is considered a legend by literary theoreticians and historians, the memories of Bolesław W. Lewicki and Stanisław Kaszyński are treasured by film studies scholars and theatrologists.

³ Polish October, also known as *October 1956*, *Polish thaw*, or *Gomułka's thaw*, marked a change in the politics of Poland in the second half of 1956, that resulted in the liberalisation of political system, freeing political prisoners and a change in power.

⁴ Bolesław W. Lewicki, 1908–1981, Ph. D. 1938, Associate Professor 1959, Professor Extraordinarius 1970.

⁵ Stanisław Kaszyński, 1927–1988, Ph. D. 1958, Ph. D. hab. 1966, Associate Professor 1968, Professor Extraordinarius 1974.

Professor Lewicki is remembered as an outstanding lecturer and an educator of several generations of young researchers. Lodz film studies evolved thanks to his ability to grasp and understand the direction towards which the then contemporary culture was headed. Film appeared in the minds of academics thanks to Lewicki's persistence. His connections with Roman Ingarden — the renowned promoter of film theory — and securing his patronage, helped introduce this scholarly discipline into the university. In the case of Lewicki, the openness toward intellectual challenges (along with his best known academic publications: *Wprowadzenie do wiedzy o filmie* [Eng. *Introduction to Film Studies*] 1964 or *Scenariusz. Literacki program struktury filmowej* [Eng. *Script. Literary Program of Film Structure*] 1970, among others) became the pinnacle of his heritage, which still strongly influences the form of our Institute. He was the verbal advocate of a *café* as a place for academic discussion — with no distance between the interlocutors, far from the *ex cathedra* style. And today, as culture and education are still present in the city of Lodz, non-academic initiatives remain a part of the Institute's activities.

The Department of Drama and Theatre developed under the auspices of Stanisław Kaszyński, who is famous for his meticulousness and passionate documenting of public life. His research on Polish provincial theatre (*Dzieje sceny kaliskiej 1800–1914* [Eng. *History of the Kalisz Scene 1800–1914*] 1962 or *Teatr łódzki w latach 1945–1962* [Eng. *Lodz Theatre in Years 1945–1962*] 1967) reflected Kaszyński's sense of discipline and persistence. However, students and the academic community remember him slightly different than Skwarczyńska or Lewicki — when we think of Professor Kaszyński we see a researcher, a theatre historian, who considers archives and library as the places of ultimate inspiration. His subtlety and tenderness visible in his academic career are reflected also in his literary work — for he was not only a theatrologist but also a poet (*Poszukiwanie krajobrazu* [Eng. *Searching for the Landscape*] 1963; *Krąg najbliższy* [Eng. *The Closest Circle*] 1984).

In 1973, the Department of Literary Theory became the Institute of Literature, Theatre and Film, which until September 30, 1973, was headed by Stefania Skwarczyńska. Later, the Institute was headed respectively by Professor Lewicki, Kaszyński and Grzegorz Gazda⁶, who first held the post until 1981 and later since 1997. In the years 1981–1997, the Institute was managed by Teresa Cieślukowska⁷. During the next thirty years after the change in name of the Department/Institute, its structure also underwent some changes — nonetheless, it always consisted of three segments (related to literature, film or theatre). Professor Gazda continued the tradition of the “Lodz model” until his retirement in 2014. By this time he already managed to establish himself as a legend and lay foundations for a strong academic centre by closely following the new trends in literature and film. His private and professional interests contributed to a great number of publications (*Futuryzm w Polsce* [Eng. *Polish Futurism*] 1974, *Awangarda — nowoczesność i tradycja* [Eng. *Avant-Garde — Modernity and Tradition*] 1986, *Słownik europejskich kierunków i grup literackich XX wieku* [Eng. *Dictionary of European Movements and Literary Groups in the 20th Century*] 2000, *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* [Eng. *Dictionary of Literary Genres*] 2006). From a students' perspective, the most impressive is, however, Gazda's gift for narration. He was also famous for being extremely well-read — in texts on audiovisual culture included. Grzegorz Gazda is a great example of how individuals

⁶ Grzegorz Gazda, born 1943, Ph. D. 1972, Ph. D. hab. 1986, Associate Professor 1987, Professor Extraordinarius 1991, Professor 2002, Professor Ordinarius 2004.

⁷ Teresa Cieślukowska, born 1926, Ph. D. 1963, Ph. D. hab. 1967, Associate Professor 1968, Professor Extraordinarius 1975, Professor Ordinarius 1991.

shape places and leave their legacy not only for the use of the institutions they work for, but also for the next generations. The legacy of Stefania Skwarczyńska is perfectly reflected in the person of professor Gazda — he carried on her key (from the point of view of people interested in the literary theory/history) project for many years.

Studies in genology, initiated by Professor Skwarczyńska, are one of the major accomplishments of the Lodz theoretical movement. Her thesis, *Teoria listu*, shows her profound interest in genres — what is interesting, it went beyond literary genres onto applied literature hence applied genres. Skwarczyńska's works on genology and a claim to include applied forms of expression in academic studies appeared at the same time as the publications by Mikhail Bakhtin on speech genres. However, 1950s and 1960s were not the best time to make Polish research available Europe-wide — Skwarczyńska's works were not popularised outside of Poland for a long time. Nevertheless, her research was flourishing within the Department — in 1958, the first issue of *The Problems of Literary Genres* was published.

The journal launched by Stefania Skwarczyńska, Jan Trzynadlowski and Witold Ostrowski was initially designed as part of a bigger genologic project and was aimed to make the study available internationally. Every issue of *The Problems of Literary Genres*, published every six months, featured findings that were meant to be later published in a dictionary of literary genres. Although the dictionary was not published under the auspices of professor Skwarczyńska, the project was further developed and completed by professor Gazda in cooperation with Słownia Tynecka-Makowska as *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* (first edition in 2006; new edition in 2012). Dictionary entries published in *The Problems of Literary Genres* to this day are simply excerpts from academic articles, later presented as an overview of a given genre/term. Aside from the dictionary part, since 1958 the journal features also articles by literary scholars from around the world. It is a multilingual platform for dialogue between comparatists, literary theoreticians and historians from various Eastern and Western countries. The role of Editor-in-Chief of the journal was served by: Stefania Skwarczyńska (1958–1988), Jan Trzynadlowski (1989–1995), Grzegorz Gazda (1996–2010), and since 2011, Jarosław Pluciennik⁸. While maintaining the current policy of the periodical, Professor Pluciennik extended its scope — now, the journal features articles related to cultural studies, diverging from the traditional literary context. Since its beginning, *The Problems of Literary Genres* is published regularly (except for a short disruption in the 1980s) and maintains a high level of academic scrutiny. The journal does not only provide its readers associated with the Department of Literary Theory with an undeniable scholarly value of a sentimental manner, but it is also a symbol — the journal guarantees that the legacy of Stefania Skwarczyńska, her associates and followers will not cease to exist. The Lodz heritage of genologic studies became the hallmark of our centre.

Currently, the Department of Literary Theory is a part of the Institute of Contemporary Culture at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Lodz — until 2014 the Department was headed by professor Gazda, now the office is held by Professor Pluciennik. Aside from the Department of Literary Theory, the Institute consists also of the Department of Drama and Theatre headed by Małgorzata Leyko⁹ (who is also the Head of the Institute since 2012)

⁸ Jarosław Pluciennik, born 1966, Ph.D. 1999, Ph.D. hab. 2003, Professor Ordinarius 2009.

⁹ Małgorzata Leyko, born 1955, Ph. D. 1988, Ph. D. hab. 2002, Professor Extraordinarius at the University of Lodz 2005.

and the School of Media and Audiovisual Culture headed by Ryszard W. Kluszczyński¹⁰. In the years 2005–2014, within the Department of Literary Theory a Workshop of the Jewish Language and Culture was headed by professor Gazda (thanks to his suggestion, in 2013, the University of Lodz granted an honorary degree to an outstanding Israeli writer Amos Oz). The Workshop of Literary Anthropology is still, however, a part of the Institute — it is headed by Joanna Ślósarska¹¹. Neither scholarly, nor didactic work of the Department of Literary Theory are limited to a purely theoretical approach. And this is precisely what makes the centre appealing to young researchers — it does not only combine literary theory with history, but also eliminates the traditional artificial division to theory and practice. The academics and students are engrossed in how literary theory develops, and how interdisciplinary it may be (now it may actually combine such disciplines as cultural studies, linguistics, psychology or anthropology). Within the Department emerged a specialization in *creative writing* focused on giving even greater insight into theory and developing the writing skills of students. New opportunities for cultural studies interest not only for employees of the School of Media and Audiovisual Culture — the Department of Literary Theory is also open to issues of modern education or digitalization of education and culture. Currently, thanks to the efforts of and under the auspices of Professor Pluciennik a number of international projects is carried out in the following areas: innovative approaches to the cooperation between universities and business, creative methods of education, studies on readership. The perspective of a literary scholar, a cultural studies researcher, a historian of ideas and a cognitivist enable the professor to adequately diagnose the directions of development of modern culture and education hence to anticipate the needs of the current and prospective students. Since recently, in the aforementioned *The Problems of Literary Genres* one may find also articles on the issues of new media and its impact on literature and readership. Moreover, thanks to the efforts of Artur Galkowski¹² (thesis supervisor) and Jarosław Pluciennik (reviewer), the Senate of the University of Lodz adopted a resolution on granting the honorary doctorate to Umberto Eco, a distinguished semiotician and writer¹³.

Numerous scholarly and educational projects, academic conferences, publications, various activities that contribute to the development of the humanities and culture — all this constitutes the Department of Literary Theory and makes young students, who are still at the very beginning of their academic career, feel that they are at the centre of academic life. Suddenly, they feel the urge to absorb as much knowledge as possible. This is not, however, a disheartening sensation, rather a motivation to act and see how the situation develops. It is possible thanks to people who create the Department. For it is their experience, charisma, passion and knowledge that help keep a firm grasp on reality. By listening to or reading about long-gone legends, we recall times when professors were always there to offer some advice, who supported young researchers. Professors who were respected and at the same time were a source of inspiration. Those recollections are undoubtedly full of sentiment, but they lack nostalgia, as nothing has really changed that much. Nowadays, we still have our mentors — people who still create the legend of the Department of Literary Theory every day.

¹⁰ Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, born 1952, Ph. D. 1987, Ph. D. hab. 1999, Professor 2003.

¹¹ Joanna Ślósarska, born 1953, Ph. D. 1978, Ph. D. hab. 1998, Professor Extraordinarius 1999, Professor 2005, Professor Ordinarius 2007.

¹² Prof. Artur Galkowski Ph. D. hab., Department of Italian Studies, University of Lodz.

¹³ The ceremony of awarding the title of Doctor *Honoris Causa* took place on 24th May 2015 in Lodz.

The history of our Institute in one which was faced with many changes — a change of structure, profile, sometimes even a change of location. Professor Lewicki valued cafés as places for academic debate, in the 1960s extracurricular meetings were organised in Stefania Skwarczyńska's private house, not to mention that the Department itself changed its headquarters several times. The tenement house on 21 Sienkiewicza Street (until recently the headquarters of German Philology of the University of Lodz) is a significant location in the history of our centre — one of its lecture halls was named after Stefania Skwarczyńska and the building itself holds many memories. Until last year, the Department was located in Alfred Biedermann's Palace at the corner of Franciszkańska and Północna Streets — a modernistic building with a few classicistic elements constructed between 1910–1912. In 1998 it became the property of the University of Lodz, which renovated the Palace. Finally, the academic year of 2014/2015 was the first year of the Department in the new building of the Faculty of Philology located on 171/173 Pomorska Street. The building, designed as a part of the campus of the University of Lodz, is the effect of a fusion of modern design and the textile tradition of Lodz.

No matter where the Department of Literary Theory is located — in a monumental palace or in a modern construction made of concrete and glass — it is always a place that was created by Stefania Skwarczyńska and other professors. At the same time, thanks to the traditional openness to new challenges (Professor Lewicki), persistence in making history (Professor Kaszyński) or passion and charisma (Professor Skwarczyńska), it continues to change before the very eyes of the several generations of students and academics. It is therefore an extraordinary opportunity for young scholars to indulge in the history of an institution, when they can actually see the footprints of their predecessors and feel the presence of the old and contemporary legends around them.

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(translated by OLGA ŁABENDOWICZ)