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The Institute of Literary Studies - its present day and prospects

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Articles

Mieczysław Klimowicz

The Institute of Literary Studies – Its Present Day and Prospects

The Institute of Literary Studies¹ was founded in November 1948 and in 1952 became a part of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The Institute, the first national literary research centre in the Polish People's Republic, was established during the days of the post-war reconstruction and development of Poland's scientific life. At that time, Polish literary research was expected to carry out extremely difficult methodological, organizational and didactic tasks stemming from the country's social and cultural revolution. The members of the new literary research centre fully accepted those tasks and engaged in polemics against the non-Marxist approach to literature. They initiated interpretative and editorial works and laid the foundation for the modern organization of our discipline. From the beginning, the Institute has been engaged in the training of a new staff and participated in the activities of university centres. The foundation and the effective functioning of the Institute ever since can be explained by the fact that the need for such an institution had actually been felt much earlier.

The idea of a modern centre, initiating and organizing scientific work, already appeared before World War II among the radical students of the Learned Society of Polish Philologists at the University of Warsaw. Their opposition to scholarly conservatism and open protest against the growing fascist tendencies of the mid-30's

¹ In 1978 the Institute of Literary Studies will have existed for thirty years. In connection with this anniversary the present volume opens with an article by Professor Mieczysław Klimowicz about the structure of our Institute and the main trends of research conducted by it. The author is the head of the Institute of Literary Studies.

formed common ground for criticizing the state of scholarship at the time and called for new solutions which would revolutionize both the type of studies and their ideological direction.

One of the most active members of the Society recalls:

“To these young people the renewal of literary study was to stem from the criticism of Positivism, from Marxism and the scientific sociology of literature based on precise theoretical results of linguistically understood poetics, or morphology of the literary work, free from critical impressionism” — S. Żółkiewski, *Z historii IBL (From the History of the Institute of Literary Studies)*, “Biuletyn Polonistyczny”. No. 49, p. 18.

From the start, the activity of the Institute concentrated on three main spheres: the study of the history of Polish literature, the study of the literary work in all its various aspects, and a wide programme of bibliographic, documentary and lexicographic works. Moreover, from the very beginning the Institute of Literary Studies performed a double function: as an executive organ fulfilling specialized scientific tasks, especially those which could not be carried out, owing to the lack of appropriately trained staff, either by individual academic workers or even by Warsaw University which was overtaken with didactic activities; and secondly, as an organizer of academic life, especially in the sphere of research, editorial works, scientific conferences, supervising Ph.D. theses, etc. These scientific and social functions, suitably developed and modernized, are still performed by the Institute.

Although over the last few years a number of young people has joined the highly specialized staff of our Institute, we still need young scholars whom we could specialize in both “deficient” disciplines and those not taught by university centres which find them not very useful. In order to help solve this problem the Institute has its own Ph.D. courses: a full-time course for 13 persons, to be completed in February 1977, another for 21 persons who started their course in September 1976, and a part-time Ph.D. course for school teachers (19 persons).

The Department of the History of Polish Literature is engaged in the systematic study of our literary tradition from its beginning to the days of the Young Poland Movement. For many years the Department has been preparing an academic manual *Historia litera-*

tura polskiej (*The History of Polish Literature*) which, consisting of nine volumes, is to be a synthesis of Polish literature. It is the result of joint scientific and organizational efforts supervised by the Institute's Board. So far, under the supervision of the editor-in-chief, Professor Kazimierz Wyka, volumes on: the Renaissance (by J. Ziomek), the Baroque (by C. Hernas) and the Enlightenment (by M. Klimowicz) have been published. The fact that the volumes have already run to two editions (a third is expected soon) and that their authors have been awarded high academic prizes proves the success and usefulness of this undertaking. The unexpected and untimely death of Professor Wyka has complicated the work on *Historia literatury polskiej*, as the Professor himself was preparing two volumes. Despite this set-back, the volume on Positivism (by H. Markiewicz) will soon be published and the work on Romanticism (by M. Janion and M. Żmigrodzka) is well advanced.

As a supplement to the above *Historia literatury polskiej* there will be further three volumes, in the form of synthetic essays, entitled *Historia literatury polskiej 1918–1975* (*The History of Polish Literature 1918–1975*). This will be the first attempt at presenting contemporary Polish literature. One volume has already been published and the second is being prepared.

Another important work, initiated by the Institute is the three-volume synthesis *Dzieje literatury polskiej* (*A History of Polish Literature*) which covers the entire history of Polish literature, including contemporary times. The publication is mainly intended for students and teachers of Polish. According to its editor-in-chief, Professor Jerzy Ziomek, it should appear in 1978.

For the last two decades the Department has been preparing a multi-volume series *Obraz Literatury Polskiej XIX i XX w.* (*An Outline of 19th–20th Century Polish Literature*) which presents the literary history of these two centuries in the form of an encyclopaedia of writers. Apart from an essay on the literary achievements of each writer there is an extensive anthology of his work and a bibliography. The above series, which also contains essays on less known writers, is an excellent and highly appreciated guide to Polish contemporary literature.

Problemy literatury polskiej (*Problems of Polish Literature*) is a series in the form of an academic manual, soon to be completed, pre-

pared by the joint efforts of all sections of the Institute dealing with the history of literature. The collective publication contains cross-sections of successive Polish literary epochs and is arranged in such a way as to provide both students and literary scholars with a systematized survey of the most important problems of a given epoch. So far the following volumes from this series have been published: three volumes on the problems of old-Polish literature, two on the Enlightenment, two on Romanticism (the preparation of the third is under way) and two devoted to Polish literature from 1918 to 1939. Together with the University of Warsaw and other centres the next two volumes, on Polish Positivist literature, are being prepared.

The Department of the History of Polish Literature is divided into sections, each dealing with a successive literary period: old-Polish literature, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Young Poland. The Department, however, still lacks an independent section on Positivism, which does not mean that the Institute has not yet dealt with this literary epoch. There are several prominent specialists in this field. Among the many editorial works on Positivism we can find such important ones as the complete edition of Bolesław Prus' *Kroniki (Chronicles)* in twenty volumes, the letters of Eliza Orzeszkowa (eight volumes based on the Orzeszkowa Archives which are in the Institute), the letters of Henryk Sienkiewicz (vol. I has been completed), and the participation in the editing of Maria Konopnicka's letters. The long tradition of the Institute's research into Polish Positivism, as well as its present works covering this period (an academic handbook on Positivism and two volumes of a collective work, *Problemy literatury pozytywizmu—Problems of Literature of Positivism*) allow us to hope that in the near future a section devoted to problems of this important literary period will be formed. On making a survey of the activities of the Institute's Department of the History of Polish Literature it is necessary to mention the work of a group of scholars from the Section of Old-Polish Literature who prepare monographs on the works of the prominent writers of the period. There are also two sections dealing with the problems of the Enlightenment, one in Warsaw and the other in Wrocław. The Warsaw section is mainly concerned with the general problems of this period while in Wrocław they are continuing Professor Ta-

deusz Mikulski's tradition, i.e. carrying out editorial work and studying the Enlightenment from the philological point of view. The Department of the History of Polish Literature includes also a group of scholars dealing with the psychosociology of literature, who specialize in the study of stereotypes of historical consciousness which have entered into literary works.

Closely connected with the activities of the Department of the History of Polish Literature is a nation-wide scholarly publication issued by the Institute of Literary Studies, "Pamiętnik Literacki" (Literary Diary), a quarterly which has been coming out for 75 years.

The Institute's Department of Poetics and Contemporary Literature consists of a Section of Theoretical Poetics and Artistic Language, a Section of Historical Poetics, two Contemporary Literature Sections and the editorial office of the bimonthly "Teksty" (Texts). The work of this Department is connected with contemporaneity. The research on contemporary literature has revealed that the effectiveness of studies in this sphere depends, to a great extent, on the close coordination of methodological research with the study of the history of literature, and that a systematic study of literary genetics (and poetics in general) should be combined with the study of the theory of language and the literary work.

The Department of Poetics and Contemporary Literature prepares, among others, academic manuals and teaching aids, to mention only the many-volumed *Poetyka. Zarys Encyklopedyczny* (Poetics. An Encyclopaedic Outline) and successive volumes of *Vademecum Polonisty* (The *Vademecum* of a Polish Language and Literature Specialist) six of which have been published so far, as well as many valuable monographs on the theory of the text, on comparative Slavonic metrics, linguistic semantics, the theory and history of stylistics, the generic systematics of Polish literature, studies of the literary techniques of prominent contemporary writers and well examined problems of the development of literature. *Słownik terminów literackich* (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms*), published in 1976, may serve as an example of the works carried out by the Department for didactic purposes. The *Dictionary* is the first comprehensive Polish publication of this kind and represents a high level of contemporary scholarly achievement.

The series *Z Dziejów Form Artystycznych w Literaturze Polskiej* (From the History of Artistic Forms in Polish Literature), which has been coming out for 20 years now and of which 45 volumes had been published by the end of 1976, is a result of both the Department's activities and its vital cooperation with the entire Polish philological milieu.

The Department for Studies of Literary Culture also deals with contemporary literature, examining literary phenomena in their functional aspects and from the sociological point of view. The research is conducted on several levels. A small group is engaged in theoretically working out a programme of such a research. It should be stressed that, owing to the initiative of Professor Stefan Żółkiewski, the study of literary culture became an independent discipline in the Institute. The theoretical notions formulated in numerous monographs have paved the way for empirical and collective works which are being carried out simultaneously. It is the Institute which has been initiating and organizing, as well as financing, the local research programmes carried out in several university centres for eight years now. The materials which are being collected concern the history of literary institutions and public, the development of popular literature and the mass media, literary groups and problems of the cultural geography and demography of Poland. It is worth mentioning that the programme of research on literary culture and on the aspects of communication of the literary work are closely related to a newly prepared educational programme already being realized at both secondary school and university level.

The Section of the Sociology of 19th-Century Literature is one more section of the Institute dealing with the history of literature. On the other hand, a natural supplement to research on literary life are the materials collected and systematized by the Section of Folk Literature Studies. The Department also includes a specialized Section of the History of Polish 19th- and 20th-Century Press, which has recently completed a pioneer work, *Dzieje prasy polskiej* (*History of the Polish Press*) in three volumes, two of which have already been published.

The works of the Institute's Department of Documentation and Bibliography cover the entire history of Polish literature from its

very beginning to contemporary literary output and have already won the recognition and esteem not only of specialists in Polish literature. The Department also deserves credit for the wide scope of its research, its enduring scholarly standards and immediate usefulness. *Bibliografia literatury polskiej – Nowy Korbut* (*Bibliography of Polish Literature – New Korbut*), the set of biograms as well as subject and object bibliographies, covering the entire history of Polish literature, as the most comprehensive publication of this kind in Poland and one of the largest in the world, is undoubtedly one of the most valuable achievements of the Department. Twelve volumes of the *Nowy Korbut* have appeared so far.

A kind of continuation of the *Nowy Korbut* is *Słownik współczesnych pisarzy polskich* (*A Dictionary of Polish Contemporary Writers*) and its four-volume series is being supplemented at present by a three-volume one. A synthetic combination of the two above mentioned compendia will be a three-volume alphabetical encyclopaedic dictionary of Polish writers which is also being prepared at present and is designed for students and people professionally connected with culture.

The Institute also carries out editorial work, preparing, among others, critical editions of the complete works of A. Mickiewicz, S. Żeromski, W. Broniewski, J. Kasprowicz, and A. Fredro. For two years now it has been involved in preparing an anniversary edition of the complete works of Jan Kochanowski. *Listy Elizy Orzeszkowej* (*E. Orzeszkowa's Letters*), which will soon be completed, has rightly been called a model of editorial precision. The first volumes of Z. Nałkowska's *Dzienniki* (*Diaries*) have already won the recognition of Polish readers and the edition of H. Sienkiewicz's correspondence will undoubtedly be a great event in Polish literary life. Among the numerous editorial and commentary works those on Mickiewicz are of a specific character, as the study of Mickiewicz engages specialists from different branches and is many-sided, ranging from critical editions to monographs. So far, the Institute has published six volumes of *Kronika życia i twórczości Mickiewicza* (*A Chronicle of Mickiewicz's Life and Work*) which is a unique source of knowledge about the poet, and nine volumes of a ten-volume *Słownik języka Mickiewicza* (*Dictionary of Mickiewicz's Language*) which

is also unique on a world scale from the philological point of view. The Institute conducts also many specialized studies on Mickiewicz and prepares phototyped editions of his autographs.

The Institute's interdisciplinary functions are clearly seen in such an important sphere of contemporary science as information. The quarterly "Biuletyn Polonistyczny" provides both Polish and foreign readers with information on scholarly works which have either been completed, or are being carried out or planned in all Polish centres.

Transl. by *A. Korzeniowska*