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## PSEUDO-GENRE TERMS

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some terms which suggest the existence of corresponding literary genres which do not really exist. It might seem that the question does not deserve attention but for the deeply human tendency to expect a thing behind a name. So many names refer to notions which refer to things that when a name expresses a notion only (like the word "nothing") we still tend to expect a real thing behind it. Words and notions like „phlogiston” and „ether” once used by serious chemists and physicists testify to that tendency even in science.

Another reason for the discussion of literary terms denoting non-existent genres is perhaps even more pertinent for the student of literary genres. The fact is that there is such power in a name that in some cases that name has almost forced into being, if not a completely developed genre, at least the shadow of it.

I am referring to such English terms as *a cock and bull story*, *a tale of a tub*, *an old wife's tale*, *a tall story*, *rigmarole* — which have their quasi-equivalents in Polish — *banialuka*, *bajka o żelaznym wilku* / *a tale of an iron wolf* /, *koszałki-opalki*, *romans kucharski* / *kitchen romance* / etc.

Many of these terms suggest derivation from a story about a definite subject. At the same time they are used as derogatory terms in a very vague and indiscriminate way in reference to any literary or non-literary production which is criticized as silly, boring or absurd.

Let us look at them more closely. Dictionaries agree that *a cock and bull story* denotes a long, idle, rambling story or a concocted, incredible tale<sup>1</sup>.

The indefinite article customarily used suggests that the term is a genre term which may be referred to many individual specimens, but the contents

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<sup>1</sup> Its French equivalents are *un conte de coq à l'âne* and *un conte de ma mère l'oie*. In Poland it is *bajka o żelaznym wilku* / *a fairy tale of an iron wolf* / which may have had its origins in the Lithuanian legend of Gedymin's dream about an iron wolf, which was interpreted by Lizdeyko, a bard and seer as an order to build the fortified town of Vilno. Cf. A. Mickiewicz's reference to the legend in *Pan Tadeusz* translated by Kenneth Mackenzie, London 1967, Book IV, 11.5–12 and the poet's footnote.



of the term suggest the existence of one definite story which was lost, but became proverbial. If it ever existed it might have been one of the stories of the medieval beast-epic whose heroes were Reynard the Fox and Chantecleer the Cock known in all European countries.

One of the earliest mentions of a *cock and bull story* is to be found in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621–1652). Burton writes: "Some mens whole delight is... to talk o a cock and a bull over a pot". (II.II.4) Also Richard Bentley's *Boyle Lecture* (1692) contains a statement "that cocks and bulls might conduct a discourse and hinds and panthers organize religious conferences". The reference to hinds and panthers put on the same level with cocks and bulls is, of course a critical jab against John Dryden's allegorical animal fable *The Hind and the Panther* (1687)<sup>2</sup>.

An allusion to the cock and bull story ends *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767), the famous novel by Laurence Sterne: "L-d! said mymother, what is all this story about? — A COCK and BULL, said Yorick — and one of the best of its kind, I ever heard"<sup>3</sup>.

A *tale of a tub* is another term which denotes a long, concocted and incredible story. Like a *cock and bull story* it suggests its origin in a lost story of which there are no traces left. The vagueness of its meaning resulting from the fact that "tub" may be a barrel or a bath-tub, and even a popular preacher's improvised pulpit, has allowed for a wide variety of allusive uses of this term and for puns<sup>4</sup>. The term, moreover, has the distinction of having provoked at least two eminent writers to use it in the titles of their works.

The first of the two was *A Tale of a Tub* (1633), a farcical comedy by Ben Jonson, based on a rivalry between the suitors of the daughter of the High Constable of Kentish Town. On St Valentine's Day the rivals fail in their attempts to woo the girl owing to their cross-intrigues and eventually an usher wins her instead of Squire Tub of Totten Court.

The use of the name Tub given to a suburban squire and suitor gave to Ben Jonson a wide variety of opportunities for word-play in the title, the prologue, and the epilogue of the comedy. The puns show that the playwright did not treat the play seriously. At the same time they give an idea what he meant by the term *a tale of a tub*. In the Prologue he writes:

No state affairs, nor any politic club,  
Pretend we in our Tale, here, of a Tub;  
But acts of clowns and constables, to-day

<sup>2</sup>In Dryden's debate the White Hind represents the Roman-Catholic Church while the Spotted Panther stands for the Church of England. No wonder that Bentley, who was an Anglican, did not like the idea.

<sup>3</sup>The examples of allusions to a *cock and bull story* have been taken from P. Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Oxford 1958, and E.C. Brewer, *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, London, New Edition n.d.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Glasgow 1962; W. W. Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Oxford 1958; E. Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, New York 1961.



Stuff out the scenes of our ridiculous play.  
 A cooper's wit, or some such busy spark,  
 Illumining the high constable, and his clerk,  
 And all the neighbourhood, from old records  
 Of antique proverbs, drawn from Whitsun-larks  
 And their authorities, at Wakes and Ales,  
 With country precedents, and old Wives' tales  
 We bring you now, to show what different things  
 The cotes of clowns are from the courts of kings<sup>5</sup>.

The text of the play ends with the words:

And so doth end our TALE HERE OF A TUB<sup>6</sup>.

Similarly, in the Epilogue spoken by Squire Tub allusive word-play is to be found:

This tale of me, the Tub of Totten Court  
 A poet first invented for your sport.  
 Wherein the fortune of most empty tubs  
 Rolling in love, are shewn<sup>7</sup>,

It is worth taking notice of the fact that Ben Jonson who was a poet learned not only in the Classics, but also in popular lore as recent studies have shown<sup>8</sup>, connected *the tale of a tub* with "antique proverbs, drawn from Whitsun-lords And their authorities, At Wakes and Ales, With country precedents and old wives'tales", i.e. with popular tradition.

*A Tale of a Tub* (1606) has also been used by Jonathan Swift as the title of an allegorical satire. It was written a year after Swift was ordained, but printed as late as 1704 with the omission of a critical account of the English Reformation and the organization of the Church of England.

The literary genre of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* is a not quite well integrated combination of an allegorical history of three brothers Peter, Martin and Jack, or the Roman-Catholic, the Lutheran-Anglican, and the Calvinist branches of Christianity with essayistic digressions (in separate chapters), which contain satirical attacks against contemporaneous scholars, critics, and enthusiasts of modernity. In its fabular parts Swift's satire is a very sharp attack against those doctrines and practices of different Christian denominations which seemed to him stupid or abusive, but the most important accusation was directed against the dissension and mutual hatred of all Christians.

The brutal crudity of the allegorical equivalents of Christian sacraments and the bluntness of his language have marked Swift's satire so strongly that

<sup>5</sup> *Ben Jonson's Plays*, J. M. Dent, London 1953, vol. II, p. 573.

<sup>6</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 634.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the book by Irena Janicka, *The Popular Tradition and Ben Jonson*, Uniwersytet Łódzki, Łódź 1972.



doubts were raised as to his being a Christian. But, alluding to an alleged practice of the sailors of his times or inventing his own interpretation of the title of his satire, its author claims in the Preface that his position was Christian and his criticism was meant to obviate the attacks of the materialistic philosopher Hobbes. Swift ascribes — truly or falsely to fact — the origins of his satire to an initiative of some ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries. Here are his words:

"The important discovery was made... that seamen have a custom, when they meet a whale, to fling him out an empty tub by way of amusement, to divert him from laying violent hands upon the ship. This parable was immediately mythologised; the whale was interpreted to be Hobbes' Leviathan, which tosses and plays with all schemes of religion and government, whereof a great many are hollow and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to rotation; this is the leviathan, whence the terrible wits of our age are said to borrow their weapons. The ship in danger is easily understood to be its old antitype, the commonwealth. But how to analyse the tub, was the matter of difficulty; when after long inquiry and debate, the literal meaning was preserved; and it was decreed that, in order to prevent these leviathans from tossing and sporting with the commonwealth, which of itself is too apt to fluctuate, they should be diverted from that game by a *Tale of a Tub*. And, my genius being conceived to lie not unhappily that way I had the honour done to me to be engaged in the performance"<sup>9</sup>.

Whatever one may think about this "explanation", one thing is certain: giving the title of *A Tale of a Tub* to the satire was an act of purposeful lowering of the importance of the work. The title, like the same title of Ben Jonson's comedy, suggests that the contents should not be taken too seriously. Or, at least, it pretends to diminish its seriousness.

That such widely different literary works as Ben Jonson's comedy and Swift's allegorical satire have borne the same title testifies to the lack of connexion between the term *a tale of a tub* and any definite genre.

It is significant that Ben Jonson in his Prologue mentions *old wives' tales* as related to *a tale of a tub*. This term which had its Latin equivalent in *fabula anilis*, seems to be generally European<sup>10</sup>. It denoted a story full of wonders meant for the naive and the credulous and was a term probably critical of the popular romance in the times of the Renaissance.

In England it was George Peele (1557–1598) who used the term as the title of his play called in full: *The Old Wives Tale, A Pleasant conceited Comedie, played by the Queenes Majesties players. Written by G. Peele*. The comedy was produced about 1589 and printed in 1595. The title of the comedy suggests not one feminine author of the tale, but a type of story created by many individual authors.

<sup>9</sup> J. Swift, *The Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, Berlin 1922, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Krzyżanowski i S. Świrko (ed.), *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażeń przysłowiowych polskich (A New Book of Polish Proverbs and Proverbial Expressions)*, I–IV, Warszawa 1962–1978 where Fr. Piotr Skarga is mentioned as using the Polish equivalent „bajki babie” in 1603.



The plot of Peele's comedy gives the best idea of the meaning behind the term. Antic, Frolic, and Fantastic lost at night in a forest find hospitality at the cottage of a smith Clunch and his wife Old Madge. To kill time they ask her to tell them a merry winter's tale. Making mistakes and haltingly, Madge tells them a story of two brothers of a noble family whose beautiful sister Delia was kidnapped by the wizard Sacropant. Wandering through woods the brothers are caught in his power, but rescued by the knight Eumenides helped by the Ghost of Jack grateful to the knight for having once covered the cost of Jack's funeral. Towards the end of the adventures Jack subjects Eumenides to a dramatic test: he demands, as his deserts, a half of Delia. The brothers are horrified, but the knight, though he likes the girl, without hesitation shows a readiness to cut the young lady in two to be true to a gentleman's word. The Ghost is satisfied with such mere readiness, dismisses everybody with his blessing and jumps back into his grave. On the stage, lit by the dawn, three listeners and the couple from the smithy remain. Madge is asleep notwithstanding the frightful adventures which were enacted throughout the night in front of her eyes. She is awakened and the whole company go to breakfast.

Historians of drama have had various opinions about Peele's comedy. Some of them saw in *The Old Wives Tale* a satire directed against romances like Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (where Sacropant appears) or against fantastically romantic contemporaneous dramas. But a certain rustic atmosphere and subtle humour of the comedy demand a revision of that view. At present it is assumed that it was a new type of playful romantic comedy with a touch of delicate auto-irony, which broke with an earlier rather primitive type of farce and anticipated the synthesis of poetry and humour in such comedies by Shakespeare as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), *Twelfth Night* (1599) and *A Winter's Tale* (1610); the very title of the last has been, as it were, mentioned by Antic in the beginning of Peele's play<sup>11</sup>.

Peele's title and the traditional term were revived when Arnold Bennett published his novel *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908). This naturalistic chronicle of the changes brought to the English Pottery District in the second half of the nineteenth century by modern civilization has nothing in common with folklore or extravagant romance. Its title is simply a word-play alluding to two contrastive heroines of the novel — sisters who chose two different ways of life.

All the hitherto discussed pseudo-literary terms should be completed by *rigmarole*. What W.W. Skeat and E.C. Brewer write about it suggests that the older form of the word was *ragman-roll*, but that its first component derives from the Icelandic *ragmenn* which means "coward". In the Public Record Office in London Ragman Roll is a collection of documents containing the names of those Scottish barons who paid feudal homage to king Edward I of England during his victorious march through Scotland.

<sup>11</sup> See *Five Elizabethan Comedies* ed. by A.K. Mc Illwraith, London 1959 and M. C. Bradbrook, *The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy*, Harmondsworth 1953.



One is tempted to put all these facts together and look for the origin of *ragman-roll* in Scotland. The connexion between the hasty obedience of some of the barons and the word *ragman* in the sense of coward would be obvious.

But the original sense of *ragman-roll* has been forgotten and its corruption *rigmarole* has acquired a new meaning — that of a long, rambling tale without order, coherence or sense. As such it has been used about any text which we find tedious.

An interesting literary term is *ditty*. It is not derogatory in any sense. It has some poetic connotations. It is usually used in older English poetry and drama and denotes songs or poems mentioned without title, in a general way, not as individual works. John Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes* is an exception when he says:

He played an ancient ditty, long since mute,  
In Provence call'd "La Belle dame sans mercy".

*Ditty* derives from Latin *dictatum* through French *ditie* and it means a song or a poem that might be sung. Shakespeare in *Much Ado About Nothing* (II,3) associates *ditties* with "dumps so dull and heavy" i.e. with sad strains. His contemporary, Richard Barnfield, calls the last mortal song of the nightingale pierced by the thorn of the rose "the dolefull'st *ditty*". John Milton in *Paradise Lost* (I,1.446–449) speaks about Syrian damsels lamenting Thammuz' fate in amorous *ditties*. All this suggests a sad song.

But in *Henry IV part I* (II,1) Mortimer says that his Welsh lady's pronunciation

Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties penn'd  
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower  
With ravishing division, to her lute.

It seems that in the nineteenth century the word *ditty* connoted some thing rather light and carefree. And it is characteristic of Shakespeare that songs, whose texts are quoted in his dramas are not called *ditties*, but songs. It looks as if the term *ditty* functioned as a poetic stylistic convention, but not as a name to be given to real compositions.

I should like to end this review of pseudo-genre terms by presenting one which almost had a chance of creating a genre, but failed — *anatomy*.

Its first appearance was in the title of John Lyly's *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1578), a fashionable Elizabethan romance of scanty action and many reflections on love, the follies of youth, feminine inconstancy, friendship and education, irreligion and immorality, all expressed in the notorious euphuistic style.

The second man to use the term *anatomy* — meaning analysis — was a Puritan essayist Philip Stubbs (active from 1581 to 1591) who wrote *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583). The first part of that pamphlet consisted of a dialogue between Spudeus and Philoponus. One of them talks about his



visit to the island of Ailgna (Anglia) and about his impressions of that country. In this way the author attacks the vanity and the sins of the inhabitants among which not only bad economic and social conditions are condemned, but also improper Sabbath-keeping, May Days, dances, cards, football, bear-baiting, reading wicked books and going to the theatre which, together with actors, plays, and playwrights have become subject to fanatical Puritan criticism.

Stubbs' pamphlet met with the anti-Puritan reply of Thomas Nashe (1567–1601) in *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589), an essay in which the writer, who relished logorrhoea and invective, presented a Rabelaisian repertory, treading not only on Puritans, but also on euphuistic writers, women, hypocrites, bad poets, students, gluttons etc.

In 1611 John Donne (1573–1631) broke this chain of *anatomies* forming as it were an incipient essayistic or pamphletic genre when he wrote an elegiac, pessimistic poem *The Anatomy of the World*. John Andrews made an attempt to maintain the continuity when he wrote a feeble combination of satire and religious attitude — *The Anatomy of Baseness* (1615). A few years later Robert Burton (1577–1640), an Oxford divine, mathematician, astrologer, bibliophile, and amateur psychiatrist published an astonishing treatise *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Between 1621 and 1652 six new enlarged editions of this book appeared in print, a book which might be called an analysis of neurasthenia today.

*The Anatomy of Melancholy* was written with a quasi-medical purpose. The author, who suffered from occasional dejection, resolved to analyse melancholy as a disease inborn in all of us. Part I of the treatise gives the definition and determines causes, symptoms, and characteristics of the disease; Part II describes treatment; Part III, devoted to melancholy in love and religion, grew into a great river of discourses about the whole life of man, his physical and spiritual health, and even about social and political reforms. References to the Bible, the Fathers, the Classics, and the English writers, anecdotes, summaries of books, humour, pathos, tolerance, comic monologues, oddities, pedantry, and the occasional, surprising modernity of Burton's theory made this treatise, published under the pseudonym Democritus Junior, one of the monuments of English Literature.

The next *anatomy* — *The Anatomy of an Equivalent* (1688) was a short political treatise by George Savile, Marquess of Halifax (1633–1695), called Trimmer, Swift's patron. Then there was a pause until H.G. Wells published *The Anatomy of Frustration* (1936), one of his pessimistic diagnoses of contemporary civilization.

When we look carefully at the literary works called *anatomy* we find among them an essayistic romance, three polemical essays, an elegiac poem, a pseudo-medical treatise and a political treatise. The term *anatomy* has not covered any definite genre though a certain tendency towards a critical-polemical essay on multiple subjects may be observed in the beginning.



One might ask what is the moral of it all. The answer is that the existence of even a widely popular literary or pseudo-literary term does not necessarily signify the existence of a corresponding genre. Such popular terms are usually vague and ill-defined like notions they are supposed to express, just because the notions were an abstract creation and not a reflection of tangible reality — as it was, for instance, in the case of the science fiction of J. Verne and H. G. Wells, before Gernsback actually invented the term *science fiction*.

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#### OKREŚLENIA PSEUDO-GATUNKOWE

##### STRESZCZENIE

Celem artykułu jest omówienie niektórych określeń, które sugerują istnienie odpowiadających im gatunków literackich, naprawdę nie istniejących. Wydawałoby się, że nie zasługują one na uwagę, gdyby nie ludzka tendencja spodziewania się konkretnego pod każdą nazwą, nawet pod taką, która odnosi się tylko do pojęcia (jak wyraz „nic”). Słowa i pojęcia takie jak „flogiston” i „eter”, kiedyś używane przez poważnych chemików i fizyków, świadczą o istnieniu tej tendencji nawet w naukach doświadczalnych.

Drugą przyczyną omówienia terminów oznaczających nie istniejące literackie gatunki jest to, że w niektórych wypadkach termin niemal spowodował powołanie do bytu, jeśli nie w pełni rozwiniętego gatunku, to przynajmniej jego cienia.

Przedmiotem dyskusji są angielskie określenia *a cock and bull story*, *a tale of a tub*, *old wives' tale*, *rigmarole*, które mają analogie w polskiej *banialuce*, *bajce o żelaznym wilku*, *koszałkach-opałkach* i in.

Większość tych określeń sugeruje pochodzenie od historii na określony temat. Jednocześnie są one używane jako krytyczne, umniejszające i uwłaczające określenia w bardzo luźny i dowolny sposób w stosunku do każdego utworu literackiego lub nieliterackiego, który uważa się za niemądry, nudny albo bez sensu, co widać z cytów z różnych autorów. Określenie *a tale of a tub* („opowieść o beczce”) zostało użyte jako tytuł farsowej komedii przez Ben Jonsona w 1633 r., a przez Jonatana Swifta w 1696 dla mieszaniny alegorycznej satyry i eseju. Określenie *old*



*wives'tale* („bajka babia” wg ks. P. Skargi) przyjął za tytuł autoironicznej komedii romantycznej George Peele w 1589 r. a powtórzył je w tytule naturalistycznej powieści Arnold Bennett w 1908, używając go jako gry słów.

*Rigmarole* (długie, rozwlekłe opowiadanie bez ładu, składu i sensu) pochodzi z dokumentu z czasów Edwarda I. *Ditty*, wspomniane przez Szekspira, Milтона i Keatsa oraz innych poetów, oznacza pieśń lub wiersz, który można śpiewać, ale nazwa ta nigdy nie występowała w odniesieniu do konkretnego utworu. Jest więc tylko tradycyjnym określeniem w poetyckim stylu.

*Anatomy* („analiza”, „rozbiór”) pojawiła się w tytułach różnych utworów: romansu filozoficznego *Euphues, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1578) Johna Lyly; *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) Philipa Stubbsa — dialogu ostro krytykującego całokształt życia angielskiego, na który równie ostro odpowiedział Thomas Nashe w *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) w formie eseju; w 1611 John Donne napisał pesymistyczny poemat *The Anatomy of the World*, w 1615 John Andrews próbował wrócić do formy eseju w *The Anatomy of Baseness*, w latach 1521—1652 Robert Burton publikował i rozszerzał pseudomedyczny traktat *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, który jest jednym z najbardziej zadziwiających dzieł późnego angielskiego renesansu. Nazwa *anatomy* występuje jeszcze w traktaciku politycznym markiza Halifaxa *The Anatomy of an Equivalent* (1688) i w *The Anatomy of Frustration* (1936) — książkowym eseju H. G. Wellsa.

Mimo ciągłości nazwy *anatomy*, nie określała ona żadnego wyraźnie rozwiniętego gatunku, choć we wczesnej jej historii można było zaobserwować tendencję formowania się krytyczno-polemicznego wielotematycznego eseju.

Pseudogatunkowe określenia są zwykle mgliste i niedokładne jak pojęcia, które wyrażają, właśnie dlatego, że nie odpowiadają konkretnej rzeczywistości w postaci pewnej liczby okazów gatunku literackiego, który domagał się osobnej nazwy, jak np. science fiction J. Verne’a i H. G. Wellsa zanim H. Gernsback wymyślił określenie *science fiction*.