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Genre Criticism, Narrativity and Memory Strategies

Abstract: This paper aims to scope the generic transfigurations throughout the history of genres, and the way genre criticism has underlined the problem of narrativity. Since Plato and his determination of literary imitation as mimetic (dramatic), mixed (epic), and narrative (dithyramb), undoubtedly these generic formulations were related to the aesthetic vision – imitation was founded in the whole concept of beauty, marked as a mixture of the good and the truthful. Throughout the 20th century, the emergence of Russian formalism, Czech structuralism, etc. as essentially “Eastern” movements, notably in the essays of Shklovsky, Jakobson, Tynyanov as well as their successors, brought about the change of dominant perspective. 1950s are highlighted by Mikhail Bakhtin’s investigation of speech genres, re-examined by French literary theorist and narratologist Tzvetan Todorov in 1970s. Our intention is to re-investigate the contemporary narrative practices in order to explain why narration is overall the most effective tool for memorisation.

Key words: genre criticism, narrativity, memory, literary work of art, discourse, genre.

1. Genre theory and the problem of narrative structure

The question of generic structure and the possibility of its discernible taxonomy has been one of the main challenges of literary studies. Today, the analysis of genres is mainly focused upon the differences between poetry, prose and drama (consequently, these researches are enriched with gender implications in both senses of this word, understood as genre or as a term referring to the biological and cultural differences between human beings). Although Milivoj Solar has already pointed out to the selectiveness of genre terminology (Solar 1985: 50), especially when it comes to choosing the more appropriate term (like kind, genre, gender etc.), there is still a predominance of one term over another. Namely, as Solar puts it, terms “class”, “kind” and “genre” are more vivid and effective, compared with the more unusual terms like “type” (which often refers to an attribute by which a certain member of one class can be characterised), “form” (since this term unavoidably implies the term “content”) or “subkind/mode”, taking into account its relatedness to the term “kind”. On the other hand, Zdenko Shkreb's terminology is more simplistic, he presupposes the total deletion

of the term “type” and its inevitable substitution with the term “genre” (Škreb 1985: 18).

This problematic generic terminology has been analysed in the light of narrative structure, since its existence as a part of the widely accepted triad was (and is) elaborated thoroughly from antiquity. The problematic status of narrative text is foreseen by Alastair Fowler (Fowler 1982: 106-129), who proposes several different categories in order to re-arrange the classic understanding of what genre represents. Thus, his term “kind” refers to the historical genre, the one that is fixed according to the labels of antiquity, and which, in essence, represents the generic repertoire; “mode” is defined by pronouns, i.e. comic, tragic, satiric, etc., depicting and implying to the elements of outward structure or of a certain kind – characters, represented aspects, values; “subgenre”, defined as a form or a subtype of certain type, characterised by the subject matter or the motifs in the literary work of art. One element in Fowler's typology has a unique status, namely the so-called “formal constructional type” that can be viewed in the light of a certain theme which is embedded in a literary work of art, or according to the generic signals (names, titles etc.). Henceforth, this last term is an actual effort for envisioning a prescriptive terminology, which is already surpassed by the fact that genre is more than a pre-given structure applied by the author, or something that can be seen as a result of a sort of collective agreement, since Fowler's “mode” indicates factual presence of elements of certain type, even in structures already labelled as certain kind (for example, narrativity in poetry).

2. Genre typology and narrativity in the antiquity

From a historical point of view, narrative structure and narrativity were usually opposed to the other forms of writing, but the fact that the perception of the relationship between mimesis/imitation and diegesis/narration changed over time, actually pinpoints the changeable attitude towards the question of narrativity. Plato in his work „Politeia“ (The Republic) underlines the first and crucial difference between the mimetic and the diegetic, which will be elaborated thoroughly in the next centuries. In his understanding of “poiesis”, works of art cannot be differentiated solely by their subject matter (or the subject of imitation/narration), but also by the way the content is being represented. Consequently, the mimetic (or imitative) refers to the poet's urge to hide himself from the work he is representing (or even singing), and the diegetic is a form of his interfering into the words of the characters. Thus, he proposes a generic structure which can be grasped as a triad, namely the three basic kinds of poetry: imitative, narrative and mixed genre:

You have conceived my meaning perfectly; and if I mistake not, what you failed to apprehend before is now made clear to you, that poetry and mythology are, in some cases, wholly imitative – instances of this are supplied by tragedy and comedy; there is likewise the opposite style, in which the poet is the only speaker – of this the dithyramb affords the best example; and the combination of both is found in epic, and in several other styles of poetry. Do I take you with me? – Yes, he said; I see now what you meant (Plato, *The Republic*: 50).

On the other hand, in Aristotle's findings, there is a crucial distinction between the imitative and the non-imitative poetry, since imitation is clearly defined more broadly, as a natural, innate, instinctive human ability (Aristotle 1902: 15). Imitative poetry, which is the main subject of Aristotle's analysis, once again is divided into several categories, according to the means, the object and the manner of imitation. Since the means and the objects of representation are more discernible (rhythm, tune and metre, or men in their actions), the manner of imitation presents itself as a ground for genre identification and poetic ramifications. Thus, Aristotle differentiates the narrative genre and the mimetic, thus excluding Plato's purely narrative genre:

There is still a third difference – the manner in which each of these objects may be imitated. For the medium being the same, and the objects the same, the poet may imitate by narration – in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged – or he may present all characters as living and moving before us (Aristotle 1902: 13).

2.1. Modern explanations of antique miscellany

Modern attempts of explaining antique restrictive classifications are actually methods that establish genre criticism in its most vibrant and lucid form. As Gerard Genette points out (Genette 1979: 14-15), Plato's genres are in fact modes/styles, they will be called genres much later (since they are defined by modes or styles of representation and enunciation), and thus Plato's paradigm is restrictive in its nature. This restrictiveness can be grasped in the sense of lyric poetry (equally in Plato and Aristotle), which is non-representative and thus is not included in the classification, together with the representational forms in prose (which can be seen in the light of antique overall understanding of poetry, dominantly written in verse). Zoran Konstantinovic (Konstantinović 1985: 22) indicates that lyric poetry in the antiquity is not defined as such, since there are only certain forms that are acknowledged – ode, yamb, elegy etc. On the other hand, Genette clearly

indicates that Plato's three-folded classification will be adopted (in certain sense) by Aristotle, but the main difference between these two authors is actually their understanding of the elements of narrative structure, as well as the essence of narrative (what do we mean/hear/grasp when it comes to narration).

Taking into account Aristotle's paradigm, it can be noted that the main difference between his theorisation and the one that Aristotle proposes is embedded in the nature of imitation, or the mimetic ability of human being. To Genette (Genette 1979: 17), the difference between these two paradigms can be found in the fact that Plato's genres are modes, in the sense that he speaks more of mode or the situation in which poetic discourse takes its place. Contrary to this, Aristotle's paradigm excludes Plato's pure narrative genre (dithyramb), and this kind of exclusion is an expression of Aristotle's empirism (Genette 1979: 28). The sole existence of pure narrativity is empirical impossibility, so by affirming the constructive role of dialogue in the narrative form, Aristotle underlines the specific place of narrative discourse (and narrativity) into the realm of discursive possibilities.

Antoine Compagnon (Compagnon 2001: Troisième leçon) analyses these different approaches of Plato and Aristotle, taking into account the Socratic tradition, since its influences can be clearly noted in Plato's vision of mixed genre (and respectively, of the narrative one). Still, his main argument on these different approaches is the notion of mimetic, understood by Plato as opposite to narration and dramatic dialogue, while in Aristotle's paradigm mimesis (or imitation) is the inherent human ability, so mimetic poetry is the main category, which includes narrative and dramatic mode as its forms.

3. Modern generic classifications

Antique heritage can be envisioned in the light of the Latin middle ages that provoked several attempts of broadening the system of genres with the lyric poetry, thus speculating once again over the nature of narrativity. One of the most important classification of that time, according to Genette (Genette 1979: 30-31), is Diomedes tripartite division of genres: *genus imitativum* (the dramatic kind), *genus ennarativum* (didactic and gnomic poetry, historical poems etc., where poet speaks), and *genus commune* (the so-called mixed genre, including lyric kinds and heroic poems). This is clearly an attempt to revision and re-arrange Plato's paradigm, mostly by the act of confining narrativity to the historical and the non-imitative. This classification will be followed by Proclus division (in the fifth century AD), according to which the so-called mixed genre is totally included into the

narrative one. This is yet another illustration of the antique differences and polemics.

Modern genre theories are closely related to romanticism, and its insistence on the historical nature of genres and their evolution, based on Darwin's theory of evolution of kinds. These elements and the pre-supposed mixture of genres result in one of the most radical theories of the twentieth century – Benedetto Croce's theory of genres. Croce's affirmation of the urge to overcome genres is grounded in his logical aporias, by which the logical knowledge (as “cognition of the universal”) and the intuitive knowledge (as “cognition of the individual, the sole things”) are differentiated (Croce 2000: 26; Кроче 2005: 385). Henceforth, literary kinds are in fact a creation of the intellect, so they cannot be placed in the field of literature as such, since logical (scientific) form excludes the aesthetic one. For that reasons, Croce actually connects genre theories with books arrangement in library, since both are pragmatic methods, and cannot be treated as prescriptive norms, applicable to all literary creations.

Domestic life, chivalry, idyll, cruelty and the like, are not impressions, but concepts. They are not contents, but logical-aesthetic forms. You cannot express the form, for it is already itself expression. (...) In aesthetic analysis it is impossible to separate subjective from objective, lyric from epic, the image of feeling from that of things. (...) Every true work of art has violated some established kind and upset the ideas of the critics, who have thus been obliged to broaden the kinds, until finally even the broadened kind has proved too narrow, owing to the appearance of new works of art, naturally followed by new scandals, new upsettings and – new broadenings (Croce 2000: 27).

3.1. Mikhail Bakhtin's speech genres

One possible explanation of this modern transgression toward narrative genres can be found in Bakhtin's theoretical postulates, as one of the main representatives of the philosophical theories of genres (Duff 2000: 68). In his analysis of the epic and the novel, Bakhtin clearly describes historical periods in the evolution of the novel, and also its uniqueness, since novel is one of the genres that are constantly developing. In this historical perspective, novel is the genre that cannot be finished, it is always parodying other genres, “it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language”, incorporating and excluding several genres, “reformulating them and re-accentuating them” (Bakhtin 2000: 71). This kind of novelisation of other genres prompts the changes in their literary language, enabled by dialogisation, humour, irony, parody, etc. In Bakhtin's vision, novel is subversive and profane, facts that point out to its folklore (carnavalesque) origin.

On the other hand, through the critique of Saussurean theory of language, Bakhtin reformulates the binary opposition between “langue” and “parole” into new postulate, clearly indicating the importance of types of utterance or “speech genres”, characteristic of every language structure. Every speech genre is connected to a specific use of language, thus every utterance is created according to the “thematic content, style, and compositional structure”, depending on the area in which a certain human activity is being held. One emphasis is made on the “heterogeneity of speech genres” (Bakhtin 2000: 83), and lately in this text we can see that Bakhtin defines this notion of speech genres more broadly, including here the rejoinders of daily dialogue, everyday narration, military commands, business documents, social, political commentary, etc. Analogue to this, he makes a specific distinction between the primary and the secondary genres, thus evoking the classical division between the simple and the complex utterance. However, this point goes even further, since he does not take as crucial the difference between literary and non-literary genres (which can be found in his former works), and treats secondary genres as complex and ideological.

The novel as a whole is an utterance just as rejoinders in everyday dialogue or private letters are (they do have a common nature), but unlike these, the novel is a secondary (complex) utterance. The difference between primary and secondary (ideological) genres is very great and fundamental, but this is precisely why the nature of the utterance should be revealed and defined through analysis of both types. (...) A one-sided orientation toward primary genres inevitably leads to a vulgarisation of the entire problem (Bakhtin 2000: 85).

Transforming the classical notion of language and literature, Bakhtin actually pinpoints the importance of concrete utterance and language in all areas of linguistics and philology, “language enters life through concrete utterances and life enters language through concrete utterances as well” (Bakhtin 2000: 86). In a certain sense, Bakhtin investigates the specific relationship between style and speech genres through functional styles in language, thus provoking innovative stipulation about literary genres, which can be renewed by interpolation of non-literary styles into their structure, as well as the necessity for history of speech genres, taking into account the changes in social life and the ways they integrate into speech genres as well. In one part of his text, Bakhtin makes several attempts to re-arrange the supposed relation between language and genre, according to the traditional linguistics. Since the sense of the term “individual” in Bakhtin is understood more as socially constructed, influenced and transformed, there is no doubt or misunderstanding of his concept of generic forms, that are pre-given as

our native mother tongue (so we accept and integrate these forms long before we start to learn grammar). Although Bakhtin speaks of more or less stable genres, according to some formalistic postulates, still he treats literary genres as secondary, created by the fine interplay between the primary genres (letters, diaries, dialogues, everyday stories, etc). In this way, we can see how the dominant 19th- and 20th-century perception of novel as an archetype of narrativity is being complicated, changing the way novel and narrative structure are being defined.

3.2. Tzvetan Todorov's genres of discourse

In literary criticism, 1970s are years highlighted by the constant attempts to re-arrange narratology's field of study, envisaging the problem of narrativity as a complex phenomenon, which is not confined only to narrative text. In Todorov's work originating from 1978, he is attempting once again to approach the problems of defining literature as field of study, as well as the questions of proper understanding of the concepts "histoire" (story) and "récit" (discourse) in a narrative text. Considering the first problem, namely that of literature as a proper and adequate term, Todorov (Todorov 1978: 14-17) investigates many forms by which the natural character of this notion is taken under suspicion (the so-called natural character of literature, which is actually an intersubjective and social construct). On the other hand, that which is called literature by a certain social agreement is usually defined from a functional (according to its social function) or structuralist point of view (taking into account its imitative nature). However, history of literary criticism has shown that literature cannot be properly defined through the concept of imitation and the beauty, so the contemporary attempts tend to merge the definitions of literature in a whole (by which literature is seen as a system, underlined by its fictitious events). Todorov negates these false hypotheses by an overt analysis of the nature of fiction, which cannot be found in every literary work, same as the false assumption of the difference between the ordinary and the literary language. These premises are enriched with the definition of literary genres as a selection between many discourses, rendered conventional by a given society.

Here, we should introduce one generic notion, in accordance to that of literature: it is discourse. It is the structural adequate to the functional concept of the "use" (of language). Why is it necessary? Because language produces phrases, taking into account the vocabulary and grammatical rules. Phrases are actually the starting point of the discursive functioning: these phrases will be articulated between them and uttered into a certain socio-cultural context;

they are transformed through utterances, language, discourse (Todorov 1978: 23).

In Todorov's theory, genres are historical facts, so in these findings he is summarising Bakhtin's and Tynyanov's premises on constant historical changes and the transformations of genres "by inversion, by displacement, by combination" (Todorov 2000: 197). The basic assumption is that every genre is produced by a certain speech act, so the origins of genres can be seen in the light of speech act transformations. According to these arguments, Todorov reinvestigates the nature of narrativity, taking into account the chronological relationship between the parts of one fictional discourse and (sometimes) their causality. The five elements (equilibrium, degradation, imbalance, search, and restoration of equilibrium), which are basic for every story, are actually five elements of narrativity, since they are the foundation by which the progressive types of narrative structure (the mythological and the gnoseological) are being defined. In relation to this former types of narratives, one third type can be defined, underlining various abstract rules (ideas or constructional principles), derived by different turning-points in action. This kind of ideological narrative (discourse) Todorov puts into perspective by envisaging two types of narratives – "Adolph" and "Dangerous liaisons", highlighting the nature of narrativity – its ideological power, mythological prudence, and gnoseological potency (to arrange and affirm mystery or the ways knowledge is being formed and transferred).

4. Narrativity and memory

Narrativity can be seen through its relations with memory, which underlines the necessity of their proper definition. As Andrea Lesic-Thomas indicates (Lesic-Thomas 2008: 103), narratology clearly points out to the fact that narrative is the basic concept for understanding the central problems regarding human condition and the origin of language (and memory). Correspondingly, Lesic-Thomas also investigates the problem of lost memories or forgetting, arguing upon neuroscientific conclusions the importance of narrative for memory strategies. Although in Mark Freeman's accounts narrative is seen as an "imposition" upon life and its vital force, one cannot explain or argument the fact that memory can be lost, but narrative reshaping of the formless and meaningless chaos of life cannot. These findings are once again a reaffirmation of the modern prevalence of narrativity, and also its possible explanation.

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ЖАНРОВСКА КРИТИКА, НАРАТИВНОСТ И СТРАТЕГИЈЕ МЕМОРИЈЕ

Апстракт

Циљ овог труда је да се отсликају жанровске трансформације кроз историју жанрова, како и начин на који је жанровска критика потенцирала проблем наративности. Још од Платона и његове поделе поезије на миметичку (драмску), мешану (епску) и наративну (што се може приметити у случају дитирамба), ове жанровске формулације су повезане са естетичком визијом – имитација је постављена у вези са концептом лепоте, који је дефиниран као спој између доброг и истинитог. Током двадесетог века, појава руског формализма, чешког структурализма и других „источних“ покрета (првенствено у есејима Шкловског, Тинјанова, Јакобсона) потенцирала је промену доминантне перспективе. 50-тих година двадесетог века појавила се Бахтинова студија о говорним жанровима, која је била основа за каснија истраживања Цветана Тодорова. Наша намера је да се преиспитају савремене наративне пракције, што би нас довело до различитих закључака у односу на релације између наративности и меморије.

Кључне речи: жанровска критика, наративност, меморија, литературно дело, дискурс, жанр.

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