

V. КОНСТАНТЫ И ВАРИАЦИИ СМЫСЛА В ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

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SYNCHRONIC AND DIACHRONIC TRANSFORMATION OF DRAMATIC GENRES

The article entitled “Synchronic and Diachronic Transformation of Dramatic Genres” focuses on the historical transformation and derivation of early dramatic genres (tragedy, comedy) into more versatile and complex genres such as melodrama and the theatre of urban boredom, for example. The research lies on the assumption that dramatic genres are historically bound and they proliferate or cease to exist in accordance with their historical need.

Keywords: drama, genre, tragedy, comedy, derivative genres

Transformation of dramatic genres – a Diachronic View

Drama in general denotes “any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors” [Cuddon 1998: 237]. According to Aristotle, *drama* is an “imitated human action” [Cited in: Holman-Harmon 1986: 154]². Recognized features of drama are 1. story, 2. action and 3. actors who impersonate characters of the story. Historically, there were many historical variants and genres of drama, for example ancient Greek drama, ancient Roman drama, medieval drama and modern, 19th century variants, such as melodrama, psychological drama and many others. In order to understand the

² In the theoretical part of this study, we greatly rely on two academic sources: J. A. Cuddon (*A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 1998) and H. C. Holman – W. Harmon (*A Handbook to Literature*, 1986).

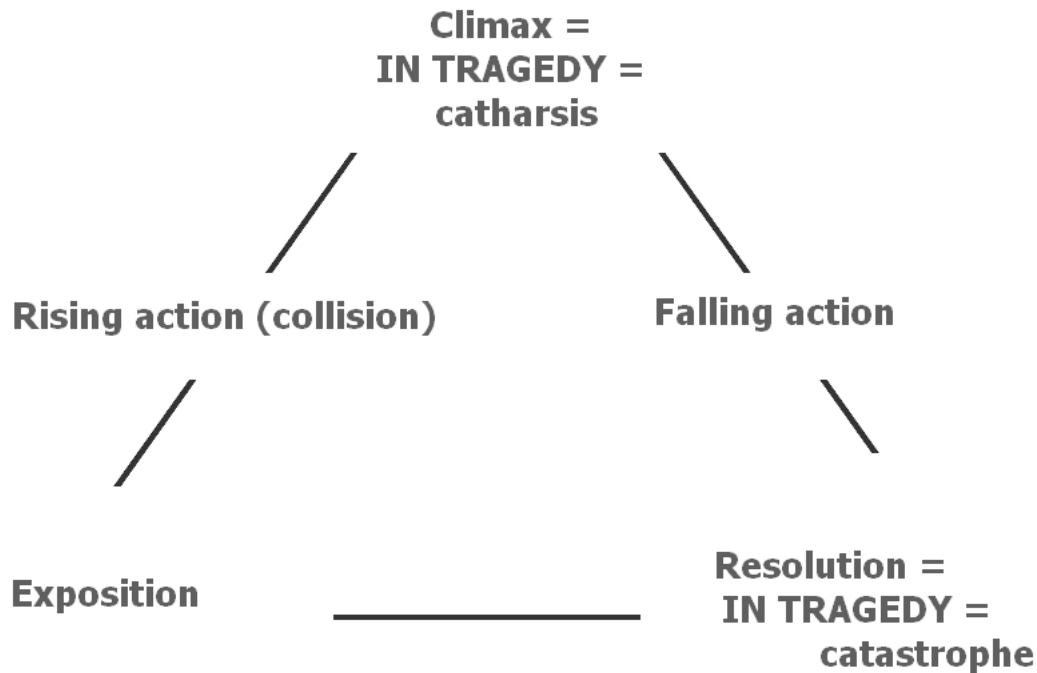
diachronic genesis of drama, it is essential to understand its beginnings in ancient Greece. The nature of the ancient plays was often interrelated with the type of theatre used for performances:



Ancient theatres, called “amphitheatres”, had a circular shape enhancing acoustics. All-men actors wore acoustics-improving masks (this is the origin of the smiling and frowning masks, the famous symbols of theatre). Unlike in present-day theatres, in the ancient theatres there were no curtains (thus the plays could not be divided into acts), few props and no spotlights. All these three features resulted in the verbal nature of the ancient plays, which were very rich in verbal descriptions of visual and sensual aspects of the play such as space, size, colours, textures and smells, as well as the emotional phenomena of the play.

In order to clarify the plot, ancient Greek dramas often employed a **chorus**, a group of actors who introduced the play, specifying its setting and main characters. At the end of the play the chorus summarized the overall message of the play [Holman-Harmon 1986: 205]. The structure of ancient plays also differed from the present-day ones. Gustav Freytag explored the generic structure of ancient plays as follows:

Structure of an ancient play: The traditional structure of a play follows what is known as Freytag’s pyramid:



There were two basic types of ancient genres:

1) **Tragedy** – based on the creation of the emotions of fear and pity, resulting in catharsis and understanding both reasons for personal downfall of the individual and the overall social context of his or her failure.

2) **Comedy** – based on alienation and emotional separation between the spectator and the character.

Roman drama differed from the Greek plays. The plays were more violent and more importantly, they showed the acts of violence on the stage. Other Roman types of drama include for example Latin closet dramas of Seneca [Holman-Harmon 1986: 205].

Medieval drama denotes all forms of drama in the Middle Ages; however, it generally refers to drama of a religious nature, which influenced its subject-matter (stories of Resurrection, Ascension), liturgical tone and language (mostly Latin) [Holman-Harmon 1986: 291].

Medieval drama included various genres, such as:

- **Miracle plays**, (based on the lives of saints, especially Virgin Mary);
- **Mystery plays, cyclic plays, moralities** (later became secularized and some were even banned. They are believed to be the basis for the later Elizabethan comedy).

The aforementioned facts about the technical and artistic development of drama in the Western world help us to understand more about the

specifics of the English theatre. The first era to be discussed here is so called the “**Elizabethan Age**”, a term used for the period of the Renaissance during the reign of Elisabeth I of England (1558–1603). The name “the Elizabethan Age” sometimes also includes the Jacobean Period (1603–1625). Another informal name of the period is “Merrie England”. This refers to the overall successful and optimistic atmosphere of this period, rooted in colonial expansion and the resulting societal developments, incorporating new technologies and materials brought from overseas [Holman-Harmon 1986: 291]. In the Elizabethan times, drama proliferated. Some of the popular genres of the period were:

- **Pastoral plays** (they developed from pastoral poems, usually describing the “pastoral” lives of shepherds and descriptions of the countryside).
- **School plays** (popular Elizabethan plays practiced and performed at schools, one form of school plays was the so-called “masque”).
- **University plays** (practiced and performed for the Queen Elizabeth by a group of academics called “the University Wits”).
- **Latin drama** (these were mostly translations of Italian plays).
- **Chronicles** (these were essentially historical plays which drew inspiration from period chronicles, such as *Holinshed’s Chronicles*).
- **Elizabethan comedies** (comedy, especially romantic comedies and court comedies, were popular genres of the period; they often used misunderstanding and mistaking one’s character for another as the central point of their subjects).
- **Elizabethan tragedies** (were as popular as comedies. Some variants of Elizabethan tragedy include tragedy of blood and revenge tragedy, which lay on the principle of poetic justice. Elizabethan tragedies often employed subjects such as the seven deadly sins and supernatural powers, and usually ended in the death of most of the characters).

“**The Jacobean Age**” was significantly different from the libertine Elizabethan Age in its more serious and contemplative tone and philosophical subjects. In this period, Shakespeare wrote his major tragedies and tragicomedies, while Ben Jonson produced classic tragedies and realistic comedies, and many other authors flourished.

“**The Caroline Age**” referred to the reign of Charles I of England (1625–1642). Drama of the period includes many new forms such as the comedy of manners, the sentimental comedy and the domestic tragedy [Holman-Harmon 1986: 291].

The 19th century was significant for its technical improvements of theatrical techniques as well as for formal and intellectual changes in the structure and content of plays.

Technical improvements included the invention of:

- Spotlights (which allowed theatres to focus on the most important character in each section of the play),
- Curtains (which allowed plays to be divided into acts), and
- Other technical improvements (that allowed theatres to bring large objects, sounds, and other effects to the stage). However, all these inventions also contributed to a diminishment of the role of language, and plays became much less verbal and much more visual than in previous dramatic eras.

Some of the most significant genres of the period include:

- **Melodrama** (a play based on romantic plot, idealized characters and a romantic happy ending or extremely unhappy ending. In melodrama, the logical course of the plot is subordinated to sensational emotions, and thus melodramatic characters often find themselves in dramatic situations – lost in the desert without water, in the wilderness without matches, etc. Modern variants of classical melodramas are soap operas). Romantic tragedies were among the successors of melodramas.
- **Problem plays** (were similar to melodramas; however, the logic of plot now played a much more important role. The plot revolved around a specific “problem”, such as immigration to the USA, unwanted pregnancy, or dilemma between obeying one’s parents and the pursuit of happiness). Problem plays later inspired modern social, psychological and political dramas.
- **Verse drama** (was only distinguished by its verse form, popular with folk audience).

Transformation of dramatic genres – a Synchronic View

The versatile genres of the 19th century gave birth to even more diverse genres and genre experiments of the 20th century which resulted in many genre derivatons. English modern drama, for example, is so multi-layered that it invites many methods of classification, such as:

1. HISTORICAL CLASSIFICA- TION	2. THEMATIC CLASSIFI- CATION	3. SUBJECT MATTER	4. TECHNIQUE OF COMPOSI- TION/GENRE	5. FUNCTION	6. ELABORATI- ON OF THEME
Angry Young Men-drama after 1956, when John Osborne's play <i>Look Back in Anger</i> premiered.	Family play	Historical play	Modern play	Didactic play	Humorous play
“New wave” of British drama	Social play	Fantastic play	Postmodern play	Entertaining play	Satirical play
1st wave of British drama	Political play	SCI-FI	Total theatre		Experimental play
2nd wave of British drama		Detective play	In-Yer-Face		Journalistic play
3rd wave of British drama		Psychologi- cal play			7. STREAM OF THOUGHT
4th wave of British drama		Biographi- cal play			Sentimental play
					Romantic play
					Realistic play
					Naturalistic play
					Existential play ³

³ Based on: Štefan Franko : *Theory of Anglophonic Literatures*. 1994. Simplified by J. J.

This list is by no means complete and new genre variants are perpetually being created. What is more, many modern genres purposely overlap with other genres, creating hybrids.

The aforementioned outline of diachronic changes of the original Aristotelian genres brings us to the question why traditional genres change and alter. Historically, the reasons for the creation of new genres are various. Many were created “in opposition” to the traditional genres, in order to provoke and disturb the reader. One of the modern genres that purposely contradict features of traditional realistic plays is the already mentioned “In-Yer-Face” theatre. In-Yer-Face theatre uses both shocking language and shocking images to physically and emotionally discomfort the spectator and make him or her think about the issues in debate. John Osborne, one of the “Angry Young Men” and the author of iconic play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), inspired this genre. Other new genres include New Jacobean Theatre, Theatre of Urban Boredom and many others.

Historically, there have been numerous approaches to the essence of literary genre. The very first attempt to systematically explore literary genre has been done by Aristotle in *Poetics* (355 AD). He believed that there are three basic literary genres – tragedy, comedy and poetry and that they have fixed characteristic elements which should be identifiable in any piece of art. His criteria for genres were so well formulated yet non-prescriptive and that is perhaps why they have survived until present days. In medieval ages, though, the research of literary genres stagnated. Scholars were mostly searching for petrified elements of genres and set strict categories for what is and what is not a certain genre. A new evolutionary approach to genre was initiated by a French scholar, Ferdinand Brunetière, in 1890 in his study *L'Évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*. He set five basic phases of the “life” of literary genres [Brunetière 1890:15]:

- Creation and existence;
- Differentiation (from other genres);
- Stabilization;
- Modification;

- Transposition (“death” of the original genre and creation, “birth” of a new one).

Brunetière’s thought was very innovative as he was the first who recognized that literary genres, just like many social and biological phenomena are subject to development, deterioration, transformation and sometimes also natural and historically conditioned end of their being.

19th century, however, was greatly influenced by the positivistic philosophy and many overoptimistic attempts to quantify research, even in humanities emerged. Literary scholars were setting strict criteria on literary genres and conducted vigorous debates whether a certain piece of literature (e.g. *The Lady of the Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas) contains pre-conceived elements (e.g. those of melodrama and tragedy) or not. Needless to say, this period was the high time for inflated scholarly debates searching for the “truth” about a literary work.

Post Second World War literary scholarship was multilayered; there were both conservative and liberal genologic wings. The orthodox, conservative view is represented by George Steiner, the author of monograph *The Death of Tragedy* (1963). He denies the possibility of evolution of genres, namely of tragedy because, as he believes, tragedy was society-bound and the present-day society lacks the attributes of the ancient *polis* (town, community) which mostly lied on the principles of a closed society (compare: Karl Popper: *Open Society*). Thus, according to Steiner, no modern tragedy is possible. Another “ultraextreme” opinion on literary genres is represented by an Italian scholar Bernardo Croce. Croce denies the existence of literary genres as they are not inherent to the literary piece but only represent secondary, artificial aesthetic literary criteria.

There were also more tolerant attempts to literary genres. New literary pieces based on the original genres were understood as enrichment of the original genre rather than its destruction. For example, notable scholars René Wellek and Austin Warren respect the historical attempts for “pure” genres (*genre tranché*) but for modern understanding of literary genres they set less normative criteria. Modern theory of genres is more interested in search for a common feature among genres [Wellek-Warren 1966: 235].

Oscar Mandel [Mandel 1961:62] attempted to systemize theory of genres and divided existing definitions of genres (namely tragedy) into four groups:

- **Definition according to formal elements** (e.g. nobility of the hero, unity of time and place, etc.). However, this approach has been rejected by many modern scholars as dated and unreliable (R. C. Miller, Arthur Miller).

- **Definition according to situation**, focused on the essence of the situation depicted (e.g. Aristotle's fall from great fortune to ill-fortune). This approach has been recognized by Július Pašteka and George Steiner.

- **Definition according to ethical directions**, focused on the overall meaning of the play and its legacy for the spectator.

- **Definition according to the emotional effect of the play (or work of art in general, note JJ)**, based on the original Aristotelian imperative of fear and sympathy as navigational emotions of a play. Paul Hernadi calls this type of definition by another name, a "pragmatic orientation" [Hernadi 1972: 37].

Many scholars doubted measurability of one's personal experience with literary genre. However, H. D. F. Kitto's counterargument to these skeptical voices recommends to "trust" one's literary intuition: "If the meaning is the total impact of the play on the audience, how is it possible to say what it is, since audiences vary from age to age? The answer is: If you trust the dramatist, if you will consider the form of his play, patiently and with some imagination, as being probably the best possible expression of what he meant, then you will be giving yourself the best chance of appreciating the impact of what he was hoping to make on the audience for which he was writing" [Kitto 1960: 7].

There are almost as many systematic and a-systemic approaches to understanding genres as there are genres themselves and more will be developed. A scholar then faces the dilemma of which approach to select to obtain most objective results. Sometimes, the literary work itself invites a specific method of research (e.g. some features of a classic genre are so obvious one cannot but trace them systematically, as for example in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*, 1949). Othertimes, one just intuitively

follows a certain type of genre and its elements and tries to interpret them in the selected work of art. In the next part, various methods and forms of genealogical research will be subject to a methodological analysis.

As far as the form of literary genres is concerned, the form also artistically contributes to the meaning of the artistic piece. Wellek and Warren [Wellek – Warren 1966: 231], for example, recognize outer form of genre (e.g. its metric system); and inner form of genre (e.g. approach, tone, aim or theme and type of audience).

One should remember that in quality art, nothing is deliberate, random or purposeless. Each detail has its significance within the broader context of a literary work and enhances its artistic impact on the perceiver. A French sculptor, August Rodin liked to sculpture his sculptures with the most solid shape because he believed that if a sculpture is pushed down the hill, everything that falls off is redundant. The same is true for quality literary works and the researcher's role is to identify the indispensable parts and find out the importance of details as well as the whole.

According to a Slovak scholar Peter Zajac [Zajac 1990: 127-128], there are two basic approaches to the analysis of a literary genre: (1) Down to top, and (2) Top to down method.

1) Down to top method starts with the analysis of individual genre elements. These elements can first be fragmentary and seemingly unrelated. Later in the course of the play, novel or other kind of literary work they tend to unite into a meaningful unity [Zajac 1990:127-128].

2) Top to down method starts with pre-conceived genre estimate which the researcher tries to support by individual elements, themes, and other literary features of the literary work. That means, one intuitively feels a play is a tragedy and then starts to systematically search for a broader system of tragic elements (e.g. nobility of the tragic hero, the moment of recognition, presence or absence of a chorus) in the play. Zajac understands both methods as complimentary and interrelated as long as they equally incorporate two features: inner differentiation of literary works and their complex nature [Zajac 1990: 127-128].

Nevertheless, both methods evoke the basic question of genealogical research, which first has been asked by George Muller [cited in Hernadi

1972: 2]: *How can I define tragedy (or any other genre) before I know on which works to base the definition, yet how can I know on which works to base the definition before I have defined tragedy?* This type of argumentation is called “**circular evidence**” and is generally unacceptable in exact scientific research. Robert B. Sewall, however, fully agrees with this sort of argumentation in literature and with regards to the specific nature of a literary genre accepts it as a legitimate form of genological research [Sewall 1991: 175].

Literary genres, thus are socially bound, they evolve, modify and even die in accordance with the historical and social changes in the particular society. Some dramatic genres, such as miracle plays, disappeared completely, as they lost their social justification. Other genres, for example tragedy and comedy, have been proliferating until the present days as they in terms of form as well as content still can reflect the life of “modern” man. Moreover, definitions of various (dramatic) genres are also subject to historical and artistic modifications as the plays that serve as sample corpora for such definitions change and modify with times. Therefore, scholars often differ in their opinions on the significance of literary genres as means to understanding literary works. Literary genre is nowadays understood more as an essential “orientation point” that transmits the very introductory information to the reader and helps the reader to organize his or her anticipations toward literary works and, understanding a genre thus often means understanding the diachronic as well as synchronic genesis of its formation.

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СИНХРОНИЧЕСКИЕ И ДИАХРОНИЧЕСКИЕ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ ДРАМАТИЧЕСКИХ ЖАНРОВ

Автор данной статьи рассматривает проблему исторического происхождения и трансформации ранних драматических жанров (трагедия, комедия) в более сложные жанры, такие как мелодрама и театр городской скуки. Исследователь исходит из посылки, что драматические жанры исторически связаны и развиваются, либо угасают в зависимости от исторического развития.

Ключевые слова: драма, жанр, трагедия, комедия, производные жанры

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ДИСКУРС ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ И КИНО (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ РОМАНА «ПИАНИСТКА» Э.ЕЛИНЕК И ОДНОИМЕННОГО ФИЛЬМА М.ХАНЕКЕ)

Особенности дискурса литературы и кино исследуются на материале романа и фильма «Пианистка». Индивидуальная режиссерская концепция, подкрепленная харизматичной актерской игрой и различиями в системах эстетических принципов и средств двух видов искусства, рождает самостоятельное произведение, не только развивающее и дополняющее романский замысел, но и вступающее с ним в идейный спор.

Ключевые слова: дискурс, концепция, эстетика, психологизм, реализм, типизация, индивидуализация, несобственно-прямая речь, символ, лейтмотив, образ, повествование, автор, субъект, объект

Перевод на язык кино далекого от реалистической эстетики словесного произведения – задача *a priori* не из легких. Тем более, если