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Comparative Genology: Genre Modifications and Genre Metamorphism

Abstract

The article under studies deals with the issue of the comparative aspects of genre. Particular emphasis has been placed on the genre form (in the sense of a characteristic matrix/canon as a complex of specific factors), which functions in terms of a continuous literary process and, accordingly, adapts to its contextual changes, deviations, objections, innovations, correlations, needs of the receptive environment. The author's and the reader's perception of the meanings, contained in a particular genre, do not necessarily coincide. Consequently, the issue of the so-called multiplicity of genre logic (Jean-Marie Schaeffer's proposal) directly appeals to the comparativistic experience of studying typological coincidences or borrowings that affect the genre as such. Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Adolescent* is taken as an example of genre modification. Its genre is regarded in contamination with the genre of confession by means of comparing the individual plot lines and interpreting the main characters, which are perceived in the biblical context. Besides, it acquires a different perspective in clarifying the general author's idea. Finally, the article singles out such terminological syntagms as genre polymorphism, genre modifications, and genre metamorphism.

The form of any text in its integrity is generally implemented through the genre. To determine the genre key means to find a receptive criterion that helps to identify the acceptable resources of the text. However, from the time of Aristotle and to the present day, the development of reliable criteria for genre division, as well as the search for its "unambiguous classification" falls behind the literary process itself, sometimes even making no sense at all. Therefore, Gérard Genette and his disciples, like Jean-Marie Schaeffer, paid peculiar attention to this issue. In the long run, in 1989, the latter developed a convincing argument in favor of the multiplicity of genre logic (with a summary table of categories relevant for genre definitions) (Šeffer 2010). This situation appeals to the comparative methodology in contrasting the possible interpretations of the genre form of a particular text. This, however, does not mean that the issue is fully clarified.

It is important that Boris Yarho (a representative of the school of formal method) in his article of 1935 has defined genre as "a more or less limited complex of forms" made up by certain "summary features" (Ârho 1984: 139). The scholar has actually anticipated the problem of instances when emphasizing that "the mere fact of the coexistence of forms is not enough to distinguish this complex from the neighboring one. This complex is not only a certain sum, but also a special correlation between these forms, a certain connection between them" (Ârho 1984: 139). According to the scientist, it is necessary to pay attention to this correlation, to identify it as "a necessary act in the study of genres, schools, epochs, etc." (Ârho 1984: 139). In the article under discussion, the idea expressed by Yarho is of great methodological significance: both *correlations and forms* are equally important features of a genre complex.

As a rule, Ukrainian scientists still associate the formation of genre with a certain tradition, which also requires a comparativistic view on the issue. In this respect, the article presents some observations regarding the so-called philosophical novel in the monograph by Valentyna Herasymchuk. The researcher traces the European branch of this genre from the ancient, in particular Platonic tradition and the Enlightenment, and the Russian branch "somewhat differently, [...] by synthesizing, first of all, religious and moral experience, which was formed 'genre-wise' in the novels by F. Dostoevsky" (Herasymčuk 2007: 214). In this case, the genre is formulated rather roughly, in connotation with other scientific paradigms and with an emphasis on the specifics of character formation (Herasymčuk 2007: 215).

This leads to a rather unexpected thesis about "figurative suggestion" as a formative feature of the genre "expressed through such a form of artistic generalization as typologization. It is emphasized that different levels of typologization of the text are represented by an *image-idea*, *image-function*, *image-symbol*, all of which are a kind of 'guarantors' of the specificity of the genre of the philosophical novel" (Herasymčuk 2007: 215). In other words, there emerge a kind of receptive keys that encourage the reader's attention to flow in a programmed extensive direction.

It is quite logical that there may also arise the question of the primary or secondary nature of the genre in relation to the integrity created by the artist (it periodically "flickers" on the margins of the genological discourse). The former nature of the genre will be undoubtedly backed by hermeneutics, whereas the supporters of the receptive concept will emphasize the significance of the latter nature of the genre canon.

This point of view has been vividly illustrated in the 1962 article by Yuriy Sheveliov on the poetry of Taras Shevchenko's last year. In particular, the author emphasizes that "all of a sudden, Shevchenko starts writing in a peculiar poetic genre that can be referred to as a poem-miniature. Along with lyrical and philosophical meditations, as well as satire with elements of invective, this genre in Shevchenko's poetry becomes prevailing." What is more, it is outlined that such a genre can manifest itself "through various variants and variations" (Ševel'ov 2008: 67). It is essential that in this particular case, Sheveliov uses the "aspect of time and space" as a basic genre criterion. The above aspect is generally marked with either uncertainty or inter-combination, thus programming the corresponding genre matrix (Ševel'ov 2008: 69).

However, today's genre experiments, which are inherent in modern genology, are even more difficult to comprehend holistically against the background of writers' widespread experiments with the form. One can even dwell on a kind of "de-fetishization" of the genre form in the contemporary practice of art forms. This process is so fast that the theory does not have time to record each new phenomenon of verbal culture, each new genre "formation."

Undoubtedly, such drastic jumps over the canons occur rather systematically, with the exception of censored literature of certain times, which allowed it to be carried out only in the strict line of genre standards, legitimate and clear genre "matrices." In art, the essence of tyranny expresses itself through clear, predetermined genre frames. This becomes possible because the stable genre form itself censors what is said (in such conditions, only fables were able to criticize).

Presently, particular attention is drawn to narrative instances in terms of the specifics of the genre format. In European discourse, this dimension has been mentioned for the first time by narratology. Ilya Ilyin points at the generalizing nature of its leading concept, referring to the most influential representatives of narrative theory — French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and American literary critic Fredric Jameson.

The researcher states that:

> [...] in accordance with this theory, the world can be perceived only in the form of a literary discourse; even representatives of natural sciences, for example physics, "tell stories" about nuclear particles. At the same time, everything that represents itself as existing outside of any history (structure, form, category) can be mastered by consciousness only through narrative fiction. (Il'in 2001: 5)

It follows from the above that narrative instances, ordering a certain narrative model, prove the genre character of the discourse itself. The typical strategy of structuralist discourse has worked constructively in singling out such instances, already taking the narrative beyond the limits of purely literary theory.

Ilyin concludes that:

> [...] the theory of narrative has become a conceptualization of the principle of 'poetic thinking', which was developed by M. Heidegger and lay in the basis of the so-called postmodern sensitivity as a specific form of world perception and the corresponding way of theoretical reflection. It is in the form of postmodern sensitivity, which confirms the importance of literary thinking and its genre forms for any type of knowledge, that structuralist ideas have proved most attractive to specialists and theorists of various profiles. (Il'in 2001: 6)

Narratology was perhaps the first philological science to provide the concept of "instance" with a terminological status, stratifying narrative forms in a literary text. Of course, the hierarchical specificity of the interaction between narrative layers (instances) of a particular text, taken in comparison, is quite capable of becoming a separate indicator of its genre composition, although other criteria will be of no less importance. First of all, genre projections of narrative layers in the unfolding of the plot, which appears in various genre projections (in particular, in the ordering of the derivative intention).

In general, the plot in formalists' terminological interpretation does not suggest understanding as one of the forms. Nevertheless, it is a core generating "concept" of the text as a form of "writing," as well as one of the most significant impulses of the act of creation. The analysis of the implementation of a certain well-known plot into a new integrity for poetics remains an open issue due to the immanent nature of this subject. This has been proved by numerous functional studies of traditional plots and images (TPI) by the representatives of the comparative school of Chernivtsi professor Anatoliy Volkov (*Leksykon zahal'noho...* 2001; *Tradycijni sjužety...* 2004). Here, any researcher is given the freedom of analytical criteria within the framework of a particular plot program, which, consequently, carries out itself in terms of numerous modifications of any of the known genre models.

Most frequently, genre modifications were described in the works by Olena Yeremenko (Jeremenko 2006). The scholar regards them in terms of the epoch, which, in her opinion, enhances the opportunity of clearly determining such facts. Highlighting the notion of "normative features" in the genreological perspective, she emphasizes that "the correlation of generally accepted and individual features in the genre organization of the text makes it possible to establish the regularities of the functioning of genre modifications in a certain literary epoch" (Jeremenko 2008: 33).

It is interesting that this issue has generated an almost scholastic discussion of the terminological nature, with the proposal to differentiate between the concepts of *genre modification* and *genre transformation* in relation to the definitions. For example: "Genre modification can be identified only at the end of a work, while genre transformations can be seen already on its first pages" (Bovsunivs'ka 2014: 88).

Staying away from such polemics, we shall focus on genre modifications. It is also permissible to consider them in terms of compositional multiplicity of elements of the plot

matrix, hence — derivative types of artistic speech, narrative layers and, as a rule, national specifics of functioning of individual genres.

A vivid example of genre modification is the novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky *The Adolescent* (1875). This work contains at least one apparent, although slightly hidden, plot core of the fundamental genre definition of the form, which is not actually taken into account by researchers. However, due to its numerous narrative layers and possible receptive projections, it is this secret key of the text that can incredibly activate the perception of the author's idea, in addition to clarifying how the genre itself works at a formal level.

The pre-plot of the text arises from Versilov's confessional narrative, addressed to his illegitimate son Arkady (Part 1, Chapter 7, Section 2). This is a story about how Andrey Petrovich, using his landowner's right, literally takes a woman from her rightful husband, his understanding of the shamefulness of the act, the fear of revenge from the offended. This story directly appeals to the Biblical source. We read:

> [...] I swear that right now I am in a highly repentant mood, and right now, at this moment, for the thousandth time, I am powerless to regret everything that happened twenty years ago. Besides, God knows that it all happened very unintentionally... and what is more, the way I could, and humanely. [...] And how I risked, how I risked! What if he had shouted and howled in the whole yard, this Uriah of the county — what would have happened to me, to such a small David, and what would I have been able to do then? The very next day he agreed to the voyage, without a word, of course, without forgetting any of the rewards I offered. (Dostoevskij 1975: 106–107)

As we can see, in this confession, the father associates the drama of his relationship with the adolescent's mother, Sofia Andreevna, with the famous biblical triangle "Uriah — Bathsheba — David," calling Makar Ivanovich Dolgoruky, whose surname is also worn by Arkady, "the district Uriah," and himself, respectively, "the short David." Thus, in its essence, Dostoevsky's plot, of course, connotes with the biblical plot about the sin of King David, which appears as a secret palimpsest of the *Adolescent*. The plot, used by the writer, which became the spiritual impetus of the iconic repentant 50th Psalm ("Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your great mercy..."), turns out to be the most essential, almost the key receptive enzyme of the text, provided its presence is taken into account. This fact may also be a certain clue to eventually "sift" the entire novel through the hyperthematic grid of the Psalter. The genre modification of the text of *The Adolescent* should therefore proceed from the genre system of Christian literary experience, in particular the confessional genre, and ferment the perception of the specifics of the most important narrative structures of this text, which, unfortunately, is lacking in the works devoted to this text of Dostoevsky.

The plot, mentioned purposefully by the author, efficiently directs the reception into three autonomous comparative channels (Makar Ivanovich — "Uriah," Versilov — "David," Sofia Andreevna — "Bathsheba," respectively), which are organically interconnected by various narrative relationships and modify the derivative genre of the biblical story (in this context, it is impossible not to hear the homonymous echo of the names Versilov and Bathsheba).

In addition, the text of the novel has other significant intertextual peculiarities that may also be considered as a modification of the prototext. Above all, here belongs the drama of

Liza, the second illegitimate child of Versilov, and Sofia Andreevna. With the exception of the denouement, it actually "duplicates" the story of Karamzin's *Poor Liza*. She is also seduced by her lover, the prince (the text repeatedly says: "Liza! Liza! Poor, unhappy!"; Dostoevskij 1975: 236). In the novel, we also come across a Shakespearean allusion (in Arkady's conversation with Versilov about women): "If I were Othello and you were Iago, you could not be better... but I laugh! There can be no Othello, because there is no such relationship" (Dostoevskij 1975: 224–225).

Accordingly, all such factors stratify the epic rhizomes of *The Adolescent*. Constructive vectors of novel events are organically consistent with all other branches of the plot. It is known that Dostoevsky is one of the first authors who undertook to dissect intricate relationships. However, only at first glance, his text looks like a disordered rhizomatic composition. In fact, mainly due to its plot, it is fastened into a clear genre format, which results in a transparent depiction of characters and motivations of their actions.

Eventually, there arises a question as to what exactly manifests itself here in the genological aspect: genre modifications, genre polymorphism or genre metamorphism? In this case, the option of genre polymorphism is obvious: a multiple plot paradigm plays a significant role, preserving its key ideological connotations in a new repetition and at a different narrative level. The genre matrix is not duplicated and performs only a secondary function, which is subordinated to the author's holistic intention. The paradigm can be implemented in any other creative version of the genre form.

If we assume that all three of the above syntagms are not terminological synonyms, then it is necessary to find the constitutive features of their difference. Such considerations generally lead to the terminological issue of correct assessments of variations of genre form. Thereby, analytical comparativistics is only just getting involved in the issue. The same functional facts (modification, polymorphism, metamorphism) are usually regarded together, but today, it will be an archaic conclusion to identify them with the forms of one common denominator.

The signs of *genre modifications* (like, for example, epic forms) can appear in the general dimensions of compositional multiplicity or in the general parameters of a certain chosen genre matrix. They are not denied even by the variation of different samples of the so-called types of speech within the same text, as well as by the national specifics of individual genre formations (in the aspect of the novel genre, in particular, there is a common denominator for the Japanese novel *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon, *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave* by François-René de Chateaubriand, *The Confessions of a Son of the Century* by Alfred de Musset, *A Hero of Our Time* by Mikhail Lermontov, *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray, etc., all which can be legitimately compared as genre modifications of the instructive novel). Nowadays, popular remakes also belong to genre modifications.

Genre metamorphism means a completely different constructive denominator of genre deformation: here, the genre is deformed due to a drastic change in the generic nature of the previously accepted genre form (matrix), which depends on the strategy of the author's writing. For instance, the so-called lyrical novel, deprived of the attention of theorists, is metamorphosed through such frontal genre features as lyrical narrative, contrast of types of expression, and dramatic dialogue. This genre form at the same time is able to contrast in its samples and it be expressed in prose or poetic text: *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin, *The Gift* by Vladimir Nabokov, *The Poem without a Hero* by Anna Akhmatova are examples of such genre metamorphosis.

Finally, *genre polymorphism* should be interpreted as contamination within the genre of a certain textual integrity of those various modes that classical poetics associates, as a rule, with a separate genre canon. This practice was followed by Romanticism, then by the modernist style of artistic discourse, and then it became the basis of the postmodern novel.

Motivating various narrative instances, high classics remains a reliable generating ground for any modern genre inventions (including multimedia). It is mostly used as a supplier of plot, transitive characters, intertextual and ekphrasistic elements, future nomadic model of the world order (anti-hierarchical, anarchic, according to Gilles Deleuze). Currently, this side of the issue looks like a rather branched rhizomatic network, provided the poststructuralist and postmodern terminology of Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze, Guattari 1976) is activated here. However, comparative studies in this direction are not sufficient.

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