

## THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF GENRES AND THE INTERTEXTUAL GENRES

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### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Every literary text is, in its quality of utterance and as an enactment of meaning, historically individual and unrepeatable, yet the very uniqueness of the meaning effect bases itself in structures, forms, and semantic nets that recur – before and after the text’s production – in a vast variety of transformations. As Bakhtin put it in his draft of the essay “The Problem of the Text”:

“The two poles of the text. Each text presupposes a generally understood (that is, conventional within a given collective) system of signs, a language (if only the language of art). If there is no language behind the text, it is not a text, but a natural (not signifying) phenomenon, for example, a complex of natural cries and moans devoid of any linguistic (signifying) repeatability. [...] And so behind each text stands a language system. Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be given outside a given text (the given) conforms to this language system. But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance.” (Bakhtin 2004: 105)

Thus, the paradox of literary texts is that what constitutes its individuality also reappears in several other texts. This makes the literary work comparable to other texts and also qualifies it as a subject of literary criticism.

To compare and seek for traits that recur in singular items and to establish what appears to be typical/general is an everyday cognitive activity. Since, from the perspective of cognitive science, our minds are “literally embodied – inextricably founded in our bodily interaction and experience with the world” (Stockwell 2002: 27), categorization may be seen as essential for the economy of our knowing and acting. Classifying literature by author, period or genre, which involves grouping bodies of texts according to our perception of certain common traits

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(Stockwell 2002: 28), serves the same functions as other cognitive tools, that is: to accommodate new data and facilitate our understanding; to manage with unforeseen situations and react properly, etc. (see Frow 2005: 51). Sorting literary texts and tagging them with general terms (e.g., “fiction,” “poetry,” “travelogue”) is intertwined with living practices (Frow 2005: 12–13) extending from amateur talks on books, spontaneous reading choices, through marketing strategies, cataloguing of incoming books, to writing critical reviews, and professional lecturing. Due to practices that enact categorization, genre terms attached to particular texts are able to trigger rather predictable associations about their content or form. However, as I attempt to show later, the interlacement of cognitive categorization with a range of living contexts also entails considerable variety, difference, and contradictions in attributing texts or text corpora to genre categories. As Stockwell warns us, “what counts as a genre and what gets included within a genre depends on what you think a genre is in general, and which common feature of its elements you have decided to foreground as being most salient” (2002: 28). It makes difference, if one reads or refers to Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* as an “airport novel” or “Victorian novel.” Consequently, in each particular case, category building and recognition of genres depend on who is involved in the categorization activity, what are her or his goals, mental framework, discursive community or cultural model, as well as on specific social or pragmatic contexts of handling with literary texts and genre concepts (see Stockwell 2002: 30–34).

### **From essences to relations**

According to Genette (1986) and Frow (2005: 56–62), genre theory from Aristotle to Goethe and the romantics evolved along two lines: more frequently, genres were classified empirically and with regard to inconsistent criteria; however, toward the 19<sup>th</sup> century this eclecticism gave way to more coherent and self-reflective systems, which adopted Aristotelian taxonomy of speech presentation and converted it, by a retrospective illusion, into fundamental kinds of all literature, based on metaphysical categories of subject, object, time, and the like. With Goethe, the Schlegel brothers, and Hegel, metaphysical essentialism, which had been involved in normative poetics of genres ever since Aristotle’s *morphe* (Schaeffer 1989a: 12–24, 32–38), reached its zenith; essentialism supposed that every literary text is grounded in an *a priori* essence that can be grasped through some general category to which such a particular item belongs as one of its representations. Whereas great

classificatory systems of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, like Linné's, have proven to be consistent, exhaustive, and viable in natural sciences, this is not the case with categories that, following the examples of biology or chemistry, attempted to classify domains of human symbolic interaction (see Frow 2005: 51). The latter are much more culture or language-dependant, since their objects of knowing are constituted through indeterminacy of the human agency. Efforts to sort a particular literary text into one single general rubric within a hierarchically structured and closed genological system have thus frequently come to a dead end.

As known, deconstruction declared against all kinds of essentialism. One of its favorite targets was the notion of "literature." It was repeatedly shown that literature, instead of being a fundament that would exist in deep structures of all genres and texts considered literary, is but a conceptual, even ideological fiction or, at best, a fluid field of social interaction. The concept of intertextuality was perhaps one of the side-effects of the early poststructuralist anti-essentialism; Kristeva backed the intertextual idea by devising *une autre logique* that was meant to supplant logical reasoning in terms of essences by that of relations (Kristeva 1969: 150–153, 172–173). Intertextuality became involved in deconstruction of literature as a homogeneous category; it was dissected it into a heteroglot plurality of genres of discourse (see Todorov 1978: 13–26).

Although Todorov thought that, in comparison to literature, genres were more certain and objective, the very concept of genre soon began to be conceived as relational as well: items belonging to a certain genre category do not all share the same invariant features, but are only in Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" (see Frow 2005: 53–54). An anti-essentialist drive, characteristic of recent genre criticism, has led postmodern scholars to the conviction that genre is but a system of differences and that its matrix cannot be deduced from a particular set of apparently similar texts. According to such logic, genre identity is historically unstable, depending merely on "extra-textual," pragmatic, or contextual factors, as a final consequence of how routines in the production and consumption of cultural products are being institutionalized or decomposed. For example, Beebee, inspired by Saussure, holds that literary genres are systems of differences without their own, positive content; they are just ways of using texts (Beebee 1994: 257). So Beebee opts for a pragmatic definition of genre as "economics of discourse" or an institution (274, 277). The institution metaphor has been quite popular since Wellek and Warren (see Fishelov 1993: 86–99). According to Jameson,

genres are “social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (1981: 106–07).

### **Genre identities and classifying practices**

Classifying a text into a genre category is, as stated by Frow (2005: 54), “as much pragmatic as it is conceptual, a matter of how we wish to contextualize these texts and the uses we wish to make of them.” Genre notions are thus dependent both on meta-literary reflection and “systems of use” (ibid. 12), that is, it is intertwined into practices of writing, reading, editing, and marketing, distributing or commenting on texts. To begin with, theorists may belong to a lesser interpretative community, but their positions in literary, academic, and educational fields have always been influential (especially during the millennial rule of normative poetics). Despite the air of disinterested speculation and abstraction, their methodical elaboration of genre concepts and systems does not transcend historical practice, since their theories are always conveyed in specific textual genres and contingent socio-historical contexts. Theoretical metadiscourse on genres often goes over literary scholarship to critical reviews, school textbooks, and even literary texts (poetics in verse, metafictional commentaries, literary satires, etc.); disseminated this way, it bears witness to the historical being of literary kinds, since they can only exist if they have been perceived and mentally conceptualized as such (see Todorov 1978: 49; Frow 2005: 68–69).

Discriminating and identifying genres occur in literary life mainly through the daily practices that the individual, collective, and institutional agents conduct when dealing with particular texts. Apart from the author’s strategic genre allusions which indicate the intended intertextual location of the text (e.g., Joyce and Beckett’s parodic hints to schemata of Bildungsroman), the practical sense of genres is at work in the reader’s choices and expectations, as well as in their activating genre-bound mental schemes that include typical slots for a variety of possible fillings – to borrow Stockwell’s example, “the SF schema” with its conventional “slots such as: spaceships, rayguns, robots, time and space travel” (2002: 79). During the reception process, genre functions as a mediator between new textual items and the schematically memorized array of *déjà lu*, thus facilitating interpretative meaning-constitution (cf. Keunen 2000; Frow 2005: 84–85, 101).

The establishment, indication, and recognition of generic features are therefore largely habitual tasks of actors playing their roles on the literary field. Genre identities of particular

texts are thus often negotiated, especially when it comes to clashes in interpretation. For example, the Slovene writer Breda Smolnikar was recently prosecuted for having defamed real persons, although she entitled her fiction as *Golden Fables from Depala Village* (Zlate dépuške pripovedke, 1999). We should also bear in mind that genre recognition and metadiscourse take place in diverse cultural, linguistic, and historical environments. As noted by Fowler (1982: 133), exact equivalents between generic terms in different languages are seldom found (e. g., historical terms for the current notion of the “novel”: *syntagma, istoria, monogatari, romanz, histoire, novela, novel, der Roman, romanzo, povest*). The confusion is further increased by the fact that criteria applied in distinguishing genres are themselves being modified and contested because of ever changing network of systemic differences between genological concepts (see Beebee 1984: 28, 257). For instance, the term *commedia* in Dante’s time meant a tale with a happy ending (Schaeffer 1989a: 105, 120).

### **The intertextual existence of genres**

Texts obtain their genre identities only in the tangled web of the strategies, needs, dispositions, and acts of agents – be it individual or institutional – within a special social field. However, how and why did the texts gain their “use-value” (Beebee’s term; 1984: 7)? Skwarczynska, who was among the first to differentiate between genre notions, terms, and textual structures of literary genres, found out that, on the textual level, genres are integrated in linguo-communicative structures; they partake in their functional variety (1966: 20, 23–24). Stressing that language exists only through uses in socio-historically specific utterances, Bakhtin, in his essay “The Problem of Speech Genres,” proposed the notion of “speech genres:” they develop by repetition of certain linguistic or thematic patterns in a series of texts that are performed in comparable situations (Bakhtin 2004: 60–102). Each discursive genre features an interface between the text, the language system, and recurring situations (cf. Frow 2005: 14–15); the literary genres, however, are more complex and made also of patterns taken from simpler discourse genres and speech-acts. Derrida and Todorov came to similar conclusions. Derrida connects generic codification with his idea of iterability (*citation/ré-cit*) (1980: 57–58), while Todorov explains it with the institutionalization or conventionalization of reiterated traits in multiple utterances. For him, discourse genres get institutionalized as generative matrixes for authors and horizons of expectation for readers (Todorov 1978: 49–51).

Yet genres and literary kinds are not just a matter of the linguo-pragmatic competence or cultural literacy. They also arise on the metatextual level, through the interaction between the cognizing subject and textual percepts. Despite all theoretical constructivism and institutionalism, the observed text features and intertextual family resemblances also play a major role in genre attribution. According to Hoorn's empirical research (2000), texts can be classified by typical distributions of word frequencies. Readers are capable of identifying the generic pattern as soon as they catch some prominent word families, characteristic of a certain group of texts. The concept of genre thus connects the elements and patterns occurring in speech/writing with cognitive acts that arrange text percepts with regard to memory schemata (motifs, chronotopes, etc.) derived from recipient's former text-processing (see Keunen 2000). From this viewpoint, literary kinds turn out to be products of intertextual and meta-textual procedures encapsulated in writing and reading.

The intertextual explanation of literary kinds was made possible by the deconstruction of the code/text opposition. The notion of code used to be an unacknowledged descendant of essentialism; it was represented as a fundamental, primary entity that exists prior to and independently of texts. Barthes reversed this hierarchy: for him, all codes exist textually and evolve intertextually (Barthes 1981: 155, 157). His notion of generic intertextuality was carried on by Suerbaum (1985). He demonstrates that genre identity is formed only by way of successive texts, in a cumulative process driven by intertextuality. Whereas "perspectival intertextuality" locates a literary text vis-à-vis non-literary discourse (e.g., by adopting structures of a diary, letter, vocabulary), it is "linear intertextuality" in which the text refers to similar pre-existing works of literature. Later works often imitate titles of a model text or group of texts (see A. Fowler 1982: 92–95): English Renaissance tragedies followed the example of the classical ones in taking the name of the main character as the title (*Othello*, *King Lear*). By this and other intertextual indicators, such as imitations of style, quoting of prominent fragments, borrowings of characters or spaces, authors unconsciously or deliberately evoke genre background for their texts' semantic figures. They may bring into play references to the "already said" in order to perform the pertinent genre lineage for the model reader.

Textual linking to genre traditions is twofold (cf. Frow 2005: 23–25): on the one hand, imitations and transpositions of recurrent, conventionalized semiotic patterns are "uses" or "performances" of diverse generic matrixes; on the other hand, by exploring new possibilities and hybridizing genre traditions, new texts reshape given intertextual "codes" and constantly

shift genre boundaries. As a result, genre identities and systems are fluid and at least sporadically subject to negotiation.

The intertextual approach to genres has proven to be productive in theories that connect the notion of family resemblances with that of prototypes. For cognitivism, categorization is not proceeding through a rigorous and logically formalized discrimination between things, but with reference to prototypes; every categorization is based on a fuzzy set of exemplary items, that is, on a “radial structure or network with central good examples, secondary poorer examples, and peripheral examples” (Stockwell 2002: 29). Inter-categorial boundaries are therefore neither sharp nor stable; prototype structure is culturally and historically changeable, because it depends on variegated goals, strategies, and contexts of manifold cognitive acts (Stockwell 2002: 30–34). For example, what used to be referred to as “literature” in the cultural mainstream of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was based on a rather different network of prototypes than today’s notions, which have – at least in the elite culture – restructured the schema of “literature” by integrating into its conceptual network once peripheral, disputable, or even alien examples, such as decadent and naturalistic aesthetic of ugliness, modernist fragment and stream of consciousness, avant-garde collage and ready-made, non-fiction novel, computer poems, and so forth.

Fishelov introduces the working definition of genre based on prototypical texts and flexible sets of constitutive rules derived from and exemplified by these texts (1993: 8, 12). Prototypes are not necessarily paradigms which must be imitated, but may function as deliberate genre references as well (see Schaeffer 1989b). Emerging texts refer to prototypical patterns with a variety of intertextual signals and attitudes, from affirmative to explicitly polemical. This is also connected to genre bound mental schemata which are employed by agencies within the literary field. As Stockwell succinctly summarizes, literary schemas – including genres – generally evolve in three ways: by “accretion – the addition of new facts to the schema; tuning – the modification of facts or relations within the schema; restructuring – the creation of new schemas” (2002: 78). New texts in genre development thus either preserve and reinforce the given schema or refresh and even disrupt it, thus leading writers, readers, critics, and others to “knowledge restructuring” (Stockwell 2002: 79–80). The above mentioned super-genre “literature” may witness to this fact.

The concept of prototype is not limited to a single exemplary work, figuring as the mythical founder of a literary kind. Drawing on cognitive studies by Rosch and Mervis, Fishelov claims that the role of the prototype is also played by a series of texts, whose constitutive

features establish family resemblances and which are appreciably different from the members of other categories (Fishelov 1993: 61–63). Intertextual family resemblances develop genetically, through persistent references to prototypical texts or sets. The genre lineage is usually structured around authors and texts which are *in retrospective*, after their canonization, viewed as founders of the genre, for example, Homer and Virgil as fathers of the epic, Petrarch and Shakespeare as the founders of the sonnet (ibid.: 65–67).

In literary life, successful genre patterns inspire imitation, variation, and transformation. First they are rehearsed by the “original” author, encouraged by the achievement of his/her first trial, and then by all who fell under his sway. As convincingly shown by Moretti, who compares transnational generic influences to waves, the ensuing explorations of given generic potentialities are, as a rule, subject to survival struggles imposed by the literary market and steered by changing selections of audiences: among the genre’s offspring only those varieties survive and continue to evolve that are best adapted to such exigencies. From this, Moretti concludes that the “typical pattern” in evolution of genres is “divergence [that] prepares the ground for convergence” (2004: 55). And for generic prototypes, we could add.

Intertextual references to prototypical texts are often indicated by citations, epigraphs, intertitularity, or allusions to the supposed “originator” of the respective genre. For example, Prešeren, the Slovene romantic poet not only emulated and reinvented petrarchism in his sonnets, but also wittily and meta-poetically compared himself to the Italian master. However, Prešeren’s own sonnet writing, especially *The Sonnet Wreath* (Sonetni venec, 1834), became a model for subsequent Slovene poetry, probably also due to its successful crystallization of long-lasting traits of Slovene collective mentalities and feelings. The sonnet, often interlaced with revisions of Prešernian forms, imagery, themes, and modalities, is the most frequently used and prestigious genre in the national repertoire of lyric poetry. Similar sonnet traditions can be observed in Czech and Polish literatures (see Juvan 2006: 286–293).

Genre consciousness produced by only intertextual references, variation, and rewriting would be anarchic. Yet the literary institution disposes with discursive powers that regulate genre consciousness and map particular acts of generic recognition; poetologists, followed in modernity by influential reviewers, literary opinion-makers, academic critics, and the school system establish and reinforce stable genological concepts or systems. These theoretical concepts and nets – being meta-discursive categories disseminated from positions of authority across the entire literary field – influence the formation of the generic tradition; this



was particularly the case in the canonized genres of pre-Enlightenment literature such as epic, tragedy or ode (see Schaeffer 1989b).

The notion of intertextuality has also undone the essentialist hierarchy of containments, according to which every text belonged to a literary kind, the kind to a literary type or “natural form,” and the latter to literature as a meta-genre. A work of literature, quite to the contrary, evokes manifold generic references, combining and hybridizing them (see A. Fowler 1982: 156–57, 183–90). The text is the site where various generic codes not only meet, but also construct and deconstruct each other: “The text does not *belong* to a genre. Every text *participates* in one or more genres” (Derrida 1980).

### **Coda: The intertextual genres**

It is not only that intertextuality challenges the established genological notions. Genre criticism has also enhanced the intertextual theory. We have become aware of the literary kinds whose identity depends precisely on intertextuality that is explicit and foregrounded, so that the reader is ready to grasp it as a writing strategy. Actors in the literary field are able to distinguish between types of re-writing and intertextual reference thanks to those forms’ inherent iterability – references and derivations repeat, copy, and modify not only pre-texts but each other’s structures and prototypes as well. In the realm of the explicit intertextuality or citationality (Juvan 2000: 57–59) thus evolves a special sort of literary kinds, that which depends on resembling and conventionalized forms of intertextuality. I call them citational genres, to which I include parody, travesty, burlesque, pastiche, collage, paraphrase, variation, imitation, sequel, interpretation, etc. (ibid.: 31–46, 265–70). Although some explain them as generic modalities, similar to satire or the tragic (consequently, *parodic* novel, *parodic* sonnet, etc.), the citational genres function just like the proper literary kinds. So a text may be identified as a parody regardless of whether it is formally a sonnet, a tale, or a grotesque play. There are multiple reasons for that: 1) the texts denoted as parodies mainly refer to their pre-texts in a parallel, more or less conventional manner (by caricaturing their features and/or by introducing disharmonies in content/form) – therefore they exhibit family resemblances in the intertextual syntax and semantics; 2) they play analogous communicative roles (from entertainment to criticism of ideas or styles) – they are therefore related by their pragmatics; 3) they have successfully formed a cognitive class backing up literary percepts of authors, readers, critics, and others – this can be seen in the fact that a specific genre term has

been conceived (the term “parody” is actually one of the oldest in literary scholarship) and that an extensive body of meta-discourse was produced about it (on this, see Juvan 2000: 37–45).

To summarize, the conception of intertextuality, originally opposed to the metaphysics of presence, provides present genre theory with an explanation of generic identity which does not neglect actual semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic properties perceived in texts. Genres – either “straight” or intertextual – live on social practices which frame intertextual and metatextual references to prototypical texts or sets of texts. All genres are classificatory categories and pragmatic schemes inscribed in practical knowledge and communicative competence. They are cognitive and practical devices for intertextual pattern-matching. However, they do not remain entrapped in texts. To conclude with the words of Richard Bauman, genres “serve as conventionalized orienting frameworks for the production, reception, and circulation of discourse;” (2004: 2–3) they encode “particular orders of knowledge and experience” and “implicate different subject positions and formations” (ibid.: 6).

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