

## APPENDIX II

### ON LITERARY GENRES

The result of our investigation into the typologies of historical and biographical narrative in ancient culture leads us to reconsider the problem of 'genres' in the poetry and prose of the Greeks in terms of the phenomenology of communication. This brief appendix describes the methodological premises on which our analysis is based and our view of the essential points of this problem.

We believe, to start with, that literary genres represent a communicative system within the structure of literary communication. They reflect the most conservative and lasting tendencies in the development of literature, and their conservation capacity is in direct relation to their capacity of being renewed in each individual work in the function of new cultural realities. As an institution, the genre is always old and new because it lives in the present and, at the same time, recalls the past and its origins. This perspective permits us to find the constant elements in the literary system — narrative structures, techniques of exposition, key concepts of narrative — without ever losing sight of the historical process or the continuous contribution of the significant variants. It is the problem of the relationship between literature and public, a dialectic resolved either in a full correspondence between the work and the expectations of those for whom it is intended or in a radical break between the two, which the critic must define in its semantic dimension and its historical genesis<sup>1</sup>. As we know, genre theory has passed through

1. See in this respect the concept of "horizon of expectation" in the public, theorized by H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, Konstanz 1967.

numerous vicissitudes according to the various epochs of European culture. Apart from the heated discussions and polemics on the subject in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, its most ample analytic development occurred in the general theory of literature elaborated by positivism and in a negative critical tendency of idealism. Both perspectives contained a margin of equivocation in the definition of the genres, the first representing them according to the model of a biological species in evolution<sup>2</sup>, the second seeing them as pure and simple abstract entities, subsumed after the event by criticism. One made of the genre a biological reality circumscribed in the individuality of its species and evolving in time according to the Darwinian principle, while the other made of it an empirical-abstract scheme unable to catch the essence of a literary work. These two unilateral perspectives do not take into account the pragmatic vision of the genre and its communicative function.

Beyond the two opposed conceptions of literary genre as an objective reality of a naturalistic type which has always contained the organic principle of its evolution, or as an abstract scheme elaborated after the event for descriptive purposes, the research of the Russian formalists had the merit of studying genre in a structural vision of the work and the literary institutions. This position allows us to grasp the specific quality of the genre, the function peculiar to each formal element and the appearance of new functions as they are fulfilled in the relationship between the traditional system and the modern message<sup>3</sup>. The evolutionism of Brunetière, who theorized the action of the work on the work, is thus revived in the sense of the innate dynamism in the relationship between individual message and literary system.

The theory elaborated by Russian formalism is actually the sole instrument which permits a full understanding, in both a

synchronic and diachronic perspective, of the phenomenon of literary genres in ancient Greece. It is not by chance that Bakhtin<sup>4</sup> reached the definition of the serio-comic genre which he applied to 19th century Russian narrative starting from the study of ancient literature and, in particular, from the Platonic dialogue. The category was already clearly present in the critical reflection of the Greeks through the notion of *psógos* and *geloíon*, that is, of a work of poetry or prose which mingles blame and jest, situating itself at the opposite pole to the encomium<sup>5</sup>. It is surprising, and has never been sufficiently emphasized, that Bakhtin's intuition about the Platonic dialogue, seen by him as a typical example of the serio-comic, finds a significant precedent in ancient thought. After having read Plato's dialogue bearing his name Gorgias said: "How Plato can mock (ἰαμβίζειν)". After he had dedicated his own gold statue at Delphi, Plato hailed him when he saw him and addressed him ironically: "Behold Gorgias handsome and all of gold". And Gorgias replied: "Handsome and new is the Archilochus that Athens has begot!"<sup>6</sup>. Gorgias saw in the curious mixture of seriousness and facetiousness that characterizes the dialogue a precise element of continuity with the poetic genre that had its most representative exponent in Archilochus.

If we now turn to Greek culture in its earliest phase up to the 5th century B.C., which was primarily oral, we see a combination of various poetic genres operating on a pragmatic level rather than on the level of the apparent structure of the work and its internal organization. Song depended on the various occasions of social life and the type of vocal and instrumental performance required on each occasion. This particular sociological component of Greek culture in its pre-bookish phase has not received adequate emphasis from those who have treated the problem of the ancient literary genres.

2. Typical is the position of F. Brunetière, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature*, Paris 1890.

3. Ju. N. Tynjanov, *Archaisty in novatory*, Leningrad 1929 = *Avanguardia e tradizione*, It.trans. Bari 1968.

4. Dostoevsky. *Poetica e stilistica*, It. trans. Torino 1948, p. 140; 'Epos e romanzo. Sulla metodologia dello studio del romanzo', in *Problemi di teoria del romanzo*, Torino 1976, p. 200 ff.

5. Aristot. *Poet.* 1448 b.

6. Athen. 11, 505 d-e; Gorg. 82 A 15a D-K.

Fundamental for the earliest history of the lyric genres is a passage in the *Laws*<sup>7</sup> in which Plato argues against the license in his time in treating the traditional musical norms which had until then marked the dividing line between the various types of poetry: in ancient times, he says, *mousiké* was divided into genres and defined modes, which characterized respectively the hymns to the gods, the funeral laments (*thrēnoi*), the *nómoi* for lyre and other forms of song, such as the paeon in honour of Apollo and the dithyramb in honour of Dionysus. It was not permissible to transgress this distinction between performances, abusively substituting one type of melody for another. According to Plato the political authorities should ensure a rigorous respect for the poetical-musical tradition, and the public itself should listen in silence, without disturbing the performance by whistling or applause as happened in Plato's day. In the new situation attacked by Plato, the new poets, vying to please an unruly public that fancied itself a good judge of poetry, confused the features peculiar to the various genres of their performances.

This passage of Plato is significant for two reasons. In the first place, it shows that division into genres had operated in Greek culture of the archaic and classical period even within the substantial unity of the melic production denominated by the comprehensive term "hymn"<sup>8</sup>. This term, we should stress, assumes in Plato<sup>9</sup> the specific significance of a prayer to the gods as opposed to a song in honour of men (*enkómion*), performed before the restricted audience of a symposium or the vaster audience of a solemn ceremony in honour of an athlete who had triumphed in the agonic feasts. In the second place, the

7. 3, 700b ff.

8. An ample documentation of the term is to be found in all archaic poetry. For hymn in the sense of *thrēnos* cf. Anacr. fr. 168 Gent.; Aesch. *Pers.* 620; 626; *Ag.* 709 etc.; in the generic sense of "symposium song" cfr. above all Anacr. fr. 33, 11 Gent.; Xenophan. fr. 1, 13 Gent.-Pr.; Teogn. 993; in the sense of song of celebration of an agonic victory it is frequently used in Bacchylides and Pindar.

9. *Resp.* 10, 607 a.

passage documents a state of crisis which affected the traditional genres between the 5th and the 4th century, both in the melic forms and in the content. The true objective of Plato's polemic was really the composite style of the so-called new dithyramb which, with free use of harmonies in the three different genres (enharmonic, diatonic and chromatic), had affected every other melic form<sup>10</sup>. With Timotheus, music certainly reached the highest point of mimetic expressivity, as we infer both from the testimonials of contemporaries<sup>11</sup> and from the lexical and stylistic audacities of the poetic text. The triumph of the new dithyramb coincides with the final affirmation of writing and prose activities, submitted to the meditated control of the writer. The new art, open to the most daring musical experiments, limited the role of the verbal text to the point of reducing it to a mere *text for music*. With the decline of orality and its energies innate in the charm of the execution, the new music was able to replace that suggestive and emotional power characteristic of oral poetry with the mimetic force of its experimentation.

But Plato<sup>12</sup> also elaborates on a theoretical level a typology of narrative that permits him to classify poetic production in three large categories based on the internal structure of the work: 1) 'simple' narrative in the third person; 2) mimetico-dialogical narrative; 3) mixed narrative. To the first genre he assigns the dithyramb, conceived as a song of the chorus which narrates mythical events; to the second dramatic poetry, tragic and comic; to the third, finally, the epic and other genres which contain narrative and dialogue. With the expression 'other genres' he evidently means all those poematic forms, iambic, elegiac and lyric, in which narrative and dialogical parts coexist. This is confirmed by the further classification into sub-genres developed by

10. Dion. Hal. *De comp. verb.* 29 (II p. 85 f. Us.-Rad.), cf. Ps. Plut. *De mus.* 4, 1132de.

11. Pherecr. fr. 145, 19 K. (*ap.* Ps. Plut. *De mus.* 30, 1141f) = Test. 10 Del Grande.

12. *Resp.* 3, 392d-394c.

the grammarian Diomedes<sup>13</sup>, still within the bounds of the three fundamental genres of the Platonic doctrine: dramatic or active, exegetical-narrative, and common. This last, i.e. the mixed genre with a combination of dramatic and narrative structure, includes, along with epic, the lyric poetry exemplified by Archilochus and Horace.

The theory of genre elaborated by the Alexandrian scholars follows in the wake of Plato's rhetorical theory. The contexts and the situations to which the poetry of the past was destined were disappearing; poetry was from then on read as literature *tout court* and, consequently, classified not on the basis of the original pragmatic criteria but according to internal criteria of a rhetorical type, based on the structure of the work and its contents. Hence the abstract individuation of genres and sub-genres, which often gave rise to uncertainties and disputes in the classification of single texts of archaic and late-archaic poetry, as documented, for example, by the controversy between Callimachus and Aristarchus over the classification of the *Cassandra* of Bacchylides. This seemed a dithyramb to Aristarchus, while Callimachus maintained that it was a paeon, basing his judgment on the ritual cry *iē* which recurred in the poem<sup>14</sup>.

The classification of the genres in the Alexandrian age was substantially bookish not only in its analytical formulation but also in its genesis and its operative ends in as much as it was narrowly linked to the practical necessities of critical editing and the libraries. Conceived with the principal purpose of offering a rational catalogue of ancient texts, this doctrine of genres ended by exercising a decisive influence on the literary taste of the time, which expressed itself, on the critical level, in a complex and elaborate theoretical structure and, on the concrete level of poetic activity, in the tendency towards a sophisticated contamination and mixture of poetic genres<sup>15</sup>.

13. *Gr. Lat.* I, p. 482 f. Keil.

14. *Schol. Bacchyl. Carm.* 22-23, p. 127 f. Sn.-Maehl.

15. On the poetic genres in ancient Greece, see the fundamental work of H. Färber, *Die Lyrik in der Kunsttheorie der Antike*, München 1936, and the arti-

cle of A. E. Harvey, *Class. Quart.* n.s. 5, 1955, pp. 161-174. The successive attempts at theoretical reassessment should be kept in mind: L. E. Rossi, *Bull. Inst. Class. Stud. Univ. London* 18, 1971, p. 69 ff.; C. Calame, *Quad. Urb.* 17, 1974, p. 113 ff.; M. Fantuzzi, *Lingua e stile* 25, 1980, p. 433 ff.; D. Lanza, *Quad. Urb.* n.s. 13 (42), 1983, p. 51 ff. In the discussion of genres in Greek culture it is of primary importance to understand the changing course of the archaic situation whose dislocation into genres was closely connected with the different occasions and modes of execution, without implicating the internal structure of the work, until the new situation in the 4th century when classification was based on this last criterion. For this essential passage, see B. Gentili, 'Epigramma ed elegia', in *L'Épigramme grecque, Entret. Hardt* XIV, Vandoeuvres-Genève 1967, p. 39 ff.; Gentili 1972, p. 57 ff.

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