

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO GENRE

Genre is a fundamental category of literary studies and essential instrument of literary analysis. Genre is not a static concept but its understanding changes depending on the context, society, and the time period from which it is observed. The category of literary genre allows to differentiate and compare literary works since Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece developed a classification of literature into epic, lyric, and dramatic genres based on mode of representation, however there is much theoretical dispute when it comes to categorizing specific genres and defining their purposes and functions. The term *genre* is now more commonly used in rhetoric, literary theory, and media theory to designate a certain type of text. Internally, genres are flexible, particularly the genre of the novel. Novels can be classified according to subject matter, type of hero, style, technique of composition, setting, tone, atmosphere etc., and in different national literatures there are different terms to reflect this variety. There are epistolary novels, campus novels, Gothic novels, historical novels, satirical novels, picaresque novels, detective novels, postmodernist novels, roman à clef, Bildungsroman, Künstlerroman etc. Various standards for distinguishing sub-genres in novels are still evolving, and the same novel might be classified in a variety of ways depending on the criteria used. Another issue in genre theory is determining whether genres should be considered “timeless essences” or “time-bound entities”. Many academics argue that genres can only be discussed as historical phenomena in relation to specific historical and social situations, while others consider genres as ahistorical essences, consisting of a small number of “natural forms”, “archetypes”, “Platonic ideas”, “anthropological constants”, “types of worldview” etc. They argue that in spite of the dynamic fluidity of genres some types of literary works and their textual characteristics remain recognizable over time. In light of these concerns, several researchers have made their own constructive proposals for resolving the historical/ahistorical conceptualization of genres, such as the concept of prototypicality to describe writings that might be recognized as more typical members of a genre than others, N. Kopystyanska’ differentiation of multiple levels of generic structures, and Chinese quartering method which is based on years of experience with the conventional “Verse and Prose” dichotomy in Ancient China as well as the western genre classification. No matter what method is adopted, scholars agree that genre is not some kind of label that is

attached to a literary work but an important tool of interpretation. As noted by N. Frye, “the purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify”. Genre serves as a link between texts, producers, and interpreters since different genres have diverse audiences and text-reader interactions. They allow writers to define the direction of their creative work and to communicate with their audiences through genre expectations. Recognizing the multiplicity of genres helps to give a more sensitive assessment of the many ways in which literature has been valuable to us, and it is preferable to take a flexible approach because new literature is continually produced.