

Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

PhD Thesis

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**The Formation and Transformation of Genre Structures in
Slovenian Literature from Romanticism to Modernism**

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Budapest

2019

In my doctoral dissertation I undertook to outline the formation of the genre structure of Slovenian literature, as well as the particularities of the transformation of the said genre structure. *The Formation and Transformation of Genre Structures in Slovenian Literature from Romanticism to Modernism* covers a research area on which no individual monograph has been written thus far, from a perspective that remained unexplored even in Slovenian literary science. The material to be reviewed is vast, despite the fact that the topic to be examined is the “small” literature of a “small” nation. The dissertation is divided into six chapters: the introduction is followed by the outline of the context of the research and the methodology. After this I narrow the research topic: I highlight some genre nodes of 19th century Slovenian literature, nodes which one way or another displayed a defined characteristic during the course of my research. Following the summary of literary developments leading to romanticism my research first concentrates on the processes linked primarily to France Prešeren and Matija Čop, then I shift the focus to those decades influenced by the romanticism of Prešeren, which are intertwined with elements of realism. Finally, I touch upon the subject of modernity led by Ivan Cankar. In addition to using Slovenian primary literary texts and critical literature, I base my research on contemporary studies written in English and (to a lesser extent) in German.

The definition of genre by Benedetto Croce, in spite of its extremisms, draws our attention to the fact that the category of genre is not at all closed, it rather covers a concept that is present concurrently with the world of newly produced texts. The text that is being produced simultaneously takes away from and adds to the system to which it can be linked in accordance with a specific interpretation. Therefore, the genre is an open category (Hites 2011 and Eco 2006). In the dissertation *The Formation and Transformation of Genre Structures in Slovenian Literature from Romanticism to Modernism* genre is always regarded as the designation of certain text connections, we never understand it as an individual text, but always as more texts, even though theoretically it would be possible for a single text of a self-contained genre to exist. At the same time, an approach that has the individuality of texts as its core principle would make the discussion of texts impossible. According to David Duff genre is the constantly renewing category of the text, Wellek and Warren identify it as an institution, Marko Juvan as a mediator, Irena Avsenik Nabergoj – following Roland Barthes – as a story, Péter Dávidházi as an organ, György Poszler as a flexible imperative, Todorov as the codification of discursive properties, Éva Jeney as a legendary dove, Alastair Fowler considers it to be a family (Chapter: *A műfaj mint szöveghozzájárulás*). Based on the diversity of

definitions, in the dissertation the concept of genre will be a metaphor. Within this concept we identify text connections in which the similarities of thematics, style, modality, form, rhetoric features and paratextual characteristics are in some (even extreme) way discernible.

Literary conventions are closely linked to national cultures (Fowler 1982: 133), the problems of these conceptions are inseparable from the designation of genres. The concept of genre in contemporary Slovenian literary discourse gives a slightly disordered impression, nowadays two different definitions (with divergent origins) seem to become permanent. One of these continues the processes characteristic of Slovenian terminology: avoiding foreign-sounding names when defining scientific phenomena (Avsenik Nabergoj 2011). The other approach, accepting the influence of foreign languages, adopts and aims to naturalize the derivative of foreign words (Juvan 2017). Therefore, the *žanr* is fundamentally characteristic of the phrasing of comparatist texts, although these days the term is also used in linguistics. Its meaning can be considered to be wider and at the same time more specific than the more abstract, more theoretical terms *vrsta* and *zvrst*. *Žanr* is to be understood as a convention that essentially influenced writing itself, as well as the reception of literary text; at the same time, it is a component of the horizon of expectations.

The novelty of the dissertation, compared to the preceding theoretical work, lies in the fact that in an integrative way – using the findings of literary history, literary theory, comparatistics, and areas of research exceeding the boundaries of literature – it gives an overall picture of Slovenian literature over the course of a century (from the beginning of romanticism to the beginning of modernity). Through the transformations of genres (Imre 1996) literature unfolds as a program of common origin and common traditions (S. Varga 2005a). In addition, it becomes visible how individual aspirations (Vodnik, Prešeren) make possible the formation of a genre system, as well as how diversity is realised. Based on this, the following statements can be made:

1. The genre-centered examination of Slovenian literature from the point of view of Hungarian literature cannot avoid the designation of **literary connections**. This way a seemingly marginal, however, considering the whole system, notable part of Central and Eastern European literature unfolds right in front of the eyes of the researcher. The system, alongside the coexistence (I. Lukács 2006: 130), by means of weak links (Csermely 2005: 14) broadens with an additional semantic field that changes our

perception of marginality, further expanding the pillars of the bridge built by the literature of Prekmurje. The value of Slovenian–Hungarian literary connections is reflected in the process when we – expanding our perspective – regard the literature of Central and Eastern Europe as a complex system.

2. The translation of genres of long narrative poetry between the discussed languages is almost non-existent. In Hungarian only short extracts were published to our day, for example from the romantic narrative poem of France Prešeren *Krst pri Savici* (*The Baptism on the Savica*), while in Slovenian only one saw the light of day, *The Apostle* by Petőfi. As a result, the Prekmurian **Toldi-translations** of János Kardos can be considered as exceptional cultural treasures that from an aesthetical point of view are among the finest preserved literary works of the region. The dissertation points out that with the help of translated works (Arany, Madách) the system of genres can be stabilised.
3. The cross-genre text *Krst pri Savici* is a good example of how genre is determined by external factors: outside of its context it cannot be regarded as an **epic**, however, according to its function, examined within its context it can be. Therefore, concerning its genre *Krst pri Savici* is not a clearly defined work, elements of lyric and narrative are intertwined with each other, completing one another. As it is explicitly stated by Ivan Macun (Macun 1863: 41): a narrative poem with lyric as its real frame. It can be established that the work of France Prešeren in its thematic material is an epic (partly a love epic characteristic of romanticism), in its form is a Byronic narrative poem, and finally in its tone is an elegy (Juvan 1994: 229). It seems to be true that the epic is present in the history of literature as a kind of subterranean brook, we cannot speak of its “extinction”. Bogdan Novak (*Pesem o kralju Matjažu*) reconnects with a stable and constant tradition of Slovenian literature. The epic adaptation of this tradition at first glance, from a postmodern perspective, seems to be obsolete. Since the myth of King Matthias has always been suitable to raise the questions of Slovenian fate, its obsolescence is relative.
4. The role of **parody** is particularly important in the context of literary connections. On one hand, it seems to be unavoidable in the process of renewal, transformation. On the other hand, it establishes a strong connection between the texts, since without intertexts the genre becomes incomprehensible. As opposed to Hungarian scientific discourse, in Slovenian literary thought the scrutiny of epic parody was neglected, although the contexts of *Ognjeplamtič* by Simon Jenko show that the insolent voice,

caricaturing the esteemed status of the national epic can play a significant role in the realist “turn” that appeared in the Slovenian literary space with relative belatedness and in the previously mentioned combined way.

5. Compared to Hungarian literature, the Slovenian **novel** appeared surprisingly late, in the work of Ivan Macun the genre is barely noteworthy. Approaches are quite diverse regarding the definition of the novel subtype represented by *Deseti brat (The Tenth Brother)*. Instead of realist approaches, the traditions of romanticism and sentimentalism are prominent, thus the first Slovenian novel is characterized by this duality. Furthermore, the novel can be placed on the border of artistic and popular literature: while the narrator often reflects on the genre and the nature of literature itself, elements of adventure and crime novels (love, murder), as well as parodistic scenes built on situational comedy are simultaneously characteristic of the work. Its literary significance, value in the history of the genre lies in the fact that it realises the program of national literature formulated by Fran Levstik in *Popotovanje od Litije do Čateža (Trail from Litija to Čatež)*.
6. With the comparison of *Toldi* and *Martin Krpan* (Bakonyi) it becomes apparent that both authors feature a mighty folk hero (Strong John-motif), both titular heroes can be interpreted as storybook characters, they have to face a trial of strength, and eventually, at the court of the ruler, they defeat the stranger who seems to be undefeatable. However, before the fight the enemies shake hands, during this blood springs from the fingertips of the enemy. After the fight the hero shows off the severed head, that is received with exultation by the audience watching in the distance. Just like *Toldi* by Arany, a work that adapts the heroic idyll based on the text of Ilosvay Selymes Péter, in his **short story** Levstik relied on *Pegam in Lambergart (Pegam and Lambergart)*, an important text of collective memory known from folk tradition, one of the elements of processing war, a cultural data carrier. These similarities allow the conclusion that the authors both adapted motifs well known in the region.
7. France Prešeren, following the theoretical framework proposed by Matija Čop, consciously elaborated different variations of the **sonnet**, his crowns of sonnets were regarded as his greatest achievement as a lyric poet. *Sonetni venec (Crown of Sonnets)* represents a particularly high aesthetic standard, it is the symbol of perfection, of the structured poetic world. Such a virtuosic manifestation of the genre is twofold, since it simultaneously represents the individuality of texts and their close mutual reliance. By highlighting the connection and separation of texts individuality and

interconnectedness become visible. At the same time, the characteristic feature of the crown of sonnets can be defined: they are positioned between an independent work and a cycle.

8. Although the official national anthem of the independent and democratic Slovenia from 1990 is the poem of France Prešeren, in Slovenian literature, just like in every other culture, a kind of rivalry can be observed for the primacy, for the position of the prime symbolic poem. As a **hymn** the text of Prešeren only acquired meaning later, however, even without this it is an important work in the oeuvre of the poet. What greatly contributed to the cult status of the text was the fact that it only became available after revolutions broke out in March 1848, up to that point censorship prohibited the publication, it was not even featured in the book of poems by Prešeren. The genre of *Zdravljica* (A Toast) is drinking song (*napitnica*), it is built on Anacreonean traditions. The Vörösmarty-parallels of the text (Gy. Kiss 2005: 163), as well as the image of world liberty by Petőfi can be regarded as interferences (Lukács – Pavičić 2006). The speaker of the toast of Prešeren talks about the questions of collective fate within the framework of a feast, the rhetorical situation is special, ceremony is combined with a relaxed atmosphere. The text therefore can be regarded as a ceremonial poem that simultaneously bears the mark of the main historical versions of the drinking song genre. The *Zdravljica* is an exceptional text that, with respect to its choice of genre, image of liberty, and concept of nation can be considered to be a different and unique piece of European literature. The image of the nation in the sung verse 7, its supranationalism represents a kind of openness in the system of interpretations that is remarkably unusual among the solidified, almost sacred symbolic poems.
9. In Hungarian literature the genre of **ghazal** seems more marginal as in Slovenian. This is primarily due to the influence of the oeuvre of Prešeren, since the transformations of the genre are in the same way present in the poetic oeuvres that defined the literary canon of eras following romanticism. *Gazele* creates a lyrical text world similar to *Soneti venec*, the uniqueness of this lies in the choice of genre. The exclusive, artistic form of the ghazal, its pulsation that expresses duality associates (with the poetic tools of musicality) the tension that is presented in the motifs as well. The *Gazele*, as one of the most well-known texts in the love poetry of Prešeren, not only signifies a cornerstone in his career as a poet and in Slovenian literature as a whole, but it also

became a point of reference for the conscious development of poetic oeuvres in the following eras.

10. The function of the **ballad** genre can be grasped in its role as a mediator. This slightly overrides those traditional conclusions that became deeply rooted in the reception of the genre since the 19th century. Within the diversity of genres, the ballad is such a phenomenon that is in itself responsible for multiple colors of the scale, therefore when clarifying the concept, it is important to separate the name given by the authors from the classifications of genre theory. In connection with Hungarian literature we would venture to say that the ballad genre is a constant literary presence throughout different eras, it appears time and time again in unexpected and surprising transformations – it is possible to observe a similar tendency in Slovenian literature as well. At the same time, there is no such parallel when taking into account the interpretation of the texts of the genre, if we approach the Slovenian ballads from the point of view of the allegoric-parabolic interpretive tradition associated with the classic texts of Hungarian literature. The domain of collective-political questions not at all, or only slightly can be linked to the ballads of Prešeren and Aškerc, as opposed to the ballad poetry of Arany.
11. The examined era is a blind spot regarding drama. It is characteristic that the texts published between Linhart and Cankar – even if they are noted in summarising works – only play a marginal role. There is no doubt that there were only a few attempts to create dramatic works, however, we cannot completely disregard these if we want to give a complete picture of the genre structure of the era. Considering genres, it is undeniable that the main role was played by the **historical drama**, that often implicitly reflected on contemporary events, this way acting as the literary device of serving the community. The work of authors Jurčič–Levstik, *Tugomer* reworks the fight of the 9th century Slavic leader against the Franks in five acts, following the traditions of classicism. Regarding the conflict of the hero and his personal struggles the influence of Shakespearean histories, as well as the preromantic works of Schiller can be observed. The character of Tugomer is complex, he is primarily the carrier of moral ideas. In connection with drama we can state that despite the inadequacies, the era cannot be considered as a backward step in the process of change, with the help of the analysed texts it reveals itself that in order to understand the role of Cankar in regard to the Slovenian drama, the narrow genre tradition of the 19th century proves to be essential.

The historical projection of Slovenian–Hungarian literary connections bears witness to the fact that the two literary spaces reflect on direct, empirical, often political conditions. The two scientific worlds owe each other the detailed outline of literary history, that could become the starting point, the cornerstone of further studies, and which – following the path set by Hungarian literary history – could introduce aspects of genre history as the central focus of the research. With the help of the attributes derived from the process of „continually dynamic metamorphoses” (Fowler 1990: 158), it is possible to grasp the main characteristics of the examined period. Namely, how the uniqueness of genres, their reliance on each other, as well as – for example in the case of drama – their absence result in a genre structure that is independent, but at the same time part of the Western European literary traditions. In the light of its connections with Hungarian literature, a valuable part of the literature of the region is outlined, that with respect to stabilization cannot be disregarded.

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