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VARIOUS GENRES IN LITERATURE: VARIETIES AND FEATURES

***Abstract:** this article examines both the main and most popular types of genres of fiction, as well as less well-known and popular today. The author also identifies the main features of literary genres, mentions well-known authors and their works that serve as an example for a complete understanding of the theory of a particular genre. The main purpose of this work is to show the diversity of literary genres through the prism of history and time.*

***Keywords:** literature, literature genres, oral literature, written literature, literary theories.*

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РАЗЛИЧНЫЕ ЖАНРЫ В ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ:

РАЗНОВИДНОСТИ И ОСОБЕННОСТИ

Аннотация: в статье рассмотрены как основные и самые популярные виды жанров художественной литературы, так и менее известные и популярные на сегодняшний день. Автором также выявлены основные особенности литературных жанров, упомянуты известные авторы и их произведения, служащие примером для полного понимания теории того или иного жанра. Основная цель работы – показать разнообразие литературных жанров через призму истории и времени.

Ключевые слова: литература, литературные жанры, устная литература, письменная литература, теории литературы.

In order to get acquainted with various literary genres, first of all, it is necessary to understand the term literature itself.

The definition of literature has a circular tendency. The eleventh edition of the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* treats literature as «works possessing perfection of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest». The 19th-century critic *Walter Pater* proposed a different definition of literature: «a transcript is not just a fact, but a fact in its infinitely diverse forms. «But such definitions assume that the reader already knows what literature is. This term comes from the Latin *littera* «letter of the alphabet», literature is, first of all, the entire writing of mankind; after that, it is the writing belonging to a given language or people; then it is individual fragments of writing.

The use of the word *writing* when describing literature is misleading in itself, since one can speak of «oral literature» or «literature of pre-written peoples». As an art, literature can be described as organizing words to give pleasure. Literature also functions more widely in society as a means of criticism and affirmation of cultural values.

Critics have invented many systems of interpreting literature as a set of genres. Often these genres are artificial, invented in order to transform literature, to make it more accurate. Literary theories should be based on direct experience of real texts

and therefore should be flexible enough to include their individuality and diversity. Perhaps the best approach is historical or genetic.

Literature is a form of human expression. But not everything expressed in words – even when it is organized and recorded—is considered literature. Those works that are primarily informative – technical, scientific, journalistic – would be excluded from the rank of literature by most, though not all, critics. However, some forms of writing are universally considered to belong to literature as an art. It is said that individual attempts in these forms succeed if they possess something called artistic merit, and fail if they do not. The nature of artistic merit is much more difficult to define than to recognize.

There is an amazing variety of oral literature among the extant pre-written peoples, and since the written word appears in history, there are indications that all important literary genres existed at the beginning of civilized societies: heroic epic; stories about mysteries and the supernatural; love lyrics; love stories; stories of adventures and heroism; satire; ballads and folk tales about tragedies and murders; folk stories; fables about animals (Aesopian fairy tales); hymns, incantations and mysterious songs of priests; and, finally, mythology proper – stories about the origin of the world and the human race, about the great dead, about gods and demigods.

Readers of literature do not just read literature. Firstly, not all literature is the same; secondly, reading one genre is not the same as reading another. We don't read poetry the way we read prose. *Different genres* are different types of literature: epic, lyric, sonnet, elegy, comedy, tragedy, novel, short story, autobiography – they all require different ways of reading. We read for literary techniques or techniques specific to the genre of the work we are interested in.

Although the number of genres and their division has increased since classical times, the division of the literary field into three main genres (Plato, Aristotle and later Horace) still relevant. These are *lyrics, drama and epic*, and they differ in the «manner of imitation», that is, the way the characters and the action are presented.

Lyrics include increasingly shorter forms of poetry, for example, a song, an ode, a ballad, an elegy, a sonnet. Until the 19th century, a short lyrical poem was consid-

ered the least important of the genres, but with the romantic movement, the prestige of lyrics increased significantly. As a rule, the subject expresses both personal emotions (joy or sorrow) and social emotions (patriotism, reverence or celebration). A lyric poet writes a poem, often including his own experience in it; often the poet uses the first person («I»); however, this speaker is not necessarily a poet, but may be a fictional character or *personality*.

In *drama*, things are different: the characters are obviously separate from the writer; in fact, they tend to live their own lives, and their speech reflects their individual personalities. The writer is present, of course, in stage productions (which the audience does not know), and sometimes the character acts as the writer's mouthpiece.

Like lyrical poetry, drama was an exceptionally stable literary form. In drama, the most radical innovator was *August Strindberg* (1849–1912), and from that day to this day the drama is becoming more and more experimental, constantly striving for new methods, materials and, especially, ways to establish close relations with the audience. All this activity has profoundly changed drama as literature.

An *epic* is a long narrative, mostly written in the third person. However, the epic poet makes his presence known, sometimes speaking in the first person.

The epic, in the classical formulation of the three genres, refers exclusively to the «poetic epic». The work of the epic genre was created, of course, in verse, was quite long (24 books by Homer, 12 books by Virgil) and, as a rule, episodic. In the sublime language, it was about heroic figures (human heroes and deities) whose exploits affected entire civilizations or even the whole of humanity.

Poetry is language in its most concentrated form. Poetry is often meant to be read on paper, but there are plenty of poems that need to be read aloud to fully appreciate them. When we talk about prose, we usually think of novels, short stories, or essays. Prose writers use language to create a mixture of characters, places and events that build a whole world on the page and in the reader's mind. Plays are literary works that are usually intended to be performed by actors in front of an audience. Dialogue and plot are two key components of the creation of the play.

For example, *William Shakespeare* is considered one of the best English-language playwrights. He has written 38 plays, including comedies such as «*The Taming of the Shrew*» and «*As You Like It*»; stories such as «*King Richard the Third*» and «*King Henry the Fifth*»; tragedies such as «*Titus Andronicus*» and «*Romeo and Juliet*»; and romances such as «*Pericles*», «*The Prince of Tyre*» and «*The Tempest*».

The real heroic epic has never strayed far from its pre-written origins and emerged only in the Heroic Era. The conditions reflected in «*The Iliad*» and «*The Odyssey*» are largely the same as in the Anglo-Saxon «*Beowulf*», the German «*Nibelunglied*», or the Irish stories about Cuchulainn. A literary epic is a completely different matter. For example, *Virgil's «Aeneid»* or *Milton's «Paradise Lost»* are works of highly developed literary cultures.

Goethe's «Faust» is written in dramatic form and sometimes even staged – but it is really a philosophical poetic novel. Modern critics call long poems such as *T. S. Eliot's «The Wasteland»* and *Ezra Pound's «Songs»* a philosophical epic. There is nothing epic about them; they are dreams, more or less philosophical.

As for *lyrical poetry*, it never goes far from its origins, except that some of its best examples – medieval Latin, Provençal, Middle German, Middle French, Renaissance – which are only read today, were actually written in order to be sung. However, in the XX century, popular songs of great literary merit are becoming more and more common – for example, songs by *Bertolt Brecht* and *Kurt Weil* in German, *Georges Brassens* and *Anna Sylvester* in French, *Leonard Cohen*, *Bob Dylan* and *Joni Mitchell*. It is interesting to note that during periods when culture values artificiality, lyrics become stereotyped. Then, after a while, the poets rise up and, usually turning to folk sources, return to the lyrics.

Satire. The forms of satire are as diverse as the forms of literature itself – from the mocking epic to the sarcastic epigram. Very many social and political novels of today would be regarded as satires.

The medieval satire of the XVI century is aimed at civilization («*Gargantua and Pantagruel*» by *Rabelais*). *Cervantes' «Don Quixote»* is a satire on the sentimental romance of chivalric adventures. But, this is an archetypal myth that tells about the

adventures of the soul of a person – an individual – in a long struggle with what is called the human condition. *Murasaki Shikibu's «The Tale of Genji»* is sometimes regarded by critics as nothing more than a satire on the sexual promiscuity of the Heian court. In fact, it is a deeply philosophical, religious and mystical novel.

Fiction. Extended prose fiction is the last of the literary forms of development.

The first prose fiction is the «*Satyricon*», which is attributed to *Petronius the Arbiter*. Although it has survived only in fragments, even they indicate that this is one of the greatest novels, consisting of episodes of strong and often erotic adventures. Another great surviving fiction of classical times are «*Metamorphoses*» (known as the «*Golden Ass*») *Apuleia*. Besides being an adventure story, it is a critique of Roman society, a celebration of the religion of Isis and an allegory of the progress of the soul. It contains the justly celebrated story of Cupid and Psyche, a myth retold with psychological subtlety. The style has a lot to do with the value and, consequently, the survival of these two works.

The prose romances of the Middle Ages are closely related to earlier heroic literature. Some, such as *Sir Thomas Malory's XV century Le Morte «The Death of Arthur»*, are retellings of heroic legends, from the point of view of the romantic chivalry of the Early Renaissance, a combination of barbaric, medieval, Renaissance and sensuality that differs from modern novels about tragic love.

The Western novel is a product of modern civilization, although in the Far East novels began a separate development in the tenth century. Extended prose works about complex interpersonal relationships and motives begin in 17th-century France with *Madame de Lafayette's «The Princess of Cluve»* (1678). France of the XVIII century produced a huge number of novels devoted to love analysis, but none of them could compare with the novel of Madame de Lafayette until *Pierre Chauderloh de Laclos* wrote *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). In form it was an exchange of letters between two molesters of youth; but by design it was a wild satire on the ancient regime and a psychological study.

The eighteenth-century English novel was less refined, more durable – vulgar and *Henry Fielding's* «*Tom Jones*» (1749) and *Lawrence Stern's* «*Tristram Shandy*» are examples of this.

The nineteenth century was the golden age of the novel. It became more and more profound, complex and subtle. By the beginning of the XX century, the novel had become the most common form of thoughtful reading and replaced for most educated people religious, philosophical and scientific works as a means of interpreting life.

By the end of the 1920s, the novel began to show signs of decline as a form, and since then no work has been created that can be compared with the recent past.

Once upon a time, the *essay* was written intentionally as a literary work: its subject did not assume serious significance. Today, most essays are written as explanatory, informative journalism. Now, as in the past, some of the greatest essayists are critics of literature, drama and art.

Some *personal documents* (*autobiographies, diaries, memoirs and letters*) are among the greatest world literature. Some examples of biographical literature were not written with the aim that they would be read by someone other than the writer. Some of them are written in a polished literary style; others, written in a private language, gain their position through persuasiveness, insight, depth and scale.

Many *works of philosophy* are classified as literature. «*The dialogues*» of *Plato* are written with great narrative skill and in the best prose; *the reflections* of the 2nd century Roman emperor *Marcus Aurelius* are a set of apparently random thoughts, and the Greek in which they are written is eccentric. Some scientific works remain as literature for a long time after their scientific content has become obsolete.

Thus, there are many genres in literature, each of which has its own history and peculiarities. In this paper, not only the most frequently used genres of foreign literature were considered, but also less popular ones: essays, works of philosophy.

The purpose of this work is to show the diversity of literary genres through the prism of history and time, as well as to mention the great authors who created many

popular works, referring to those genres that they liked, in which they were able to find themselves.

In conclusion, I would like to add that further prospects for the development of genres of fiction can be directed to the development of completely new multimedia forms using the resources of all established arts. Nowadays, in a world civilization that has absorbed the styles and discoveries of all cultures of the past and present, it is impossible to determine the future of literature.

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