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II sessió
ARISTOTELISME

TEORIA DELS GÈNERES LITERARIS

De l'ampliació del sistema aristotèlic de gèneres
a l'establiment d'un nou paradigma
[The Aristotelian literary genre system: from its expansion
to the building of a new paradigm]

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Defining and delimiting literary genres is one of the most relevant issues of Renaissance poetics, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The most characteristic feature of this delimitation is the making of systems. Literary theorists do not establish abstract paradigms, but they do arrange literary genres within coherent systems by separating a set of theoretical concepts, resources or functions and making them the axis of the system. This paper focusses on the sistematic nature of literary genre theory and examines it through four models, all of them derived from Aristotle's *Poetics.*

1. A *closed system* which sanctions only the literary genres that Aristotle placed explicitly in the system (tragedy, epic poetry and comedy) and subordinates the rest of forms to these so-called major genres. This system is illustrated by the first great commentary on the *Poetics*, the largest and most influent of all, and one of the most sensitive: the *Explicationes* (1548) by Francesco Robortello. The internal logic of the system allows Robortello to reconstruct the lost second book of the *Poetics*, devoted to the comedy, but is also worth noting that the other genres that he typifies become *protogenres* of tragedy, epic poetry and comedy.

2. An *enlarged Aristotelian system*, less purist and more creative, in order to accommodate literary genres, both classic and modern, absent from the *Poetics'* system (*novella*, dialogue, lyric poetry). Francesco Bonciani's *Lezione* (1574) considers the *novella* the fourth perfect genre: since it is defined as the narrative imitation of lower actions, the *novella* completes the Aristotelian major genre system. Both Carlo Sigonio, in the *De dialogo liber* (1562), and Torquato Tasso, in the *Discorso dell'arte del dialogo* (1585), expand the object of imitation as it is defined in the *Poetics* so they can include in its system the dialogue, understood as an imitation not of actions, but of thoughts. Likewise, Giovanni Antonio Viperano in the *De poetica libri tres* (1579) and Pomponio Torelli in the

Trattato della poesia lirica (1594) distinguish lyric poetry as the representation neither of actions nor of thoughts, but of emotions.

Regarding the making of literary genre theory, this is the most relevant critical manoeuvre that takes place in the Renaissance. Aristotelian criteria become more flexible and the system becomes more complex. However, it is worth recalling that this model is not formulated in any particular theoretical treatise: it emerges from the reading of autonomous texts. The Aristotelian conception of tragedy as the most evolved and complex genre allows flexible interpretations of which of its features should be considered general literary qualities and, as such, can be extrapolated to every genre, and which are the specific features of tragedy that can only be transferred to genres with particular objects and modes of imitation. This is probably the reason why purists critics like Faustino Summo (1601) called into question the free expansion of the Aristotelian genre system.

3. An *alternative system*, that of the *Poetices libri septem* (1561), where Giulio Cesare Scaligero reworks the theoretical parameters of Aristotle. The critic adopts a triple distinction to organize genres: the object of imitation, though he does not restrict it to the two Aristotelian categories; the means of imitation, which he ties in with the types of meter, which become a tool for distinguishing genres; and, finally, the mode of imitation, defined not according to the *Poetics*, but to Plato's *Republic*. Scaligero's system grows in flexibility since *res*, *versus* and *modus* prove to be useful for analyzing literary genres, but not always the three of them are essential to constitute and distinguish a genre.

4. A *new paradigm* that incorporates genre *fusion* into the system. It takes place in a very critical interpretation of the Aristotelian system, that of Francesco Patrizi in the *Della Poetica* (1586-1588), and is expanded and justified by Giambattista Guarini in the dialogue *Il Verrato* (1588), in the oration *Verrato secondo* (1593) and in the treatise *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1601), where he offers the most systematic approach to the issue. This way of understanding and arranging literary genres is more characteristic of the Baroque Age.

The systematic conception and organization of literary genre theory takes place in a very small region, the north of Italy. Some *artes poeticae* written elsewhere, such as the seventh book of Antoni Llull's *De oratione* (1558), or *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) by George Puttenham, reveal a proper understanding of the key concepts of Italian poetics, but they also show that the most complex aspect of Renaissance genre theory, which is its systematicity, is hardly adopted by Transalpine theoretical treatises.