

Hybrid Genres: Crossing Literature with Thinking and Experience

Hybridity is a concept that Mikhail Bakhtin famously transferred from the natural sciences and linguistics to literary stylistics, poetics, and cultural theory. As such, hybridity has proven to be pertinent not only to genre theory (e.g., Alastair Fowler). Since the 1980s, the concept of hybridization has been embraced primarily by cultural and postcolonial studies (Homi Bhabha and others). Postcolonial theorists recognized hybridity as a useful tool that helped them respond to global and local forms of exploitation by recasting them in terms of identity politics and cultural struggles for recognition. In contrast to postcolonial versions of hybridity, which have dominated literary studies in recent decades, the volume *Hybrid Genres* consciously limits its scope to the kinds of modern European writing in which literature constitutively blends with discourses of thinking and experience. Following Bakhtin's idea, the author of *Hybrid Genres* does not neglect the socio-ideological implications of genre hybridity that emerge at the boundaries of literature. He focuses on metapoetry, the essay, and autobiography as prime examples of hybrid genres in which literary singularity interdiscursively mixes with various kinds of conceptual thinking (philosophy, theory, and the sciences) as well as with nonfiction genres that record the fluidity of experience (from journalism to life writing). In *Hybrid Genres*, the author further discusses Romantic and Modernist literary devices that create the impression as though literary texts were produced beyond thinking—that is, through hybridization of self-conscious creativity with ecstatic openness to the

sublime working of language. In his conclusion, the author tackles the question of how nineteenth-century and contemporary genre theory hybridizes the humanities with concepts borrowed from the natural sciences. Such a tendency is interpreted as a symptom of the humanities' survival struggle in the conditions of the commodification of knowledge. The thread of the argument of *Hybrid Genres* lies in the analysis of modern metamorphoses of knowledge systems and changes in the literary field, especially the value of creative work.

Drawing on Alain Badiou's notion of the truth, the first chapter proposes a speculative typology of the relations between thinking and literature/poetry that have occurred since Antiquity: thinking before poetry, thinking after poetry, thinking behind poetry, thinking in poetry, and poetry in thinking. Based on this, the author understands works that hybridize theory with literature as intersections of different truth systems. According to Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, the concepts of literature and theory are historically determined and interdependent cultural entities that emerged in early Romanticism. They became even more tightly interconnected in Modernism and Postmodernism. Characteristic forms of interaction between the two discourses are represented by theoretical-literary hybrids. In the Postmodern—understood as the cultural dominant of late capitalism (Fredric Jameson), in which knowledge is subjected to mercantilization while the literary affect wanes—such hybrids pertain to the symmetrical processes of the literarization of theory and the theorization of literature, both characteristic of the self-enclosed academic world of letters. The comparison of Barthes and Barth exemplifies this development.

The second chapter highlights Romantic dialogues between thinking and poetry as reflected in Alexander Pushkin's and France Prešeren's metapoetry. Early nineteenth-century poems that focus on themes of writing, distribution, reception, critical reviewing, and uses of literature convey the Romantic ideology, which Jerome McGann portrays as false consciousness about real socioeconomic conditions of writing. The ideologized forms of self-reflection partook in the self-

-regulating mechanisms through which literature—as a relatively autonomous modern social subsystem (according to Siegfried J. Schmidt)—responded to its socioeconomic context and attempted to influence it rhetorically. In Romanticism, poetic self-reflection became an inseparable and emphatic feature of aesthetic literature, lyrical poetry in particular. Hybridizing the language of poetry with aesthetic thinking and Romantic ideology, Pushkin's and Prešeren's metapoetry aimed to establish among its readership a belief that poetry was entitled to enjoy aesthetic autonomy, distinct from bourgeois society and opposed to its own commodification on the book market. Confronting poetry with capitalist realities, stressing individualism, and mythologizing poets as prophets and national seers, Romantic metapoetry also attempted to introduce its proper form of public authority able to cope with modern print media and politics of cultural nationalism.

The third chapter devoted to the essay addresses the singularity of literary writing. Exchanges between various fields within the system of knowledge characterize transversal discourses, such as literature and journalism. According to Theodor W. Adorno, the essay genre is specific in its hybrid mixing of various fields of knowledge. The interdiscursivity of the essay is inscribed in particular texts in the mode of singularity—that is, an unrepeatable and unpredictable configuration of meaning that cannot be translated into any other signifying system (see Derek Attridge and Timothy Clark). Regardless of its literary singularity, which embodies Kant's notion of the "aesthetic idea" and traverses the existing cultural codes that inform it, the essay relies on the *sensus communis*—in the sense of *topos*, common sense, and Kant's *Gemeinsinn* underlying the aesthetic judgment. Drawing on the social history of knowledge and journalism, the author traces the essay's tension between the singularity of literarized existence and the ideologized knowledge of the (media) *sensus communis* from Michel de Montaigne and Roger Bacon to contemporary Slovenian texts by Marjan Rožanc and Drago Jančar.

The next chapter approaches autobiography as an elusive and hybrid genre escaping the categories of literature and history due

to its rootedness in the fluidity of experience. The goal of writing and speaking about one's own life is to articulate and represent the singularity of an individual's experience. This tendency is prominent in writers' autobiographies, which have been instrumental in consolidating the authorial function ever since Johann Wolfgang Goethe. In its verbal expression, the autobiographical retrospective narrative individualization of the author's figure as the protagonist (see Philippe Lejeune) agrees with the Bakhtinian principle of textuality as a one-time, unrepeatable event of meaning. However, Mikhail Bakhtin also stresses that the singularity of textual meaning relies on repeatable signs and structures, which can be imitated. Hence, writing about "my life"—even if it affirms the irreplaceable self—succumbs to "the law of the genre" (Jacques Derrida). It is not only writing about one's own life that becomes entangled in the network of genres: as exemplified by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, the self that is memorialized, interpreted, constituted, and affirmed by autobiographical writing does the same. On the other hand, the individual's experience verbally expressed in autobiography constantly interrupts genre categories and systems. The autobiography floats among genres as a monad *sui generis*. This issue is also brought forth with a new reading of Ivan Cankar's *Moje življenje* (My Life).

Starting from the classical ambivalence of the poet as an ecstatic seer and a skilled craftsman, the fifth chapter discusses Romantic and Modernist devices that have been thoughtfully invented in literature to make readers think that authors, while writing their texts, were not thinking and controlling the creative process (e.g., evoking poetic ecstasy and prophetic vision, picturing narcotic delusions, describing or imagining dream worlds and representations of unconsciousness, imitating "primitive" art and "wild thinking," experimenting with coincidence or *écriture automatique*, or venturing into the transhuman through the aesthetics of the grotesque). However, these ecstatic or chaotic disruptions of modern Western rationality and the Cartesian subject (represented, among others, in the works of Pushkin, Dane Zajc, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, or André Breton) are nothing but skillful rational

literary devices aiming to accommodate the contingent demands of the modern literary market for constant innovation, originality, and singularity. With the "art of mania," literary producers strategically shaped their excessive public image. Hybridizing conscious creation with the unconscious working of language and presenting themselves as social marginals, outcasts, or bohemians, they in fact strove for a favorable position close to the elite, uncommercial pole of the literary field.

The concluding chapter starts from the premise that research on literary genres hybridizes the nomothetic logic of theory with the ideographic principle of history. This is why in the history of genre studies one can notice the tendency to emulate the nomothetic discourse of the natural sciences. A prominent model of scientificity for literary studies was provided by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In the (post)positivist history of literary genres at the end of the nineteenth century (Ferdinand Brunetière) as well as in Franco Moretti's materialist-systemic alternative to the postmodernist culturalist mainstream at the turn of the twenty-first century, Darwin's concept was adopted as an epistemic metaphor that aimed to re-conceptualize the research field to achieve the nomothetism of the natural sciences. In present-day social Darwinism, unleashed by the globally dominant neo-liberal economism, the old epistemological distinction between the humanities and hard sciences (cf. J. P. Snow's "the two cultures") is escalating into their survival struggle, which has already been signaled by the "science wars" of the 1990s. In this context, a new trend of literary Darwinism emerged that took Darwinian evolutionism literally, as a platform on which literature (along with genres) is to be explained as a phenomenon resulting from some remote evolutionary adaptation of humans. Literary Darwinism believes that literary studies can be saved from its constructivist impasse and social irrelevance if it accepts realist epistemology and becomes "consilient" with the general system of the natural sciences. However, the neo-Darwinists among literary scholars in fact merely rehearse traditional literary interpretation, seeking in literary texts allegories of biologically conceived "human nature."