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The Strange Life and Adventures of Biological Concepts in Genre Periodization

This article has two main purposes. First, to offer a critical presentation of the application of the biological concepts of birth, maturity, and old age to the history of literary genres. Secondly, to suggest that biological evolutionary concepts can nevertheless be fruitfully applied to the historiography and periodization of literary genres. Note that by cautiously applying certain concepts from biology to literature I do not wish to deny the difference between nature and culture. Whereas some concepts can be used almost literally for both biological species and literary genres (e.g., "migration"), others are used as a functional analogue or shorthand (e.g., "procreation," "environment") for phenomena which are semiotic in nature. While acknowledging the difference between biology and culture, however, one can still examine certain similar (not identical) "patterns of behavior" in both.

I.

Under the impact of evolutionary theory, the end of the nineteenth century witnessed a wave of biological concepts penetrating the social sciences and the humanities. One interesting manifestation of the tendency to use such concepts in literary studies can be found in the historiography, and periodization, of literary genres. According to this view, advocated by scholars like Brunetière (1890, 1895) in France and Symonds (1890) in England (for criticism of this view see Wellek; Ehrenpreis; Margolin 1973, 135-38; Todorov 3-6; Schaeffer 47-63), the history of literary genres can be presented as a unidirectional tripartite line of evolution that begins with the genre's "birth," moves on to its "maturity," and inevitably ends up in its "death." Interestingly enough, this tripartite biological framework for genre periodization is still very much with us: a prominent figure in contemporary genre theory, Alastair Fowler, has to a great extent adopted the segmentation of the individual life cycle and applied it to the history of literary genres (Fowler 1971, modified in Fowler 1982, 160-69).

I would like to argue that the use of the tripartite model of segmentation in the history of literary genres yields inadequate results. First, the application of the biological analogy to genre history is shrouded in deep conceptual confusion: on the one hand, advocates of the analogy, especially Brunetière, make an

extensive use of terminology (e.g., "transformation," "mutation," "adaptation") inspired by evolutionary theories of biological species, and, on the other, they in fact rely on a very different conceptual framework — that of the life cycle of the individual organism. More importantly, the division of genre history into a rigid, unidirectional tripartite scheme appears inadequate not only because of such conceptual confusions, but also on historiographical and empirical grounds. The tendency to "squeeze" the diverse works affiliated with a specific generic tradition into the scheme often makes one overlook the interesting, complicated, sometimes unpredictable, "zig-zags" of that genre's history.

Let us take, for instance, the history of Epic, a genre instanced by Fowler in demonstrating the tripartite scheme. According to Fowler, Homer's epic poems represent the genre's primary phase (thus "birth" or "youth"), Virgil's *Aeneid* exemplifies the secondary phase (thus "maturity"), whereas Milton's *Paradise Lost* is representative of the tertiary phase (thus "old age") after which all we can expect is, of course, the genre's "death." The mock epics of the eighteenth century may be viewed, according to this perspective, as a clear sign that we are standing beside a death-bed. This seemingly appealing picture of a clear line of evolution may however be bedevilled the moment we look more closely at the heterogeneous field of epic works. To begin with, mock epics, a supposedly clear sign of the tertiary ("dying") phase, were already being composed in ancient Greece, very close to the time of "birth" (e.g., the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*). Secondly, the nineteenth, and even the twentieth century, have witnessed various interesting manifestations of the epic tradition (e.g., the Polish epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, Joyce's *Ulysses*) despite its alleged "death" (see Fishelov 1993, Chapt. 2).

When we examine certain preconceptions of the tripartite model, we detect more difficulties. To determine what works, for example, should represent a genre's "mature" state often presupposes a specific interpretative, aesthetic, and even ideological stand rather than the simple recognition of an uncontroversial phase in a clear line of evolution. I do not wish to evoke the specific issues involved in the (by now ancient) debate between the "ancients" and the "moderns" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nor to side with any specific party. This debate, however, indirectly illustrates the fact that describing a generic line of evolution in terms like "childhood," "maturity," and "old age" may be highly charged with evaluative presuppositions: advocates of the "ancients," for example, would not describe the earliest manifestations of a genre (or literature), as representing an "infantile" or "childish" phase. On the contrary, the earlier, classical, stages would be hailed as a perfected (and hence "mature") and venerated stage of art creation, of which all modern derivations are but watered down, degenerate variants. "Moderns," on the other hand, are prone to describe those same earlier phases as preludes to later, more "mature," manifestations. Are we to describe Homer's epic poems as representing the

"apex" of epic tradition, and all later epic poems as merely second-rate, "aging," and "degenerate"? Or does Homer perhaps represent a fresh, "childish," start that led to the more sophisticated, civilized, "mature" epic of Virgil? Or perhaps all classical epics are but a "childish" preparation for the "mature" form of the Christian epic of *Paradise Lost*? I suspect that the answers to these questions do not derive from any solid, objective, historiographical criteria, but are rather an indirect result of the aesthetic and ideological presuppositions held by the respondent. I also suspect that the respondents will reveal certain vested interests in their specific stand: we should not be surprised to find that a devoted Hellenist offers a different answer than, say, a devoted Latinist, or a seventeenth-century English scholar.

Let us consider another example, this time closer to our time: does the nineteenth century novel represent the "mature" phase of the novel, from whose perspective eighteenth century novels should be regarded as merely "childish" precursors, and twentieth century novels as the "aging" decline of the genre? But there are other alternatives. Perhaps Defoe, Richardson and Fielding are the figures who should win the "maturity" contest because in their works they developed, synthesized, and crystallized the genre's conventions? If I were a devoted eighteenth-century scholar, chances are that I would favor such a response. I would not be surprised, however, if an admirer of Joyce, Woolf, Proust, and Mann would present a different picture according to which the sophisticated manipulations of the novel's conventions by modern authors represent the novel's *entelechia* from whose perspective both eighteenth and nineteenth century novels are judged as "innocent," and "childish" preludes. Needless to say, each of us has his or her preferences, inducing a different answer to the above questions, but those preferences would reveal many aesthetic and ideological presuppositions. Too many to be accepted as solid and adequate ground for historiography and periodization of literary genres.

In addition to the above problems inherent in the tripartite division, there is also the problematics involved in the concept of a genre's "death." While the death of an organism is (relatively) easily determined, when and how a genre should be proclaimed "dead" is a very elusive issue. Is it when works associated with a specific generic tradition are not being read any more or need scholarly commentaries, as Fowler suggests (1971, 209)? I do not think that is a viable answer, because works and genres that had been pushed into dusty corners can regain readership, as the example of the Renaissance so clearly demonstrates. In short, if one wishes to do justice to the multifaceted tradition of literary genres, and not commit oneself to any restricted aesthetic and ideological standpoint, one has to adopt a more dynamic conceptual framework than the one offered by the life cycle model.

II.

Such a promising framework can be found in the application of certain concepts related to the evolution of biological species (as opposed to the life cycle of the individual organism). What I am suggesting is that we reject the tripartite-organistic perspective as a strange, and unfruitful, incident in the life of biological concepts in genre theory, and turn instead to more promising, and also more intellectually adventurous ways of thinking about literary genres, associated with a true evolutionary perspective. In other words, I am proposing to revivify certain evolutionary notions and to see how they may apply to the history and periodization of literary genres.

Despite some misconceptions, evolutionary thinking is by no means a regression to essentialism in genre theory. Since Darwin, evolutionary theory has constantly and emphatically pointed to the importance of *variability* within a species, viewing this as one of evolution's corner stones, in contrast to earlier conceptions that described the individual organism as only exemplifying the "essence" of a species (see Mayr 681-682; Falk 13-14, 50-52).¹ In fact, evolutionary theory rigorously argues against any form of essentialism. Consider, for example, the following quotation from Ernst Mayr:

The word "species" ... designates a relational concept, like the word "brother." To be a brother is not an intrinsic property of an individual, since it depends entirely on the existence of a sibling. A population, like-wise, is a species in relation to other sympatric populations. The function of the species concept is to determine the status of co-existing individuals and populations. (286)

Were we to substitute "genre" for "species," "text" for "individual" (organism), and "group of texts" for "population" — we would get a clear manifesto of the anti-essentialistic approach to literary genres, emphasizing the relational status of the concept of genre (see also Guillén). A text is not "essentially" a tragedy or a comedy. Rather, it would be sensible to describe a text as "tragedy" only when there are sympatric texts which are "comedies" or "epic poems" or other generic groups that are related (by equivalence and contrast) to those "tragedies." Thus, the evolutionary perspective may provide a flexible, non-essentialistic, framework for describing the dynamic processes of generic evolution.

There is no need, for example, to stipulate a unidirectional line of birth-maturity-death in such an evolutionary framework. As long as the "ecological equilibrium" between a species and its environment is maintained, the species can survive with no significant change. In analogy, certain literary genres can maintain their form for many centuries in a literary environment that does not

foster innovation (e.g., the haiku in traditional Japanese culture). A genre's history would consist, according to this view, of *dynamic relationships between various forms of generic productivity and the forces of the literary "environment" that coerce or foster this productivity.*

As the hallmark of biological species is its ability to procreate, so the major factor in genre's history is its productivity. To focus on generic productivity means also to advocate a more solid and objective conceptual basis for the periodization of literary genres. In what follows, I will propose a few key concepts associated with the evolutionary perspective, and illustrate their usefulness in the periodization of literary genres.

Every biological species is a "genetic pool," characterized by its ability to duplicate itself. The "literary species," i.e., the genre, can also be perceived as a "genetic pool" from which later works draw poetic resources in the shape of formal patterns, motives, structures, characters, and themes. Needless to say, the biological analogue has certain aspects that are not relevant to the literary field. While the genetic mechanism of a biological species usually duplicates faithfully (see Dawkins 208), the duplicating process of literary genres works in the dialectical manner of semi-faithful duplication, and while hybrids in nature are prone to be sterile, literary "hybridization" (e.g., tragi-comedy) is a productive mechanism. But to acknowledge those aspects, as modern critics have done, should not necessarily thwart the entire analogical project.²

Generic productivity may take the form of *primary productivity* — works continuing the generic tradition while at the same time reshaping it — and *secondary productivity* — works that derive from that generic tradition according to certain predetermined principles (e.g., translations, parodies, "imitations").³ The "literary environment," for its part, consists of various literary and cultural factors and institutions (readers, critics, publishers, censors, ideologies) that make possible, foster, or put constraints on the various forms of generic productivity. The history of every genre — its development, changes, and relative status in a given literary system — can best be characterized as the intricate relationship between generic productivity and literary environment. An important implication of the evolutionary framework is that it enables us to describe this history, without committing ourselves to any teleological or uni-directional preconceptions. This pair of concepts — productivity and environment — also has

2 Such dissimilar aspects between biological species and literary genres are raised by Wellek, Ehrenpreis, Todorov, Margolin, and Schaeffer. While acknowledging these dissimilar aspects, I argue, in chapter 2 of my 1993, against the hasty conclusion that the whole analogy should be discarded.

3 The distinction between primary and secondary forms of generic productivity can be related to some degree, on the biological analogue, to the distinction between different degrees of genetic variability: a high degree of genetic variability would correspond to the primary form, the exact duplication of the genes would be considered secondary.

1 Todorov's criticism of the application of evolutionary concepts to genre theory (3-6), partly ignores this crucial emphasis on variation in evolutionary theory.

direct implications for the way we understand, and describe, the forming of new periods within generic traditions.

My first proposal is that we apply the concept of generic productivity as a major criterion for genre periodization: what we usually regard as distinct phases within generic traditions are in fact periods demonstrating a high degree of generic productivity, notably of the primary form. Let us turn, by way of illustration, to the history of dramatic comedy. From a bird's-eye-view, comedy's presence on the literary scene has different dimensions and significance in different periods. Were we to draw a line with various degrees of "thickness," marking the degrees of productivity and importance of dramatic comedies on the literary scene, we could get a relatively clear picture of the periods in the genre's evolution. Suppose we decide to put Old Attic comedy aside and to restrict ourselves to the generic line of New Comedy: Rome of the third and second centuries B.C. will, of course, be represented by a very thick line, with the figures of Plautus and Terence at the center; then, moving on, the line would become very thin during the next few centuries, until it almost disappears throughout the Middle Ages; it would regain "thickness" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the central figures of Jonson and Shakespeare in England and Molière in France.⁴ I would like to emphasize that the decision as to the "thickness" of the generic line is by no means a subjective or ideological one. There may be some pertinent disagreements as to how thick we should draw comedy's generic line when it comes to the last three centuries, but there is no doubt to my mind that any decent history of dramatic comedy would dedicate more historiographical space to Rome's third and second century B.C. than to the next fifteen centuries altogether.⁵ And any such decent historiography would most probably include periodizing concepts like "Roman New Comedy" and English "Elizabethan Comedy" that would correspond to the most generically productive phases.

This little exercise in line-thickness-drawing, representing the degrees of generic productivity and dominance, results, of course, in a simplified picture of the evolution of comedy. Still, I think it is a very faithful picture of the most significant periods of that genre. Furthermore, I would like to argue that any historiography of literary genres — comedy, tragedy, epic poetry, novel, sonnet, among others — implicitly uses the productivity criterion in its periodizing practice. This implicit criterion is evident when a historiographer has to decide

at what length to represent various phases of the genre's history: to dedicate a long historiographical "space" (say, a whole chapter as against a paragraph) indirectly means to acknowledge that during that phase many and/or significant works associated with that genre have been produced. And this acknowledgment usually goes hand in hand with attaching a period-label (e.g., "New Comedy," "Elizabethan Comedy," "Romantic Comedy," etc). When Bowra wrote his history of Epic poetry from Virgil to Milton, he divided the seventeen centuries of epic poetry he surveyed into four major periods, reflected in four major chapters: Virgil and the Ideal of Rome; Camões and the Epic of Portugal; Tasso and the Romance of Christian Chivalry; and Milton and the Destiny of Man. Each such period centers around an author who produced an epic poem of a characteristically primary form of generic productivity, i.e., an author who uses certain typical conventions of the genre but at the same time reshapes those conventions in order to express new themes, sensibilities, and ideologies. It will not surprise us to find, again, the implicit productivity criterion in any standard presentations of the history of the Sonnet:⁶ the emergence of the genre in Italy of the fourteenth century (with Petrarch as the central figure), its spread during the next two centuries through most of the continent (Lope de Vega, Ronsard), the impressive wave in England (Spenser, Sidney, and, of course, Shakespeare), and, after a relative lapse during the eighteenth century, the new period of Romantic and post-Romantic sonnets (Keats, Baudelaire, *et al.*) (see Zillman, Fuller 1-26). The division of the history of Pastoral into a Greek (Theocritus), a Roman (Virgil), and a Renaissance phase (Tasso, Sidney, *et al.*), also indirectly relies on the productivity criterion (see Congelton 603-05); or, for that matter, the common divisions of the history of tragedy into the Greek (Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles), Roman (Seneca), Elizabethan (Shakespeare), classicist (Racine) periods, among others (see Dorius). In all these accepted period-concepts, the productivity criterion (notably of the primary form) is implicitly assumed: it seems unavoidable to talk of "Greek tragedy," for example, precisely because during the fifth century B.C. there was an unprecedented wave of tragedy production. To be sure, period-terms do not rely on purely literary concepts, and other period-concepts (e.g., political, chronological) may be involved in designating certain genre-periods. "Elizabethan tragedy," for instance, borrows its name from the political arena; "eighteenth-century novel" uses a term from the commonly accepted chronological (decimal) division of history into centuries. Still, when we decide to divide a generic tradition into relatively distinct periods, those other period-concepts are used only as "handy" coordinates, subordinated

4 For the important role played by central, prototypical figures in our concept of a literary genre, see Fishelov 1991 and Fishelov forthcoming.

5 McLeish, for example, devotes 38 pages to Plautus and Terence, as opposed to only one page (!) to the next seven centuries altogether. Note also how the decline of Roman comedy is explained in this study in terms of a hostile literary and cultural "environment" (e.g., a declining prestige, the growing influence of Christianity which suppressed comic writings).

6 Note, by the way, that I deliberately restrict myself, here and elsewhere, to relatively concise and standard surveys of the evolution of genres (in encyclopedias, text books, etc.), to avoid the idiosyncrasies of more detailed presentations created by the author's specific theoretical stand or aesthetic preferences.

to the basic criterion of generic productivity, not as independent criteria. Every decision to dedicate more historiographical space to a certain period in a generic tradition, and to coin a period-label for it, contains a tacit application of the distinction between various degrees, and forms, of generic productivity: more historiographical space will be devoted to (notably primary) productive phases of the genre, and those productive phases will usually gain period-labels. Thus, evolutionary concepts — with "generic productivity" and "literary environment" at their center — are inseparable from, and assumed by, genre periodization, even by historiographers who do not explicitly use evolutionary terms.

The evolutionary perspective is not, I should emphasize, a simple quantitative criterion that can be summed up in the question "How many works associated with a certain genre were produced at a designated time?" Rather, it refers to the complex relations between the different forms of generic productivity (primary and secondary) and the literary environment in which this productivity manifests itself. Thus, a decision whether to attach a period label to certain phases within a generic tradition can be recast as a synthesized answer to three questions: a) do we have enough "generic material" (i.e., texts associated with a given generic tradition) in a given phase; b) is this "material" significant enough in that it represents primary forms of generic productivity; and c) how does the literary "environment" react to these forms of generic productivity. A period-label is usually given when all three factors work hand in hand: there is enough "material" of generic productivity, it is a primary form of productivity, and the literary "environment" acknowledges the distinct nature of that generic tradition within its accepted system of genres. I think most typical period-labels of generic traditions answer to this description. There may be a few less typical examples of period-labels within generic traditions in which only two (and more rarely only one) of the three aspects are present. "Augustan Satire," for example, can be described as a distinct period in the history of satire, marked by its secondary forms of generic productivity, based on the principle of "imitating" Roman models (e.g., Johnson's imitation of Juvenal Satire 10 in "The Vanity of Human Wishes," Pope's and Swift's imitations of Horace's Satires and Epistles).

Note that in accepting these parameters as criteria for genre periodization we are committing ourselves as little as possible to any specific aesthetic or ideological stand. The distinction between primary and secondary forms of generic productivity can be criticized as camouflaging an evaluative, perhaps modern, aesthetics (i.e., the primary form is supposedly "better" than the secondary because it is more innovative), but as a basis for historiography it should be used descriptively. Both forms should be regarded as legitimate manifestations of generic productivity. It is true that primary forms of generic productivity play a more central role than secondary forms in genre periodization. The reason, however, is not because they are more aesthetically valuable (which may be the case), but because secondary forms are marked by the principle of repetition (of generic conventions) whereas primary forms are

characterized by the dialectics of repetition and innovation, or disruption. And since the concept of a "new period" presupposes a contrast (in relation to the previous period), it is only natural that primary forms of generic productivity will have greater impact in periodizing genres (see Margolin 1969). We can hail, or deride, secondary forms of generic productivity, and still accept that it is the primary forms that play the major role in genre periodization. I can even envisage an ardent neo-classicist, cherishing tradition and consequently highly respecting secondary forms of generic productivity, who is willing to concede that in the historiography of genres, primary forms of generic productivity play a central role, more central than his own beloved forms.

Note, by the way, that primary forms of generic productivity do not have to be abrupt revolutions that radically challenge the entire set of the genre's constituting conventions. Sometimes they may only present a modification of those conventions, or a shift within their hierarchy. Comedy, for example, has remained a relatively stable genre despite the many historical as well as literary changes that have occurred during the past two millennia (in a sense, it can be described in evolutionary terms as a "living fossil"). Northrop Frye jokingly refers to the perennial nature of comedy when he says that "Bernard Shaw remarked that a comic dramatist could get a reputation for daring originality by stealing his method from Molière and his characters from Dickens: if we were to read Menander and Aristophanes for Molière and Dickens the statement would be hardly less true, at least as a general principle" (163). And still, despite this high degree of stability, there is no difficulty in arguing that Shakespearian comedy, for instance, represents a distinct primary form of generic productivity — with its "romantic" aspects and the central role assigned to women characters — thus marking a new period in the history of comedy.

In my initial proposal to apply evolutionary concepts to genre periodization, I focused on the central role played by different forms of generic productivity in determining, and labeling, periods within generic traditions. I have also argued that the evolutionary perspective with its emphasis on the relations between generic productivity and literary environment is (relatively) free from specific aesthetic norms and value judgments. Consequently, it can provide a solid ground for an objective historiography, and periodization, of literary genres. I have also suggested that evolutionary concepts are in fact already practised by historiographers of genres — but with no explicit awareness, and what is even more important, without realizing their conceptual implications and theoretical potentialities.

III.

The last section of this article will focus on one such intriguing theoretical implication of the evolutionary perspective on genre history: the important role played by *geography* in the dynamics of biological, and (by application) generic,

evolution. In every natural history geography seems to play a significant role. To begin with, many descriptions of biological species, and variations of a species, include a reference to a specific region, island, or continent (or other geographical domain): the distinction between *Elephantidae of Africa* and *Elephas of India* that we all remember from our visit to the local zoo is illustrative of the use of geographical terms in the descriptions of biological species. When we turn to hypotheses regarding the evolutionary process that led to the emergence of the biological species most dear to us, namely *homo sapiens*, we encounter terms such as *Australopithecus africanus*, *Australopithecus afarensis*, *Neanderthal man* — all containing geographical references ("austro" meaning south; "Afar," a region in Ethiopia, "Neanderthal," a valley in Germany) (see Harris, Sections 1-22). While paleontologists and anthropologists still debate *homo sapiens'* exact line of descent, there is no disagreement that various "stages" within that line are intimately related to different geographical regions. Further, a biological species is sometimes defined, especially in contemporary theories of ecological biogeography, as a reproductive population holding a specific "ecological niche" (note that "niche" is, again, a spatial term) (Falk 23-28; Mayr 275, 454).

Thus, geographical terms are used in descriptions of biological species, and geographical considerations are intimately related to the process of biological speciation. The formation of a new species, or a variation of a species, involves a geographical change: the latter is usually formed in a place other than the one occupied by the species from which it originated (this theory is sometimes called allopatric theory).⁷ This intimate relation between geography and speciation can be illustrated by the fly *drosophila*, an example very dear to biologists, because it has a short life-cycle, and is susceptible to various genetic analysis and tests. Different sub-species of *drosophila* (or perhaps different species of the genus?) are found in the Hawaii islands, and by means of genetic analysis and molecular biology, its genealogical line of descent has been established. This line consists of a distinct pattern of migration from the geologically oldest island, Kauai, to Oahu, Molokai, Maui, till it reached the newest island — Hawaii (with some intermittent moves "backwards" from Molokai to Oahu) (Falk 41-45). We may also remember in this context that one of the most important factors that led Darwin to construct his evolutionary theory stemmed from observing the geographical variation of biological species during his visit to the Galapagos islands.

Before illustrating the applicability of geographical considerations to the history, and periodization, of genres, I would like to point out that the distinction between "species," "sub-species," and a "variation of (the same) species" in biological thinking is less rigid than used to be assumed. A population's reproductive ability is still the hallmark of a species, but the process of forming

a "reproductive barrier" is now described as a continuum, not a distinct and abrupt event, thus allowing some forms of hybridization before the reproductive barrier is established (Falk 50-55). Consequently, when we adapt the evolutionary perspective to genre history, we by no means commit ourselves to a rigid classificatory approach that insists on clear-cut demarcations between a "genre" and a "sub-genre" and a "variation of (the same) genre." The evolutionary perspective, when cautiously applied, should not lead us to equate genre theory with classifications of genres. In fact, despite some ardent advocates of the classificatory project, I do not think we should regard the establishment of classificatory schemes as the ultimate goal of genre theory, nor even as one of its viable roles.⁸ Instead, it would be much more rewarding to focus on the dynamics of generic evolution, including its various forms of productivity, interactions with the literary and cultural environment — and its geographical variations.

I would like to propose that geographical considerations also play a central role with respect to literary genres in general, and genre periodization in particular. To begin with, a literary genre is often defined, like its biological analogue, with reference to geographical terms: Greek tragedy flourished in Greece, Elizabethan tragedy in England, the Petrarchan sonnet in Italy, etc. Moreover, I would venture to offer the following generalization: like its natural analogue, every literary "species," i.e., genre, is characterized by geographical variations and patterns of "migration" and "speciation." And these processes of "migration" and "speciation" are in their turn central to the concept of genre periodization.

The history of the sonnet is a conspicuous example of how geographical "migration" plays a decisive role in our conception of different periods of the genre: when it crossed the Channel, it was reshaped (first in the Spenserian variation, then the Shakespearian), and became a new "sub-species" or "sub-genre": the English, or Shakespearian sonnet. The pastoral can also be described in terms of its "migrations" and "speciations": from Greece to Rome, from there to the Continent, then to England, etc. And so with the recent history of the novel: this time crossing the Channel from England to France, and then spreading throughout Europe (with the "subspecies" of Russian, Scandinavian, etc.).

To take another example: the different periods of comic drama are not only distinct chronological phases, but are also intimately related to geographical "migrations": the move from Greece to Rome created a distinct new variation of New Comedy, and, a few centuries later, when it crossed the Channel, we

7 On the relations between geography and speciation, see Mayr 411-17, 561-66; Falk 29-49; for the allopatric theory, see Gould 61-62.

8 For the equation of genre theory with exhaustive classificatory schemes, see Brook-Rose. For some persuasive counter-argument to the classificatory project in genre theory, see Margolin 1974.

witness the formation of the Comedy of Humors (Jonson), and Romantic Comedy (Shakespeare). I recently came across a collection of essays on dramatic comedy, and was surprised to find how frequently geographical considerations are inseparable from the way we usually divide a generic tradition into periods and sub-genres. Let me quote the titles of the essays in Howarth's *Comic Drama: The European Heritage* (note, by the way, that "European" is also a geographical term): "The Comedy of Greece and Rome"; "Medieval Comic Traditions and the Beginnings of English Comedy;" "Comedy in Italy;" "Comedy in Spain and the Spanish Comedia;" "Comedy in France;" "English Comedy;" "Comedy in Northern Europe." Only the last essay in this illuminating collection, "Twentieth-Century Comedy," does not use a geographical reference. We can indirectly see from this that with the growth of modern communication systems and inter-cultural relations geographical and national boundaries have become less significant for the process of period and sub-genres formation.

An objection can be raised at this point: perhaps geography is not rudimentary at all, but is rather subordinated to other, more important, factors like language, nation, culture, etc. "English Sonnet" would then designate sonnets written in the English tongue, or within the English culture, and the reference to the English soil is inessential. I do not wish to deny that linguistic and national concepts participate in our concept of "sub-genres" and generic periods, nor to embark on a metaphysical speculation about what is more "fundamental" in the co-existence of territory-language-nation. I would like simply to offer the hypothesis that territorial "migrations" of literary genres are prone to produce "sub-genres," and that the establishment of these new "colonies" also marks new "periods" within a generic tradition. I may also concede that geography in and of itself is not a sufficient reason for explaining the formation of a new sub-genre or periods within genres. It is only when a geographical change has a cultural concomitant that we are likely to witness the formation of a new sub-genre or period. But since geographical differences are usually accompanied by cultural ones, it would not be misleading to take geographical differentiation as one important criterion (among others) in genre periodization. To avoid the possible shortcomings of a restrictive literal interpretation of "geography" in genre history, we may propose the term of "cultural space." Thus, we can reformulate some of the above statements, and say that when a genre "migrates" to a different cultural space, we are likely to see the emergence of a new sub-genre or generic period.

In today's "global village" geographical considerations have become less significant, and the units of our geography may also have changed (e.g., with the forming of the EEC Europe may supersede particular national divisions). Still, cultural space considerations do play a major role in the history, and periodization, of genres, in at least two ways. First, "migrations" and "colony establishment" in different cultural spaces have been intimately associated with the formation of new sub-genres and periods, during a large part of the past

history of literary genres. Then also, even when we take into account recent geo-political processes that bring together distant geographical units, cultural space considerations by no means become obsolete. The emergence of the Latin American novel, with its special tendency to incorporate fantastical elements (García Márquez), can illustrate the fact that crossing the Atlantic may bring a fresh productive phase, or "speciation" to the history of the novel.

Thus, different periods of the genre can be described not only with reference to the chronological sequence, but also to the cultural-spatial dimension. In fact, I am proposing in this context to establish the historiography of literary genres, including its division into periods, on "chrono-topic" principles (to use Bakhtin's term, but in a different sense): a generic period is an intersection of chronological *and* cultural-spatial coordinates. Evolutionary theory may remind us that the very terms used for distinguishing literary periods on the chronological level are rooted in spatial concepts (in fact, all time terms can be viewed as metaphors of spatial ones). The Greek etymology of "period," for example, is *periodos*, or a circuit (*The Random House College Dictionary* 987). Thus, I am not offering a totally new conceptual framework, but propose to take the spatial sense of temporal terms *seriously*, and to see how we can apply them to the history of genres. In fact, like the productivity criterion, geographical (or cultural-spatial) considerations are tacitly assumed in many divisions of generic traditions into relatively distinct periods. I propose to make those assumptions explicit, and to follow out some of their useful implications.

To conclude: by pointing out the conceptual potentialities of evolutionary perspective for genre history, the gap between "nature" and "culture" may seem less unbridgeable. Concepts such as "procreation," "environment," "geographical variation," "migration," "speciation," when cautiously used, can be transferred from the biological realm to the history of literary genres, yielding some interesting results, and contributing to the establishment of genre historiography and periodization on a more objective ground.

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