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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture
ISSN 1481-4374
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Volume 1 (1999) Issue 1 Article 2

The Comic in Literature as a General Systems Phenomenon

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Recommended Citation

Zubarev, Vera. "The Comic in Literature as a General Systems Phenomenon." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.1 (1999): <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1001>

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CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
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Volume 1 Issue 1 (March 1999) Article 2
Vera Zubarev,
"The Comic in Literature as a General Systems Phenomenon"
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/2>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*** **1.1 (1999)**
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss1/>

Abstract: Vera Zubarev proposes in her article "The Comic in Literature as a General Systems Phenomenon" that the definitions of and about aspects of dramatic genre are best articulated from the theoretical approach of systems theory. It is assumed that self-regulation is a basic element, that is, any object, any system or phenomenon has its own structure, fulfills its own function, performs its own process, has its own operator, and maintains its genesis. A number of new notions can be drawn from this proposition with regard to the concepts of potential in dramatic genre and the comic, as follows. 1) The core of dramatic genre is the degree of strength of protagonists' potential; 2) In accordance with 1), a new classification of genres follows as consisting of three types of potential (limited, average, powerful) which are assigned to three basic types: comedy (limited potential), dramedy (powerful potential), and drama (average / above average); each type is divided into further branches which are a combination of a type of ending (successful, unsuccessful / indefinite) and a type of potential (limited / average / powerful); 3) Differentiation is made between the notion of the comic and the laughable: here, the concept of the comic is linked to the limited potential and it has no relationship with laughter; and 4) Tragedy and comedy are not the opposite types of dramatic genre: tragedy is a branch of dramedy; a further branch is "succedy" while tragedy is opposed to sad comedy and succedy is opposed to funny comedy.

Vera ZUBAREV

The Comic in Literature as a General Systems Phenomenon

In this article, as a point of departure in my theoretical base, I postulate that the systems approach as a framework and methodology is a productive way of analyzing literary structure. In agreeing with my own proposition, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek emphasizes the important role of a systems approach to literature and he writes: "Overall, and as I am arguing throughout my book in particular with examples of application, systems theory for the study of literature is, perhaps, 'the most productive way of integrating artistic/nonartistic elements' (Zubarev 12). In order to offer a more detailed taxonomy of the notion 'literature as system,' definitions by the originator of the polysystem theory, Itamar Even-Zohar, are relevant. But first, I would like to draw attention to the notion that Even-Zohar's and similar definitions are clearly located within an *a priori* notion of literature while they are applicable to culture in general as well. Even-Zohar writes that 'if by 'system' one is prepared to understand both the idea of a closed set-of-relations, in which the members receive their values through their respective oppositions, and the idea of an open structure consisting of several such concurrent nets-of-relations, then the term 'system' is appropriate and quite adequate.' This definition is, then, consolidated by Even-Zohar to 'the network of relations that is hypothesized to obtain between a number of activities called 'literary,' and consequently these activities themselves observed via that network,' and 'the complex of activities, or any section thereof, for which systemic relations can be hypothesized to support the option of considering them literary' (28). Also Russell L. Ackoff's definition of systems thinking -- although not specifically in relation to literature and culture -- is helpful to illustrate how systems theory can be applied in the study of literature and culture" (25-26).

The most confusing part in defining an object or a phenomenon concerns a perspective from which the system is observed. As a rule, a single perspective becomes a basis for one's definition of the system. As Aron Katsenelinboigen states, such neglect of multilateral perspective causes "unnecessary arguments among scholars in the same field" (13). Indeed, if the system is distinguished by 1) having a certain structure; 2) fulfilling a certain function; 3) performing a certain process of transformation of its elements into a final "product"; as well as possessing 4) its operator who manages all elements; and (5) keeping its genesis, why should we, then, impoverish our viewing of it by narrowing the angle from which the system is approached? As a rule, while observing a system from a single perspective, scholars determine all other characteristics from it. Thus, structuralists determine function, process, and the like from structure; functionalists determine everything from function; operationalists determine all other aspects from the operational analysis of the system, etc. In literary criticism, the genetic approach is often taken for the basis in interpreting structure, function, process, and the role of the operator in the literary work. Thus, scholars refer to diaries, letters, and other documents, assuming that this is the only way to be "scientific" in confirming their statements. True, sometimes it is possible to determine all aspects from a single perspective. However, in most of the cases different perspectives reveal various sides from which the system can be approached; they do not determine but merely complement each other. The multilateral perspective is concerned with a complete description of the system whose various aspects can be viewed independently. Independence, in regard to this, means a certain degree of freedom inherent in all other aspects while one of them is fixed.

Since my definition of the dramatic genre links to the matter of the main protagonists' potentials, let us discuss how the potential can be measured. Needless to say, this question links to a general problem of measurement of a potential of a system. Thus, from a multilateral perspective, the potential of the system can be described in the following way. *Functionally*, the potential is linked to the system's ability to develop; *structurally*, potential is the set of material parameters existing in their relationships and the valuations of both. Further, from the *structural* point of view, the potential of the human system may include the following: 1) Orientation; 2) Energy; 3) Will power; 4) Physical and intellectual capacities and capabilities; 5) Knowledge; 6) Experience; 7) State of mind; and 8) Value system and values. All these components can be transformed and applied to systems other than human. *Processing* reveals methods for the system's transformation. As mentioned, in the process of development of his work the artist combines all three methods, depending on the stage of his/her

work and on the task(s) he/she intends to perform and resolve. Thus, for the analysis of literature the understanding of methods which structure the decision making process is crucial since it encompasses a wide field of artistic creation -- from the general design of the work to the depiction of the decision making of particular characters, etc.

The *operator*'s perspective represents the operator's set of values. The *genetic* approach is concerned with the way the potential of the system was formed. Now, let us apply the multilateral perspective to the analysis of the potential of the artistic system. The *function* of the artistic system is to generate new interpretations on different levels -- from literary criticism to new artistic versions, including screen versions, translations and adaptations, free translations, and even motifs in completely new works. *Structurally*, the richness of the artistic work consists of various parameters, both positional and relational and their valuations. From the point of view of *processing*, the artistic work represents the methods through which the artistic devices are applied. Next, I will discuss the methods of decision making, using as an example the chess model as interpreted by Katsenelinboigen. The *operator* in the artistic work is revealed through his/her values which indicate the way he/she approaches the system. Katsenelinboigen's classification of values which are divided on local and global, conditional and unconditional are useful for an understanding of the context where the dramatic genre represents the author's evaluation of the degree of globalization and conditionality of the conflicts structuring his/her plot. For instance, when Chekhov subtitles his plays comedies, he outlines the local, unimportant character of the events. The *genetic* approach links to the question of how the work was conceived, and how the intent has been developed in the process of creation. I propose that all this can be applied in the analysis of a literary work in general, as well as in the analysis of its characters and their relationships, in particular.

The need to define the notion of the dramatic genre is dictated by the necessity of underlining the common ground, namely the classical trio of tragedy, comedy, and drama. In accordance with Paul H. Grawe, one of the most creative theorists of comedy, "comedy has been misdefined for two millenia and, on the basis of that misdefinition, comedy has been relegated to an almost Cinderella-like position compared to her sister, tragedy" (9). It follows, then, that the inability to approach comedy and tragedy from the same perspective relates to the absence of a comprehensive concept with the ability to reveal the core of the dramatic genre. Aristotle's great contribution to the theory of genre was the systematization of its manifold features. His thorough analysis of the structure, function, and genesis of tragedy, comedy, and epic poetry drew one's attention to artistic devices inherent in different literary genres. He discussed the quantitative construction of tragedy and he established rules for the portrayal of tragic personages and for the construction of epic poetry. All this was an excellent guide for authors and critics as well as literary historians. At the same time, observations on the tragic/comic/dramatic as general categories have not been analyzed. Aristotle's statement concerning the difference between tragedy and comedy -- "the one would make its personages worse, and the other better, than the men of the present day" (1456) -- does not clarify the nature of either notion. Obviously, this conclusion requires further theoretical elaboration, for the classifications of "good" and "bad" are intuitive and vague.

The primary question concerns the notion of the dramatic genre, namely -- what does this term indicate to writers? What structure, process, function, and the like are represented by the dramatic genre? To solve this problematic, I propose first to define the dramatic genre as a systems phenomena, using a multilateral perspective, as follows. *Structurally*, the dramatic genre links to the degree of strength of protagonists' potential. *Functionally*, it represents the degree of influence a protagonist wields over the future development of his environment. For instance, unlike the tragic hero, the comic character cannot make drastic changes to his universe, because he has insufficient potential to influence global development. From the point of view of *process*, the dramatic genre represents a correlation between potential and result by means of fate, chance, and predisposition. The *operator* (any interpreter, including the artist) gives weight to the protagonists' potential, in defining the genre of a literary work. *A genetic* approach helps one to understand the artist's values in order to clarify the reason why the author defined the genre of his work in such a way. Further, I propose to approach the problem of the dramatic genre from the structural point of view. This seems the most effective way of investigating the particularity inherent in this category. I strongly believe that there is a certain structure that is connected neither to one's emotional involvement

(laughter/tears) nor to artistic devices (humor, jokes, and the like), nor to the plot development (types of ending) -- a structure that conveys independently the notion of the dramatic genre. Rather, this independent structure is linked to the degree of strength of the protagonists' potential which will ultimately define the three types of the dramatic genre -- *dramedy*, comedy, and drama. I approach the problem from the assumption that by defining the dramatic genre of his/her work, the author establishes the degree of inner power of his/her characters and their relationships. In analyzing tragedy, Aristotle and his school focused on the seriousness of conflict and the type of outcome (happy/unhappy) in tragedy. However, as further analysis will show, the same conflict may become a subject for both tragedy and comedy. In regard to the outcome, as will be shown below, it can be either happy or unhappy in any genre.

In speculating about the seriousness of the conflict, the question arises: what makes polemics weighty -- a topic or discussants? Naturally, the significance of the polemics is determined by the relative strength of the potential of those who are involved. Analogously, in a literary work, the poorer the potential of the characters, the less significant conflicts they can produce. As a rule, regardless the topic they discuss, characters of limited potential do not cross the border of local, conditional thinking, for their intellectual limitations do not allow them to elevate their speculations to the level of global generalizations. From the point of view of predispositioning theory, Paul Grawe's definition of comedy becomes an important stage in understanding the necessity of analyzing the system's potential. In accordance with Grawe, "comedy as seen from a formal perspective is the representation of life patterned to demonstrate or to assert a faith in human survival, often including or emphasizing how that survival is possible or under what conditions that survival takes place" (17). Thus, *survival* in Grawe's concept becomes a necessary parameter for comedy. It seems to me that this concept concerning the nature of comedy should be considered in a broader context, one that relates to all types of dramatic genre.

As Aron Katsenelinboigen shows in regard to socioeconomic systems, there are two types of survival: a short-term survival and a long-term survival. Katsenelinboigen distinguishes between three categories: survival, growth, and development. As he shows, although interrelated, they are independent. In defining these categories, Katsenelinboigen approaches them from the functional, structural, and process-oriented points of view. He writes:

> From the functional point of view, survival represents an extreme case with emphasis placed on maintaining a minimum level of vital parameters comprising the system. Growth presupposes an increase (as judged by a preset criterion) in the values of parameters already incorporated into the system. Development is concerned with creating favorable conditions for the future, in other words, with creating the potential of the system that may give birth to a new system with an even greater potential. From the structural point of view, survival is aimed at preserving the existing objects; growth indicates an increase in the number of existing objects; and development implies a variety of objects (with new ones appearing in the course of development) as well as their interrelations. From the process-oriented point of view, survival is a search for a stationary state; growth must facilitate the creation of a complete and consistent mechanism of coordinated growth of the sought-for variables; and development implies the creation of a mechanism that supports both the creation and the resolution of incompleteness and inconsistency in the existing mechanism ... long-term survival is impossible without growth, and long-term growth presupposes development. Proceeding in the backward direction, it is obvious that long-term development as long-term growth require survival ... I am a proponent of the primacy of development with growth and survival allotted a subordinate role. (33-35)

The development of the system requires a strong potential, which in socioeconomic systems includes the combination of different methods of decision making and strategic thinking on the part of its operator. It is important for the theory of genre to distinguish between development and survival, for it assists one in making more detailed classification of types of the artistic universe represented in literary works. Thus, in speaking of the types of artistic systems one can distinguish between those which do not survive, those which survive without development (such as, for instance, tribes of Africa or Australia), and those which are able to develop with survival implied. Naturally, in order to understand whether the world represented in a literary work is able to develop, one must analyze its predisposition, which is linked to an analysis of the potential of the artistic system. The world of comedy has a limited potential which causes its survival, not development. The comic hero whether a villain or a virtuous character cannot have an impact on the stationary state of the comic universe. Even a death of the comic character does not influence the primary balance of his world. Chekhov's

comedy is a graphic example of such unchangeable routine that continues despite any deaths (*The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*), love (*Uncle Vanya*), and losses (*Cherry Orchard*) of his protagonists.

Conversely, the world of tragedy or drama often represents the idea of development of society through the protagonists' failure or deaths. *Romeo and Juliet* is the best example of how the protagonists are able to stop the destructive feud and "direct" society to its new development. Therefore, in terms of chess, Norman Holland's statement that tragedy "involves the failure of a defense, leading to punishment for an impulse toward pleasure" (315) reveals a local understanding of failure as a combination that failed. The influences on the future development of the potential of a society represented in the literary work are not taken into account. In terms of the game of chess, Romeo and Juliet play role of a positional sacrifice made to rescue the entire world. Noticeably, two screen versions of *Romeo and Juliet*, that of Zefirelli (1968) and that of Luhrman (1996), reveal two opposite interpretations of the potential of the society: Zefirelli follows Shakespeare's pattern of reconciliation while Luhrman shows a society unable to absorb the sacrifice of two lovers. Importantly, Zefirelli's society is a society of Renaissance: faces from the crowd, architecture, landscape -- everything suggests artistic spirit and man's sensitivity to beauty. Luhrman's world is a farcical allusion to Ancient Rome at its worst, a representation of orgies and human disintegration. Besides, the main characters in Luhrman's version are characters of above average, but not strong potential, which makes one view the genre of Luhrman's version as farcical drama. Thus, as one can see, to define the genre of a literary work one must analyze it from the point of view of its ability to develop, which automatically refers one to the analysis of the potential of the protagonists and society structuring its artistic universe.

Next, my concern is the protagonist's potential as a tool for the system's development from a functional approach. The question that immediately arises in regard to the protagonist's potential is: what can its strength be measured in relation with? In accordance with my definition of genre, the degree of strength of the protagonist's potential is related to his/her influence on the development of the system he/she inhabits. This is the main difference between my approach and that given by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Here Frye states that "Aristotle's words for good and bad are *spuodaios* and *phaulos*, which have a figurative sense of weighty and light"(33). Even so, these notions are not elaborated by Aristotle, and one may only speculate about their meaning. Frye outlines five types of the hero's power of action: 1) "superior in *kind* both to other men and to environment" (a divine being); 2) "superior in *degree* to other men and to environment" (the hero of romance); 3) "superior in degreeto other men but not to his natural environment" (a leader); 4) "superior neither to other men nor to his environment" ("one of us"); and 5) "inferior of power and intelligence to ourselves" (34-35). As one can see, Frye establishes the degree of one's power based on interaction with other people. However, any system has its hierarchy. For instance, Aristophanes's *Frogs* represent a system which includes gods, poets, and simple people. The question is to what extent are these creatures responsible for the development of their universe? As further analysis will show, the difference between the comedic and other gods and leaders is that the former are formal figures unable to develop their system while the latter participate actively in the development of themselves and their universe.

Importantly, Frye's table draws one's attention to the degree of strength of protagonists. At this point, my position coincides with that of Frye. However, as shown above, the hero's belonging to comedy or tragedy can hardly be explained by his relations with others. Indeed, while speaking about the low mimetic mode based on the type called "one of us," Frye states that it is typical for comedies (35). Naturally, the question arises: how to classify gods and heroes of comedies who are definitely not "some of us"? As Elmer Blistein notices, "Jupiter's presence has strikingly different results in the different versions. Jupiter's presence in Plautus leads inevitably and reverently to the birth of a divine hero; his presence in Moliere succeeds in raising bedroom farce to the level of high comedy and leads to the birth of a semi-divine hero; his presence in Dryden creates, along with a potential sweeper of the Augean stables, a farcical triangle of an arrogant cuckolder, a shrewish strumpet, and a pompous cuckold" (Blistein 99).

Understanding the insufficiency of the parameters introduced in his table, Frye switches from the analysis of the character to the analysis of plot structure. Frye's further speculations about comic and tragic structures are equal to the idea of successful/unsuccessful endings in tragedy and comedy. Frye

writes: "Also there is a general distinction between fictions in which the hero becomes isolated from his society, and fictions in which he is incorporated into it. This distinction is expressed by the words 'tragic' and 'comic' when they refer to aspects of plot in general and not simply to forms of drama" (35). As one can see, the idea of the isolated protagonist corresponds with unsuccessful ending while incorporation of the character into society is analogous to happy ending. However, the introduction of this parameter generates new contradictions within Frye's classification. In defining comedy, Frye writes: "The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it" (43). Now suppose that this structure is combined with the high mimetic mode which is defined by Frye as having great passions and powers of expression and belonging to epic and tragedy. What type of genre should we discuss in this case? For instance, main protagonists of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* possess all characteristics inherent in mode three: they are characters of great passions, the way they express themselves elevates them to a higher level than that of the common environment; they are subject to social criticism; at the same time, they are incorporated by society. The low mimetic mode can be combined with structure described by Frye as related to tragedy. By the same token, irony and the ironic temper may appear in combination with the unhappy outcome (see Gurewitch). Thus, in defining dramatic genre, one must take into account the protagonist's ability to influence his/her world's development. This would help one to comprehend in essence the difference between seemingly analogous elements and structures which appear in opposite genres.

Now, in accordance with my definition of the dramatic genre as briefly described above, I would like to propose the following new typology of pure and mixed types of the dramatic genre. Pure types are 1) *Dramedy* (a type of the dramatic genre that represents main protagonists and their environment of powerful, rich potential, *Dramedy* exploits this potential which is pregnant with great possibilities); 2) Drama (a type of the dramatic genre that represents main protagonists and their environment of average or above average potential); and 3) Comedy (a type of the dramatic genre that portrays main characters and their environment endowed with poor, limited potential). Needless to say, the three types can be mixed by three or two, which creates mixed types. The mixture of potentials can occur either on macro- or micro-levels. On the macro-level, main protagonists can be represented as protagonists of different potential, or the potential of main protagonists and the environment can differ. On the micro-level, one may observe dynamic changes of a protagonist's potential from one degree of strength to another. In accordance with this, the following four mixed types can be outlined: 1) *Comedramedy* (a combination of limited and powerful potential either within the main protagonist or within the group of main protagonists, or of the main protagonists and their environment); 2) *Dramecomedy* (a combination of normal and poor potential either within the main character or within the group of the major characters, or of the main characters and their environment); 3) *Dramedramedy* (a combination of normal and powerful potential on either macro or micro-levels); and 4) *Come-drame-dramedy* (a combination of all the types of potential either within the main hero or in a group of main personages and their environment). Theoretically, all types can be represented within a literary work. Practically, the fourth type seems to be less probable although it may be developed in some future works.

I propose a functional approach to dramatic genres and their various branches. Although the protagonist's potential becomes a sufficient condition for defining types of the dramatic genre, delineation of the branches structuring each type requires an additional characterization. For instance, to define pure main branches one must combine the type of the outcome (successful, unsuccessful, ambiguous) with the type of the main protagonists' potential (strong, average, and weak). In other words, the traditional classification of dramatic genres (comedy, tragedy and drama) is clearly incomplete and inconsistent. As is known, the term "tragedy," derived from Greek *tragoidia,* means a serious literary work with unhappy outcome. However, not all unhappy ending makes a literary work a tragedy. Take, for instance, Alfred de Musset's comedy *On ne badine pas avec l'amour*, which ends with a death of one of the heroines. At this point, Gary Waller's definition of comedy and tragedy as based, accordingly, on "joy" and "terror," presents a problem (2-3). Rather, the tragic hero is not the one who dies but whose death has impact on the world. Thus, tragedy is concerned with a loss of a "star of the first magnitude," of a character whose potential is uniquely rich. Thus, tragedy is not a type but a branch of the dramatic genre. It represents potentially powerful protagonists predisposed

to lethal outcome. This suggests that the degree of strength of the tragic hero's potential is not sufficiently strong to preserve him or her from catastrophe. Still, the potential of the tragic character is powerful enough to influence future development of the world. For instance, in *Romeo and Juliet* the death of the protagonists changes the society in its essence. Conversely, in Chekhov's comedy, *The Seagull*, the death of the main protagonist, Treplev, has no influence on his world.

At the same time, characters of strong potential can be very successful. Owing to their intellectual, physical and emotional power, they may turn their disadvantages into advantages. Wit and a strong ability to conceptualize situations combined with some other distinguished features may help one to prevent a tragic outcome or to turn a dangerous predisposition to a successful upshot. This branch of *dramedy* I propose to call *succedy* (from success). Thus, in accordance with my notion of branches, the following nine pure main branches are formed: 1) Tragedy (a combination of a rich potential and unsuccessful outcome); 2) Succedy (a combination of a rich potential and successful outcome); 3. Open dramedy (rich potential combined with ambiguous ending); 4) Happy drama (a combination of normal potential and successful outcome); 5) Unhappy drama (normal potential and unsuccessful outcome); 6) Open drama (normal potential and ambiguous outcome); 7) Happy comedy (limited potential and happy ending); 8) Unhappy comedy (limited potential and unhappy ending); and 9) Open comedy (limited potential and ambiguous ending). Certainly, pure main branches can be mixed with each other and create a considerable number of mixed branches. Aside from the main branches, one can emphasize some additional branches and introduce new characteristics. For instance, one can introduce the degree of the laughable (the funny, the sad, and the normal) combined with the previous characteristics. Thus, one can speak of a large number of additional pure branches, such as funny happy drama, funny unhappy drama, sad unhappy comedy, funny open dramedy, and the like.

Next, I propose a genetic approach with regard to the dramatic genre as a reflection of manifold and singular variety. In regard to the dramatic genre, a genetic approach is traditionally used to research circumstances under which a certain dramatic genre appeared. However, descriptions of external circumstances seemingly responsible for appearance of such or another genre does not provide one with holistic vision of this category. Here, I attempt to approach the dramatic genre from the point of view of its philosophical ground. I would like to investigate what kind of philosophy was beyond the spectrum of the character's representation -- from the insensitive inanimate creature whose failure may evoke only laughter to a highly sensitive, unique individual whose suffer shocks the spectator. At this point, Aristotle's observation on a harmless nature of the deformity in comedy, namely his assertion that "a mistake or deformity" is "not productive of pain or harm to others" (1459) in comedy implies two things. First, deformity in comedy has no potential to cause any drastic changes, including harmful ones. This has been discussed above. The second speculation concerns the spectator who is not supposed to feel for the comic protagonist as deep as he/she is supposed to feel for the tragic character. In other words, deformity and ugliness represented in the comic character must not cause the spectator's painful reaction. No matter what the blows on the back of his head the comic hero receives he is supposed to evoke laughter (that may be even combined with light pity), but not compassion. Actually, here we face the very old problem of man's attitude toward the strongest and the weakest. It is especially typical for children who usually mock their weak peers. As soon as they see someone who is inferior to them, they immediately take advantage of him, making jokes and laughing at his deficiencies.

The operator's (author/observer) orientation toward the inanimation of the character of limited potential suggests a degree of conditionality in the evaluation of human beings. Such relationships between the observer and the observant in comedy, tragedy, and drama reflect a more general paradigm, namely the relationships between the manifold and singular variety. In accordance with Katsenelinboigen, the need for manifold in a system is dictated by the degree of indeterminism (110-18). The uncertainty demands from a developing system a long-term strategy to keep all manifolds. As Katsenelinboigen writes, "changing conditions may cause one class of objects to decrease and another to increase in size so the universe as a total ecological system will have ample opportunities for further development" (287). Further, he applies his concept of manifold to his analysis of to the legend of Noah in the Torah. He states that in saving both clean and unclean animals, God, who in Katsenelinboigen's interpretation is indeterministic and developing, deals with a multitude of objects (288) and in the mid-term strategy, the manifold is usually exchanged for a variety which is "set of

prioritized elements, but with all the elements of the set preserved" (110). And, finally, in the short-term tasks one primarily deals with a singular variety which is "a set of prioritized elements, with all elements outside of the select subset being banned" (Katsenelinboigen 113).

In societal systems the idea of manifold and singular variety links to the problem of integration of different ethnic groups. Thus, democratic society develops manifold while totalitarian regimes prefer singular variety. Katsenelinboigen writes: "The described principle of integration of manifold, variety, and singular variety in societal systems is also illustrated by the perennial debate between the radical liberals and radical conservatives centering on the coexistence of different ethnic groups. As racists, conservatives not only underscore ethnic distinctions, but claim the superiority of the ethnos over another based on certain indicators. ... On the other hand, liberals who recognize the need to preserve diverse ethnic groups are unwilling to acknowledge a *variety*.... Perhaps, adversely, the radical liberals seem to advocate only *uniformity*" (113).

The above paradigm is in full accordance with the principle of structuring the types of the dramatic genre. Indeed, the way tragic and comic heroes are represented suggests that the dramatist thinks in terms of singular variety. Thus, a dramatist makes his preferences toward one kind (the tragic hero) which he pronounces highly valuable and completely neglects another kind (the comic character) which he portrays as something not even human. Therefore the traditional comic character is represented as lacking deep feelings and thoughts. In this sense, he is a block of wood unable to suffer, the subject of one's mockery. In other words, the comic hero is permitted to be ridiculed even in circumstances when the human being seeks for compassion. He is represented in exactly the same way as a minor ethnic group is represented in totalitarian society: it would not be a harm to destroy this particular group. Conversely, the tragic hero is the one who is chosen and whose failure must be mourned, not mocked. In this context, drama conveys the idea of a manifold: It attempts to show that all creature are equally important, whether they be Dostoyevsky's "superfluous man" or heroes of bourgeois drama. The way the common characters are elevated in drama to the level of universal importance will be discussed later. For now it would be sufficient to note that drama was intended to draw one's attention to the inner world of so-called common people in order to reveal their originality and uniqueness hidden in plain view. And, finally, all dramatic genres in general can be considered a variety, for each time they keep their "situational priorities" of one genre over another as judged on the basis of certain criteria.

As I argue above, the evaluative process is subjective. In regard to the analysis of a protagonist's potential, it must be understood that only a method of evaluation can be objectivized. The evaluation itself in each case will be based on one's subjective appraisal. Nevertheless, if a situation is more or less standard, if the protagonist is two-dimensional, then the varieties of interpretations come to minimum. Obviously, the same character can be perceived differently by different interpreters. The author does not determine one's perception of his character, but merely assists one in adjusting his/her valuations. In this context, the role of artistic devices is very important. From the point of view of genre recognition, certain artistic devices serve to control the degree of one's emotional involvement. For instance, in the traditional comedy the author finds a way to alienate his reader/spectator from the character in order to decrease the degree of his/her emotional involvement. Some of the devices can be formalized while others are property of their creators. All devices described by theoreticians of comedy fulfill the same function: humor, jokes, word play, and the like serve as "separative" means keeping the observer alienated from the observant. In extreme cases such alienation of the reader/spectator may cause cruelty and heartlessness and then the laughter turns to mockery and abuse. However, the application of artistic devices does not assist in creating uniformity of readers' or spectators' reactions. As any evaluation, the reaction to humor, jokes, funny incidents, and the like depends on an individual. The artist may intend to create a very laughable situation while the reader can be left totally indifferent or bored. Not every reader/spectator would enjoy distortions of the comic character. Still, the purely comical implies "harmlessness" of distortions so that a common spectator could feel for protagonists. Any character may evoke either pity or laughter and this cannot be controlled by the author. This depends exclusively on the observer's values and his/her particular evaluation of the moment. The only thing that can be objectivized is the artist's technique which, in some cases, can be elaborated into a system. The interpreter's reaction, however, remains subjective.

In choosing one or another genre for his/her work, the artist attempts to form the degree of intensity of the spectator/reader's emotional involvement. This means that even if one feels for the comic character, it would not be a deep emotional stress typical for tragedy. In this sense, one can speculate about the meaning of different nouns describing the observer's emotional relationships with the observant. It seems, pity is a feeling typical for the stronger toward the weaker. The word compassion conveys the idea of confluence of the observer's and the observant's values. Such merging is possible only when the observer considers the observant equal to himself/herself. Still, some spectators may feel deeply for the comic character and, conversely, be indifferent in regard to a tragic hero's misfortunes. This reaction cannot be changed by the author, unless the interpreter agrees to reconsider his/her values.

The degree of indeterminism in the development of dramatic types and branches depends on process. Processing assists one in understanding how different characteristics structuring types and branches of the dramatic genre link together. For instance, one may research the relative influence of a protagonist's potential on the type of outcome. One can also analyze how different potentials correspond with the degree of the laughable/the sad. Here, I will focus on the degree of determinism inherent in the outcome of the artistic work, as well as on the problem of development of dramatic branches. The former links to the question concerning the role of the main character's potential -- does it predispose or predetermine a certain outcome? Traditionally, comedy and tragedy are distinguished by the degree of determinism of their plot development. According to Aristotle, chance is prerogative of comedy while destiny designs tragedy. Such view of the opposite genres as two extremes -- a complete order and a complete disorder -- appears questionable to me, however. I strongly believe that there is a very limited number of works in which a single chance occurrence drastically changes the protagonists' lives. As the analysis reveals, in a masterful work, whether it is comedy, tragedy, or drama, the role of characters' predisposition is crucial. Regardless of genre, a chance occurrence always interacts with a certain predisposition. Moreover, the same chance occurrence may result in different outcomes if it is absorbed by a different predisposition. Therefore, chance in a literary work cannot be analyzed regardless of the characters' predisposition. It must always be considered within the system created by the characters in accordance with their predisposition.

The systems approach -- in principle and seen conceptually a comparative approach -- allows one to define a structure, a thought category, an object, or anything given from different angles and allows it to reveal its different aspects and elements. These elements and aspects of the item under scrutiny are usually of a multiple character and structure and cannot be understood from a single perspective; or, if it is analyzed from a single perspective, its understanding will only be partial and reductive. For someone who seeks simplifications and intends to approach an item of study from a single perspective, the systems approach may appear redundant. However, for those who understand the importance of a multi-dimensional approach such a method of thinking and method will be advantageous. Applied to the problematics of literature and the study of genre in drama, the notion of the comic and comedy cannot be derived simply from happy ending, or the seriousness of the topic, or the hierarchy inherent in society, for example. As my systemic argumentation reveals, all factors, such as potential, ability to develop, structure, form, content, etc., must be considered as independent characteristics which, in turn, show the multifaceted nature of my object of study. Approached from the point of view of its self-regulating system, that is, its structure, function, processing, genesis, and the role of the operator, the genre of drama reveals its sophisticated and multi-dimensional character and function.

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