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The genesis and the development of satire in Latin literature : summary

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SUMMARY

The Genesis and the Development of Satire in Latin Literature

This publication based on author's doctoral thesis and defended at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in 2016 deals with satire as a genre and aims to define and categorize the satire in the hierarchy of literature. The satirical element, tinge, feature, tendency or the satirical "something" is not the core of this piece of work, as it is included in many works of ancient literature. Only those works which are put into the direct context with satire as a genre are mentioned.

In this publication, satire is viewed as a genre which can be perceived and recognized by anybody. However, almost nobody is able to define it. The term genre is used, as suggested by the latest works, as an open system of formal and functional features in which the individual works participate at a varying degree. The genre in this work is understood as a model which possesses certain constant and variable features, which can be discovered in particular works of art, is related to the period in which it was created and is influenced by other literary forms as well as by the social situation, the personality of the author and the audience (the readers or the listeners).

The second chapter deals with the terminological specification of the term satire. Its ancient use and its modern meaning are defined which helps the orientation concerning the use of the terms satire/*satura*. In the source materials, *satura* is not only satire. Leaving aside its original meaning – the adjective *satur* in female gender, the word *satura* (even if its exact meaning is not known) was used to sign works, particular poem, genre or genres, even for personified genre, as an idiomatic expression of not absolutely clear legal meaning *per saturam* and as a name of a lake or a girl. The expression *satura* is probably of autochthonous origin. There have

occurred a lot of attempts to explain the meaning of this word. However, none of these is evidential and already in Classical antiquity the meaning of *satura* was not clear. The meaning of *satura* as a term defining a literary genre cannot be explained. This term was certainly not created to describe the genre. Most likely it comes from the gastronomy milieu meaning filling or stuffing. *Satura* as a noun appears apparently in the second half of the 2nd century BC. In literature, the term *satura* was first used to describe a poetry collection. Presumably, Ennius named his poetry collection in this way. Since the time of Horace, the use of *satura* as a literary term describing the genre can be dated and at the very latest, since the time of Juvenal the term *satura* has been used for a particular poem. Nevertheless, already Varro used in the title of his work *De compositione saturarum*, a form, which indicates that he considered *satura* a particular poem. In the works of later authors, the term *satura* is rarely used in the meaning of satyr play. Concerning the Menippean satire, the word *satura* mainly occurs with the determining adjective and it is found on its own only exceptionally whereas it is obvious from the context that it is a prosimetric work of art. It is questionable if there was dramatic *satura*. There might have been some performances in Rome around the 3rd century BC. However, it is highly unlikely that the literary satire developed from the dramatic satire or that there were more common features than only the name, which was used for many unrelated issues, as this publication takes the opportunity to point out.

The term *satura* was the original genre designation of satire and very soon (probably during the reign of Augustus) it was orthographically changed. In the source materials, the term *satyra* (rarely *satira*) became dominant and coexisted with the word *satura* for some time and finally it completely took over its function until the beginning of the 17th century, when “y” was replaced by “i” based on the work of I. Casaboun and the term satire has remained in the modern languages up to the present day.

Nowadays, all researchers (if they use it) perceive the expression *satura* as the original name of the genre, which is today referred to as satire. Using the word satire, the reader must be careful about author’s usage of the word as this term can be used in various meanings (like the term *satura* in Classical antiquity).

In the third part of the publication, the “ancestors” of satire, or the literary forms linked to satire, are mapped. The Greek world is represented by the iambic poetry, Old comedy and Hellenistic literature with an amount of works characterised by variety with the dominant influence of Callimachus and diatribes. Concerning ancient Rome, Naevius is mentioned in connection with his famous attacks at the Metelli family, as well as the representatives of “miscellaneous” satire Ennius and Pacuvius.

Diatribes and satire (mainly the post-Lucilian one) have common exhortation, moralising and the attempt to improve the world. The iambic poetry and satire

share the emphasis on poet's personality, straightforward expression and appropriate style. And both Old comedy and satire arise from the period situation. Both of these literary forms criticise, alert and exhort.

Naevius cannot be considered the predecessor of satire, even if under his influence there begin to occur some features typical for the genre of satire, such as poet's personality, in Latin literature. Representing the "miscellaneous" satire, Ennius and Pacuvius are inseparably connected with the only phase of satire as a genre or rather a satirical tendency in terms of the whole historical development of literature. In association with these authors, this phase comes into existence and most likely also ceases to exist. Even though only a few fragments from Ennius's collection are left and only few ancient authors or recent researchers mention their work in this genre, both are crucially important for understanding the context of historical development of this genre. Either of them wrote probably a poetry collection which was considered by later authors as satire or *satura*. We will probably never identify who wrote it first. For the further development of the genre, it is very important to realize that there were (so far as we know) at least two authors of this "miscellaneous" satire, which shows the acceptance by the reading audience and a certain continuity of the genre. The references in the later grammarians indicate that the "miscellaneous" satire established and created a tradition.

However, this tradition apparently ends with Ennius and Pacuvius or a short but not an irrelevant chapter in the history of satire as a genre is finished. The "miscellaneous" satire characterized by a variety of metres and topics ceases to exist and its place is taken by the new satire represented by Lucilius which is critical and becomes a fully-fledged genre. Ennius and Pacuvius, let alone Naevius, cannot be included in this tradition. Nevertheless, they should be seen as the first ones who noticed the literary potential of the genre which had not yet been established and they began to "tread a new path" in the constituting Latin literature.

Undoubtedly, the first legitimate author of satire as a genre is Lucilius, who the fourth part of the monography deals about. The situation in Rome in the second half of the 2nd century BC is presented. Lucilius was the first satirist – which is proved by his successors who refer to him as an inventor of the genre. In his work, he does things in an innovative way and tries to find the best way of describing the world around him. He writes for his own inner need, and he is probably driven by the desire to criticize his surroundings. He does not violently force his position to the audience. With Lucilius, there appears the personally focused poem in Rome.

Lucilius founded a distinctive genre and it is the open criticism which represents one of the key stones of this new literary form. Personal attacks are typical for Lucilius. However, Lucilius is the last author using them in the genre of Roman satire as in the period that followed the social climate did not allow such

attacks on a particular person who was still alive. On the contrary, today personal attacks belong to one of the characteristic features of satire, or satirical tendencies in various genres. Further characteristic of this genre includes hexameter, the metre which Lucilius chose after the period of experimentation. Lucilius also represents the poet who does not remain in the background or who is not willing to deserve praise and speaks openly and exposes himself and his opinions in danger. Personal confession – his personality, his experiences, his view of the world and his opinion, became the content and the objective of his work.

The last chapter focuses on the verification of the hypothesis that Roman satire is an independent literary genre and the characteristics of this literary category are clarified. There did not exist any definition of satire in Latin literature. Even Horace, in the work of whom the identification of the genre clearly appears for the first time, does not define the genre, he as well as his successors only describe it. Beginning with Horace, the genre got defined more narrowly and as well as bounded, the term satire began to acquire significance of simple and wildly offensive tone, which has remained up to the present day.

Satire as a comprehensive genre with all formal features was founded in Rome, or was formed in the area of the Roman republic towards the end of the 2nd century BC. During the 1st century BC there occurred the identification of the genre i.e. the designation of the genre, the fact that another author writes in a similar way and refers to the founder of the genre and uses the same title for his work (or his work is considered by others as satire). A century later, this genre became an integral part of the literary system

Satire was written in metre (beginning with Lucilius in hexameter), included criticism, dealt with various topics, was related mainly to the present or recent past, its authors defined themselves with respect to their predecessors, used expressions of the commonly spoken language, responded to topical initiatives and wanted to evoke the respond in their readers.

One of the most important and most typical features of the genre is its integration into the Lucilian tradition referring to Lucilius and his criticism. This criticism, which may have either an entertaining effect or it may be considered as a real “indignation” towards the rottenness of the society, became a typical feature of satire throughout its existence, and not only Roman satire, but also the satire or satirical tendency at all. It is obvious that criticism must be aimed at something which is sufficiently recognizable and known by a wide range of potential readers at the time. Consequently, the genre is connected with the milieu in which the author lives and creates. Even if it may seem that the work echoes its author, it is important to stand back and bear in mind that the poems just reflect the current reality in an artistic way, i.e. their authors chose and adopt the topics to be as interesting as possible and to be sold very well.

There occur various topics and there can be traced three basic ones which accompany the mankind since its very beginning and which include the desire for satiation and fulfillment of human needs. Food, love/sex, desire for the material comfort are the most common topics of criticism, being opposed by the distant past which is considered the good time in which there were no excesses. According to the spreading of the Roman area and permanent conflicts with the neighbouring nations, the issue of foreigners mainly the Greeks becomes one of the topics of the satire.

It is certain that the authors of satire were educated Romans who were fully aware of the fact that if they decide to share their ideas in literature, the exalted and influential ones educated in the same way will read them. Even if the genre is more likely found in the middle range of literature and there are no claims for the top, the authors thought about it thoroughly, which is evident from the number of references to various topics (especially the literature ones) they filled their works with. The poets do not want their works to be pushed aside. Their poems reflect the rejection of writing the epic or tragedy, the authors prefer writing about everyday issues. Already the way of their writing – variation of topics, styles and forms offers to the readers/audience a unique opportunity to define themselves against the presumed topics and appreciate the way they were processed at the same time. To attract their audience, the authors chose different ways, in which criticism having an effect (entertaining, educational) at the target audience played an important role and forces them to adopt their own position which can correspond with the opinion presented in the poetry or it may differ from it.

Originally, this genre of satire was called *satura*. Today, if we talk about it, different designations are used, the most appropriate one being “Roman verse satire”. The genre disappeared for some time after the fall of Roman Empire. However, the satirical tendency survived and fully appeared again in the national literatures. Juvenal was the most valued of the canonical authors and therefore the sharp offensive criticism typical for his work became one of the criteria for identifying the genre.

Today, satire as a genre cannot be designated accurately or circumscribed, even if it can be stated with a certain exaggeration that it still contains some dominant characters which are already present in the early form, Roman satire, and include variety, criticism, expressing of own opinion, and connection with the period in which it originated. Nowadays, satire has become more likely a satirical tendency. Satire appears in all areas of human activities, we can recognize it relatively easily and we understand it quite well. If we wanted to specify satire, it would be necessary to resort to the subgenre, i.e. to further specify satire, e.g. “the Czechoslovak satire in the 30s’ of the 20th century”. However, to define satire in this way is possible only after a certain time span; from our point of view we do not speak about

a genre, but about various subgenres of a broad literary category which appeared in literature in a period during the history of the genre.

And this is the point when the original genre (satire) becomes a subgenre – Roman verse satire. Today, if we speak about the genre, we consider its history, some also include the satirical tendency. However, according to this work, this satirical tendency cannot be confused with the satire in the beginning of the genre. The original genre, which was written by Lucilius, Horace, Persius and Juvenal, becomes only a chapter in the development of the genre of satire. If we spoke about it in terms of the whole genre as seen today, the designation “subgenre” would be preferred. If speaking only about the ancient literature, the term genre could be used.

Satirical features have crossed to other genres and they have become a part of the name of the subgenre, e.g. satirical novel. Satire has expanded to other fields of arts: painting, media, theatre. It is obvious that the issue of satire as a genre or the satirical features included in other genres is relatively comprehensive and complicated, but also, we can hardly imagine our lives without it as it is one of many means of personal expression. Each of us possesses satirical tendency which makes us view the world from different perspective.