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**ANTI-GENRE CATEGORY IN MODERN STUDIES:  
DECONSTRUCTION OR RENEWAL?**

Larisa Prokhorova (a)\*, Galina Zavalova (b)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Kemerovo State University, ul. Krasnaya, 6, Kemerovo, Russia, larpro@rambler.ru

(b) Kemerovo State Medical University, ul. Voroshilova, 22a, Kemerovo, Russia, galina\_zavalova@mail.ru

*Abstract*

The aim of the paper is to discuss the currently under-researched notion of anti-genre as methodological concept of comparative literature, which derives from the notion of genre as a fixed form of utterances united by theme, composition and style. The authors use interdisciplinary anthropocentric approach to examine in detail the mechanisms underlying genre subversion, and apply various methods including elements of semiotic, cognitive and discourse analysis. The research focuses on the key elements that make up genre as a unity and explores the ways in which these elements are transformed and endowed with new functions. Anti-genre is defined as a variety of the genre aimed at deriding, parodying the model created by the prototype genre. It deconstructs the well-organized world of the genre in question, creates the anti-world, anti-culture, anti-heroes and produces the effect of defeated expectancy. The anti-genre based on the “intertextual encyclopaedia” of the model reader reworks the most recognizable, the so-called basic genre elements, or genre-forming signposts, which serve as intertextual frames placed and transformed in a new context. Thus, anti-genre texts become a playground for the dialogue between the author and the reader, providing genre evolution. The authors conclude that anti-genre per se should not be considered as deconstruction of genre, but rather its renewal, modification or transformation.

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**Keywords:** Genre, anti-genre, genre deconstruction, genre/anti-genre modelling, literary discourse strategies, model reader.



## 1. Introduction

The concept of genre has revealed itself to be of great interpretative flexibility. The heterogeneity of speech genres giving birth to many hybrid genre forms or modifications, absence of distinct boundaries between genres determine the complexity and multifoldness of the term. Contemporary genre studies deal with “hybrid texts where various genres are connected and recontextualized” (Luzón, 2017).

Formulated by Bakhtin (1975) definition of genres as determinate, relatively stable types of utterances united by theme, composition and style became fundamental for most of studies both literary and linguistic. He claimed that literary genres store overtime the forms of world vision and conception. According to Bakhtin, genre holds constant elements of archaic character, which are regularly renewed, making genre old and new at the same time.

Any approach associated with analysing the processes of understanding and producing texts belonging to different types and genres is most likely to be anthropocentric, for the text itself reveals its anthropomorphic nature. As noted by the leading expert in the field of text linguistics Turaeva (2016): “Any communicative act is intrusion into the thesaurus of the recipient, instilling into his/her mind a picture of the world that is not necessarily a replica of the real world. Thus the text may assume a social significance” (p. 32).

Genres may also be discussed as methodological concepts of comparative literature, bringing new insights into the traditional study of influences and reception. The concept of genre in a modern sense presents a heuristic model for interpretation and meaning. This is especially true for postmodernism theory, which defends pluralism of meanings one may find in any text representing postmodern genres (Fedorov, 2016). As Chotchaeva and Sosnovsky (2017) posit, postmodernist approach of universal humanism gives way to anti-hierarchical ideas of cultural relativity and diversity.

Genres have both constant and relevant features. The former, the so called “genre memory elements” contribute to the conservation of genre form while the latter promote the emergence of new ones which allows us to discuss genre evolution, genre transformations, genre “shifts”, a genre range, etc.

Since codes and conventions make up the essence of any genre, interpretation of a literary work builds largely on generic assumptions. Although reworking and revisiting genres may be considered to some extent a timeless trend in literary process, postmodernism brings about the breakdown of genre, subverting genre conventions, undermining these assumptions and altering interpretation. The concept of “form” itself undergoes some transformation since “the genre’s borders have not been shaped by the borders of form any more” (Demchenkov, 2017, p. 674).

## 2. Problem Statement

Unlike genre, the anti-genre problem in general still remains one of the most neglected. It is usually described in separate chapters and parts of genre studies, which analyse specific anti-genre models – anti-utopia, anti-fairy tale, anti-detective story, dark comedies etc. (see, for example, Artyomova, 2017; Comanducci & Wilkinson, 2018; Garipova & Kostyleva, 2019; Gehring, 2016; Leiderman, 2010; Morson, 1981; Peredery, 2018, and others). The term “anti-fairy tale” may be applied to various types of texts within literary discourse: 1) fairy tales per se, but with a tragic or sad rather than

the expected happy ending; 2) postmodern reworkings of fairy tales that use the plots of original stories to reflect on the problems of modern society; 3) texts of other genre forms that incorporate some of the elements of the fairy tale genre to create a more vivid contrast between the perfect world of a fairy tale and the real world.

The presence of recognizable elements of a classical genre is obligatory for an anti-fairy tale. In her work on postmodern feminist anti-tales, Reynolds (2019) defines the anti-tale in terms of a reverse discourse. She notes that the anti-tale is a genre rich in intricacy and subversive potential that broadens the possibilities of genre renewal. There is direct correlation between the artistic composition of anti-tale and the characteristics of the archetypal model, which acquires a new, diametrically opposite content conflicting with the image of an ideal world of the genre-prototype.

Bezchotnikova (2010) illustrates the mechanisms of genre transformation with the example of a literary utopia as one of the canonical variants of genre form which can engender new modifications. In this theory, world outlook aims and style context act as dominant criteria determining genre transformation. The concentration of the genre modality of utopia on the axiological values of the epoch “manifests itself in flaming optimism which remains as the matrix feature throughout its historical life” (p. 16).

In the context of postmodernism the active destructive opening and axiological multipolarity inherent in the out-hierarchical worldview created by the polyphony of cultures changed the genre modality of utopia giving birth to anti-utopia endowed with the new pathos of negation. It resulted in contamination at the level of the artistic whole, that is, to the formation of a two-part structure of an anti-utopian text and the shift in its ideological and thematic accents. Bezchotnikova considers (2010) “the increased role of subjective opening in reproduction of existential experience” and of aesthetic constituent as the components of the given structure (Ibid.).

The fiction world of the detective genre being ultra-logic and hyper-determined, gives the author a perfect opportunity to create anti-genre texts. There appeared some research works analyzing Boris Akunin’s quasi-detective novels built on manifold intertextual links, which transgress genre boundaries blurring the notion of the detective genre (e.g., Desyatov & Karpukhina, 2019; Kikhney & Gereikhanova, 2017).

It is remarkable that some novels and tales by Vladimir Nabokov are found to have such distinct features of the detective story as a plot which involves investigation and the unravelling of a secret (The Eye (1930), The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (1938-1939), Lolita (1955)). By means of these elements the author constructs the so-called “quasi-detective narrative strategy. In the above mentioned novels the detective genre plot elements are spoofed, while its essential inspiration, which derives from the mandatory victory of human rationality over evil, is left open to doubt. According to Mel’nikov (2006), Nabokov’s The Real Life of Sebastian Knight “is a special kind of mystery novel, a philosophical “anti-detective” story in which there is an “investigator” and an “investigation” but neither crime nor criminal, and the mystery facing the reader is, in principle, never unambiguously resolved” (p. 21).

Thus, the main objective of the anti-genre is the deconstruction, decanonization of the genre, polemics with it, but this objective is achieved by means and techniques of the genre itself.

### **3. Research Questions**

The paper aims at discussing two basic methodological issues that appear to be essential for the definition of the anti-genre phenomenon:

- a) What genre study aspects may be applied to analysing the anti-genre as a variety of the genre?
- b) What mechanisms underlie genre subversion and bring about the creation of anti-genre?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The paper seeks to understand the phenomenon of anti-genre within the broader context of literary and cognitive studies. The phenomenon of anti-genre should be analyzed through the lens of cognitive base and the notion of shared knowledge between the author and the reader, their equally important roles in creating and getting the anti-genre effect.

Modern mass literature has contributed much to blurring the genre borders. Reflecting on “the reasons for the transformation of the classical work into a certain code of the modern mass culture”, Cherniak (2017) states that the popular projects for “appropriating” the classical novels by modern mass literature “are kinds of literary oxymorons, recreating the matrix of modernity in their own way” (p. 670).

The emergence of numerous literary texts that rework, parody, quote, and reference past works, blending genres and styles, brings the notion of anti-genre to the spotlight of genre theory and calls for the study of the relationships between genre and anti-genre conceptions.

### **5. Research Methods**

Since this paper considers various approaches to the concepts of genre and anti-genre, the applied research methods may be characterized as multidisciplinary and present a combination of methods generally used in text and genre analysis in modern studies: literary analysis, structural and post structural analysis (as applied in the genre theory), stylistic analysis, intertextual analysis, and some elements of semiotic, cognitive and discourse analysis.

These methods complement each other and help better understand the mechanisms underlying genre subversion, transformation and creation of anti-genre. We assume that all elements of form, content and style are brought into play in anti-genre production.

### **6. Findings**

#### **6.1. Theoretical framework**

Considering genre from historical-theoretical position, Lukov (2006) determines it not only as a key feature of a text including its form, content and their unity, but as a system reflecting the relationship between the author and the reader with the significance of interpretation issue. The scholar introduces the concept of “genre generalizations” as “the process of integration, constriction of genres (often belonging to different types and styles of art) in order to realize non-genre (usually problematic-topical) general principle” (p. 146).

The emergence of genre generalizations became possible due to the total destruction of genre boundaries which began at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries. Vl. A. Lukov attributes detective stories, science fiction and other genre forms which are organized around certain pivots (plot, visual, emotional) to the genre generalizations in popular fiction.

Leiderman (2010) determines genre as a mechanism that forms an artistic system called a work of art from a combination of constituents (genre bearers).

The theoretical model of genre offered by Leiderman (2010) is of special interest for studying problems of genre and anti-genre. On the basis of Aristotle's definition of tragedy Leiderman (2010) distinguishes three aspects of the genre model: "content outline", "plot outline" and "perception outline" templates, each of them unfolding in a number of categories which interact in a definite way. According to Naum Leiderman genre ensures constructive unity of the art work, it organizes all its building blocks into a particular world model.

A large number of works are devoted to studying speech genres within the framework of cognitive linguistics (Dement'ev, 2016; Plotnikova & Zabolotnyaya, 2019; Slyshkin, 2005, etc.). The interest in studying the speech genre in the cognitive aspect is primarily due to the fact that genre as a standard form of utterance falls into a pattern.

However, the literary genre is interpreted more broadly as a world model type for it is the genre that models virtual aesthetic reality (Leiderman, 2010).

Slyshkin (2005) aims to synthesize the achievements of both the speech genres theory and linguo-cultural conceptology considering the speech genre as a subject of analysis and the linguo-cultural concept – as an instrument. The scholar suggests studying speech genres in the framework of two complementary approaches: modeling of a speech genre as a conceptual sphere and modeling of a speech genre as a metaconcept.

The speech genre acts as a field of realization of a definite variety (a spectrum) of social values and linguo-cultural concepts formed by them. The indicated spectrum of realizable values is the main characteristic feature of a genre, and its width may vary with a definite genre. Slyshkin (2005) calls this feature "the conceptual saturation", which attains its maximum when the world image constructed within the texts of a given genre contains the information about the genre itself and the axiological attitude towards it. In other words, the genre itself appears to be one of the metaconcepts which are activated within it.

The genres whose texts describe or mention the genre they belong to (proverbs about proverbs, jokes about jokes) are referred to as self-reflexive genres.

In the worldview of each genre Slyshkin (2005) identifies the system-forming concepts in which the main values of a bearer of culture are concentrated (the concept "mystery" in the detective genre, the concept "love" in melodrama).

The other concepts belonging to the worldview of the given genre specify the system-forming concepts (Ibid.).

The evident similarity of understanding of the genre as a conceptual sphere by G. G. Slyshkin and the genre generalizations described by Vl. A. Lukov enables us to apply the findings of both literary studies and linguistics to modeling of genre and anti-genre.

## 6.2. Anti-Genre Definition

The actualization of anti-genres occurs in transitional epochs when chaos mythology becomes more and more common and the need for destruction of authoritative genres appears.

In “The Boundaries of Genre” by Morson (1981) the anti-genre is interpreted as a particular type of the literary genre characterized by conformity of its models to a certain tradition as well as by a set of conventional ways of their interpretation (p. 115). Moreover, the text written in the traditions of anti-genre is not aimed at parodying a particular literary work or character/characters or the elements of the genre but the genre in general as the tradition in which the text is written (ibid.). The author refers such texts as anti-utopias parodying a definite idea, for example, the social evil, to other genre systems.

The anti-genre is characterized by ambivalent nature: anti-genre texts are to have two types of models – the positive models of their own tradition and the negative ones of the derided genre (Morson, 1981). Therefore, in the anti-genre interpretation we can find a double system of motives including the derided genre motives as well as counter-motives of the anti-genre. The genre ambivalence enables us to consider the anti-genre as a combined genre, which means that any text referred to as an anti-genre allows for several variants of reading – as a novel, an anti-utopia or a social satire and a parody on an epic poem, etc.

## 6.3. Discussion

The described genre study aspects may be applied to analyzing the anti-genre as a variety of the genre. Though the notion itself and numerous texts categorized as representatives of anti-genre of any kind remain under-researched until now, as it is highlighted in the Introduction to the collection of the research works devoted to the anti-tale:

there has been much anti-ness inherent to scholarship and practice to date, and a wide-reaching use of critical disenchantment. For instance, the Atlas Press has published an Anticlassics series which concerns reprints of primary avant-garde texts. A pervasive “anti-ness” can also be found in the related artistic philosophies of Georges Bataille and Marcel Duchamp which have come to dominate twentieth and twenty-first century thought. Their influence extends into the post-structuralist critiques of numerous writers such as the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari in their famous study *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) often linked with Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Anti-Christ* (1888). In discussions of the (neo-) avant-garde, Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster have been influential with their notions of anti-narrative, “antivision” (1986), and the “anti-aesthetic” (1983) (McAra & Calvin, 2011, p. 4).

Like genre, anti-genre is a system of utterances united by the theme, composition and style. It can also be considered as a conceptual sphere in which a system-forming concept and concepts specifying it are distinguished. Anti-genre texts are created within the framework of a definite tradition and have their own models.

The subversive mechanism of anti-genre effect may be illustrated by David Calvin’s chart, in which he points out key distinctive elements between the anti-fairy tale and its prototype: (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Fairy Tale vs. Anti-Fairy Tale

<b>Fairy Tale</b>	<b>Anti-Fairy Tale</b>
Optimism	Pessimism
Teleological, anticipatory	Retrospective, subversive
“Once upon a time”	Real world context
Initiation	Dissonance
Pedagogical	Lessons unlearned
Infantalised, bowdlerized	Adult themes, cynicism
Telling	Untelling
Cultural mirror	Breaking the mirror
Parabolic	Anti-parabolic
Black and white morality	Grey morality or amorality
Fixed point of view	Shifting perspectives
Independent narrative	Intertextual, metafictional
Bourgeois	Avant-garde
Patriarchal	Feminist
Mythologises	Demythologises
Enchantment	Disenchantment

(Ibid, p. 3). The chart is interesting in two ways: first, its spatial layout presented in the form of binary opposition visually demonstrates the nature of genre / anti-genre interrelationship; second, the kaleidoscope of elements inherent to the notion of genre collected in the chart testifies to the infinite variability possibilities in anti-genre modelling. While genre maintains constructive unity of the literary text and arranges all the elements into a particular world model, anti-genre deconstructs the unity and triggers cognitive dissonance and interpretative hesitation.

The system of multiple intertextual links creates “multi-interpretative texts”, which, in its turn, allows the author to change a narration genre dominant (Desyatov & Karpukhina, 2019).

However, any text representative of anti-genre carries on a dialogue with its prototype and therefore targets the reader who is able not only to recognize the parodied or transformed genre but also to decode this dialogue. The reader, guided by his experience of other texts recognizes genre frames regardless the degree of their presence in the text in question. Thus, the reader becomes nothing but a textual strategy or a collection of favourable conditions necessary for text interpretation. There is always a distinct relationship between the model of a reader (as well as the author) and the type of the text, in other words, its belonging to a particular genre (or anti-genre).

## **7. Conclusion**

In closing, we believe it is the canonical genres that become the anti-genre target since the anti-genre based on the “intertextual encyclopedia” of the model reader reworks the most recognizable, the so-called basic genre elements, or genre-forming signposts, which serve as intertextual frames placed and transformed in a new context. Thus, the anti-genre is characterized by the presence of the definite elements borrowed from the prototype genre and called to perform a new function in it. Referring back to the title of the paper we assume that anti-genre per se should not be considered as deconstruction of

genre, but rather its renewal, modification or transformation (depending on the number of elements serving as intertextual frames and their function). We posit that anti-genre becomes an active pursuit to evade categorization, to transcend all genres. The number of texts ascribed to anti-genre belonging to related and unrelated literary discourse genres serves to validate the idea of almost infinite mutability of genre construction, making genre evolution everlasting, and, at the same time, offering insight into why genre studies appear to be so complex and manifold.

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