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## R E C E N Z J E

LAWRENCE DANSON, *SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC GENRES*  
(Oxford Shakespeare Topics), Oxford  
University Press 2000, p. 160.

In the great ocean of recent critical works on Shakespeare, books about the general picture of genre diversity in his literary heritage appear very rarely. It is strange, but it is a real and distressing fact. That is why Lawrence Danson's monograph, which is issued in the series "Oxford Shakespeare Topics", has been met with great interest by explorers of literary kinds and Shakespeare scholars.

L. Danson made an attempt to research Shakespeare's dramatic genres resting upon the ancient and Renaissance theories of drama, but also with due regard for some modern theoretical works. It is noteworthy that he is more attentive to the theories which were (or could be) known to Shakespeare himself: the special part of first chapter contains a short outline of those theories since Aristotle till Ben Jonson. Differentiating the *descriptive* theories from the *prescriptive* ones, the author emphasizes Shakespeare's freedom from many limitations in genre, introduced by his predecessors and contemporaries. "Shakespeare... left plenty of space for digression" (p. 25), and this statement characterizes the playwright's approach to dramatic genres as well. In this connection of special use and interest are the pages (35-56), where Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies are represented in the context of the dramaturgy of English Renaissance.

As for presentday descriptive theories, Lawrence Danson limits himself to quite a few works, including Northrop

Frye's seminal books and a very useful volume "Kinds of Literature" by Alastair Fowler. It may seem that an amount of the newest theoretical explorations, used by Danson, could be much wider, but still the author's option was determined by his will to research Shakespeare's dramas in juxtaposition with "the rules of their own game".

Trying to have his terms "as precisely as an inherently elusive subject allows" (p. 2), the scholar stands firmly upon the historical ground. So he accepts the First Folio's tripartite division - comedy, tragedy, and history - as a basic one, and the central chapters of the book under review are devoted to these genres.

L. Danson proceeds from such the division and takes into account that "the history of any genre is the history of its variations" (p. 60), describing the genre properties of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies. He takes notice of the typology of comical situations and some structural features of Shakespeare's comedies. His reasonings about the role of such comedy's structural element as *Happy Ending* (and *Marriage* as its variant), or about variety of comic characters in Shakespeare's plays can provoke an interesting discussion. There are original observations on several comedies. For instance, when generic nature of *The Taming of the Shrew* is described, the Prologue is considered to be an organic part of the play, and Christopher Sly's understanding of the inner play gives an additional view of this early comedy's genre peculiarity.

The chapter on Shakespearean comedy includes a number of keen observations about different dramatic elements' generic role. I'd like to distinguish very

interesting passages about "the rhetoric of wonder" in the comedies (pp. 68-69). Quite valuable are judgements about such the so-called "blocking-characters" as Shylock and Malvolio (pp. 84-85). Probably, these personages can be also called the *borderline* ones, because they belong to the field of comedy and at the same time are close to the world of tragedy. Therefore it is quite natural that the chapter "Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies" is ended with the analysis of these characters.

The originality of Shakespeare's tragedies is analysed by L. Danson in comparison with and against the background of two tragedies of the prominent Elizabethans - *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd. Special attention is paid to several tragic characters from Titus Andronicus to Prospero (this personage is regarded in the monograph as a tragic one, in spite of quite another generic nature of *The Tempest*). In Danson's opinion, almost all Shakespeare's tragedies have at their centre "a single remarkable protagonist" (p. 116); the exceptions are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and with reservation *Macbeth*, where the pairs of protagonists are at the centre. This observation is capable to initiate a discussion on the system of characters in Shakespeare's tragedies.

The chapter on the histories is the most logical in the book, to my mind. Some important problems are touched there, including the key question concerning the histories' place "on a map of genres". The author tries to see how Shakespeare's "conception of genre" changed from play to play and for that purpose analyses two famous tetralogies of the histories. He focuses on the generic properties of the both tetralogies, of which the first one is closer to the tragedies

and the second one is obviously marked by the comic. Touching *Henry IV* with its "multivocality" and a figure of Falstaff, he observes, in particular:

"...the interplay between comedy and tragedy takes place not simply as the alternation of serious royal scenes with funny Falstaffian scenes. We see it in the opposing visions of life the characters represent; in, for instance, their relations to conceptions of Time itself..." (p. 98).

The last remark is exact and sophisticated, indeed. However, I cannot but mention, that the similar opinion was expounded and developed by Russian scholar Leonid Pinsky thirty years ago. Of course, L. Danson could not know about it, because Pinsky's profound book is not translated into English yet, and it is a pity. Besides, that is one more improvement of the fact, that nowadays the interest to Shakespeare studies in different geographical regions must be more active and mutual. At least, in Europe.

The last pages of the chapter are devoted to the history *King John*, which is treated by L. Danson as an experiment of the dramatist, "who both uses and stunningly revises the resources of a genre's tradition" (p. 112). The role of Shakespeare's experiments in genre is great, of course, and it is exposed in the monograph. Nevertheless, Danson does not use some genre definitions, which can be attached to the experimental forms. One of these definitions is *romance*. This word is met here and there in the book, but there is no special chapter on the last plays of the playwright; the scholar follows Heminges and Condell who attributed these works either to a group of comedies (*The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*), or to tragedies (*Cymbeline*). Here Danson's solidarity with the Elizabethan classification limited possibilities of his own theoretical research.



The common conclusion, running that "ancient genre theory has become modern genre theory" (p. 143), is determined by the scholar's affection for historicism, and it is quite understandable and evident. Certainly, the recent critics must consider the theoretical views of Shakespeare's epoch, but at the same time they can use the newest theoretical conceptions and methods as well. Apropos, Lawrence Danson himself demonstrates the rightfulness and moreover necessity of such the usage, when he addresses, though in passing, to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Northrop Frye, and some other outstanding literary scholars.

I think that such theoretical orientations can be more valid for investigation of the genre problems, than including some trendy subjects like, for instance, sex and gender in Shakespeare, androgyny, misogyny, and so on. When L. Danson writes about "the tragic man's fear of female sexuality", "woman's freedom from masculine control", or "masculine anxiety about female sex-possession" (pp. 137-138), he starts to treat Shakespeare's characters as living persons with their psychological and other oddities, but not as the personages of poetical dramas.

When analysing genre peculiarities of Shakespeare's plays, L. Danson always takes into consideration that these plays were written by the playwright not for courtly audience but for the public theatre. *Theatricality* of Shakespeare's works is extremely important quality, which must be comprehended by researcher of the problem of genre, and Danson's book proves it convincingly.

"Genre... is a system" (p. 5). reminds the author of the monograph, and this point seems to be very significant. Really, Shakespeare's dramas illustrate the statement extremely well. I'd add that the

relationships and interaction between different genres lead us to the next problem, which may be defined as "System of genres in Shakespeare's dramaturgy".

The historic distance between Shakespearean epoch and time does not prevent Lawrence Danson from mentioning some authors, literary works and events of mass culture, which are much closer to average modern readers' and spectators aesthetic experience. The book is written vividly; in style it is intelligible even to the non-specialists. But like other books of this solid series, basically it is surely directed to another group of those readers, who have special interest in Shakespeare studies. The work under review can be useful for students and at the same time is thought-provoking for Shakespeare scholars.

Mark Sokolyansky

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ПЕРЕЧИТЫВАЯ ШЕКСПИРА (РАБОТЫ  
РАЗНЫХ ЛЕТ), Одесса 2000,  
170.

Szekspir należy do tych pisarzy, których ludzkość oświecona uznana za swych duchowych przewodników i odczytuje ich dzieła wciąż na nowo zgodnie ze swym doświadczeniem historycznym i estetycznym. Mark Sokolyansky, autor książki, której tytuł przełożyć można jako *Odczytywanie Szekspira*, uczynił to stwierdzenie podstawą swojej nowej publikacji zawierającej szereg szkiców poświęconych nie tyle twórczości wielkiego dramaturga, ile właśnie obserwacji, jak utwory wielkiego Anglika inspirowały do podejmowania wciąż nowych polemik na temat sztuki dramatycznej, stały się bodźcem do własnych interpretacji twórczych