

Review article

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MELODRAMA AND MELODRAMATIC IN RAJKO GRLIĆ'S OPUS

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Abstract

If we were to classify all the films made by genre, the utmost content of celluloid tape would be on the side of melodrama. "Taken from cheap literature and boulevard theaters, melodrama has become the most popular type of film".¹²

Rajko Grlić's films enable theoretical considerations on the topic of melodrama and melodrama. Going into political, ideological, and sexual taboos, Grlić caused many controversies with his work. Despite everything, Grlić is an intense authorial individual, and his opus is original and autonomous. The topics he deals with, the tendency towards irony, the attitude towards morality. Also, the refinement in the portrayal of the characters places this director on a unique pedestal. "I often make love movies, love stories, they interest me because they're just an indication of who we are, who people are, who heroes are".¹³

He sets human destinies as a *puzzle* through which the entire social environment is observed. Inspired by the *Prague school*, Grlić's films directly reflect the reality of the time in which they were made without trying to turn films into a means by which they will express the bitterness and condemnation of the social community. The supreme connoisseur uses character and narrative in every dramatic situation primarily as a means and not as a goal of expression. The director, whose work is called provocative and unusual, turns to melodrama in his films: *You love only once* and, *It takes three people to be happy*, in which he elaborates earnest problems and has universal influences.

Keywords: Rajko Grlić, melodramatic format, melodramatic characters

INTRODUCTION

Melodrama is a tearful genre - a favorite of mostly female sentimental audiences. (...) Melodrama is a piece of life to which one reacts. The viewer is cunningly given a reason for happiness, comfort, and escape.¹⁴

"Melodrama tends to provoke empathy in the recipient, that is, sympathy with the dramatic character. And melodramas films are characterized by a plot that arouses emotions. The main feature of the melodrama is a complex set of norms related to the plot. Its emotional output, effects, *mise-en-scène* scenes, and excess. The melodrama format enables the characters to progress through their difficulties, which they

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¹² Vladimir Petrić: *Develop. of film types: how film devel.*, Belgrade: Art Academy 1970, str. 155.

¹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muu3WdyXZUI>

¹⁴ N. Daković: *Melodrama is not a genre*, Prometheus, Belgrade: Yugoslav Cinematheque, 1994, str. 7

overcome with their sacrifice and courage".¹⁵ Grlić provokes emotions by acting directly on the subconscious. That is in that part of the human psyche, we cannot control, which is in the sphere of humans subconscious. The recipient is powered from a passive attitude, engaging him in events on the screen. Grlić's melodramatic opus is often imbued with the elements of melodrama. It has the ultimate goal: to elaborate the metaphysical dimension of passion, that is, the power of its influence on the life of the main character. The author also uses motifs that do not appear in classical melodramas. If we looked at them from the position of axiology of this genre, they could be considered obscene. For the melodrama, Grlić says that "it has that stickiness and is full of universal places where you can incorporate your sentiment, your destiny, your experience. Melodrama is a set of situations in which something is more and farther than life and in which you incorporate your life and thus achieve a strong connection. Every film tries to escape from life and secretly hopes that it will become life itself. That is that it will become a document of life. On that seesaw, between life and someone bigger than life, every film, and in particular melodrama exists."

"In modern film, and even in the era of inviolable rule, the genre, as a prototype category, does not require strict respect, but allows for innovation and the introduction of personal style."¹⁶ "I have never been burdened by genre, every genre cleans reality so that it can put its network, its composition together, and in that construction of the structure, reality falls away first. I have never seriously dealt with genres. I tell stories, so which genre do they fit into". says Grlić.

This author is playing with violating genre determinants. Such a change of fulcrum is ambivalent: legitimate and subversive. Subversion is based on sexuality, life ideology, as well as erotic scenes. Only rarely the brave ones, like Grlić, investigate the real relationships between men and women. Grlić's opus is in a complex interaction with all aspects covered by the author's policy, both in the theoretical sense and when it comes to creative practice.

MELODRAMATIC CHARACTERS

"In the dramatic arts, a character is a crucial concept, which preoccupies theorists and creators."¹⁷

"The character as existence is the highest and most developed form of the dramatic face because it sublimates all features in itself. He is a type (psychological or social). He is a function (dramatic actions, or ideas), he is a character, and a person different from all others knows that, with unambiguous shapes of all its mental qualities."¹⁸ The correlation between the mutual relations of the characters, and the relations within the character itself, enables each subject to present itself as a set of distinctive features. This constitutive relationship between characters like, for

¹⁵ <http://www.filmsite.org/melodramafilms.html>

¹⁶ Nevena Daković: Melodrama is not a genre, Prometheus, Belgrade: Yugoslav Cinematheque, 1994, str. 23.

¹⁷ www.komunikacija.org.rs/komunikacija/casopisi/ybornikfdu/5/d11/html_ser_lat

¹⁸ Ibid.

example, sex differences enables a love intrigue whereby we characterize the characters with positive or negative traits. Grlić effortlessly polarizes duels and dialogues of authentic characters. He exalts them, and in each scene, the character grows. He emphasizes that the most important thing for a character is not to be a synonym of the materialization of some idea. Grlić's films are like classes in the anatomy of human destinies, in which he, in a specific way, opens the souls of human beings, like forensic scientists. A good connoisseur of male and female nature, he firstly proclaims the characters and then seals them. "I unclosed these people in dialogue, and the script and the film are a form of dialogue, not only in their ending but also in their creation. The human being is best seen in dialogue and, in general, events from multiple angles. I care about these people being alive because every movie hopes to become a document. In that endeavor, a man sometimes succeeds more, sometimes less but, an enormous part of that story is the actors because they didn't play those characters but became those characters, as much as they and I could do. Without that *existence*, there is no film character", pointed out Rajko Grlić.

"Emotions in pathetic speech seem not muffled and direct. The female character suffers, while the male character glorifies the human spirit and organizes the world through struggle. Pathetically using the banalest means..."¹⁹ In the movies: *You love only once (Samo jednom se ljubi)* and, *It takes three people to be happy (Za sreću je potrebno troje)*, a male character suffers. About this unusual setting of melodramatic heroes, Grlić says: "I never thought about whether I would be crueller to a female or male character. I think that in my films I talk equally about the positions of men and women. In the film, *You love only once*, he burned out, because the fire was larger, not only towards her but towards time, towards space, towards politics, towards hope, towards everything, so that burned that man. In the film, *It takes three people to be happy*, the center is a love relationship. It is a film about quite ordinary, small little things, in which it could happen that the story has turned around, and a female character has suffered". Grlić did not intend to violate the rule of melodrama, for him, the relationship between the male-female position is just a coincidence from which it *turns*, like Almodovar towards *male* melodrama. He did not stage his films respecting melodramatic elements. After he made them, he said that he heard that they were films of the melodrama genre. The essential qualities and experiences that the recipients can perceive have projected on the characters in Gilić's film. The mystery of human destiny and the emotional narrative indicate that outside the essential feature, there is also the truth about morality, which we cannot fully understand. The characters change "... from the classic position of a passive victim, which awakens a feeling of pathos, to an active melodramatic character who threatens the conventions of the patriarchal world ..."²⁰

"Each of Grlić's dramatic characters has its variations on the theme of their desperate behaviors and destinies that are causally consequential with life circumstances. Dealing with modernity, Grlić polarizes his attitude towards the

¹⁹ Nevena Daković: *Melodrama is not a genre*, Prometheus, Belgrade: Yugoslav Cinematheque, 1994, str. 55.

²⁰ Nevena Daković: *Melodrama is not a genre*, Prometheus, Belgrade: Yugoslav Cinematheque, 1994, str. 200.

characters from the tendency to get closer on one side and away from pretentiousness on the other. By opting for life marginals, he completes the circle of dealing with outsider personalities from modern life. In his films, he presents them in such a way as to give the impression that nothing more can be *learned* about them. His every character is formed of personal (internal) and interpersonal (social, public, professional) elements. A certain level of awareness is perceived, which his characters have, likewise the state in which the recipient is given an insight about the characters, more than the characters themselves have about themselves. Nearly, as in the classic Hollywood narrative, in which the recipient has got a privileged position, so he knew much more than the characters in the film".²¹

Often the image that Grlić's characters create of themselves and the structural reality of these characters differ. The author does not deal with certainties but with full ambiguous meanings.

In his rich opus, Grlić staged characters for whom feelings are more important than thinking, that is, characters whose feelings are directly related to the deepest emotions and who perceive the characters around them more than they judge them. In each of Grlić's characters, one of the three personalities clearly distinguishes: the savior, the victim, or the persecutor. No character contains only one of the mentioned characteristics, but at all times, one of the inclinations overpowers the others. It is about the degree, development, and mixing of these character traits into a special polyphony.

Grlić's characters are a set of structural functions that are fulfilled either by changing or stabilizing the dramatic situation. They can also define as the sum of contrasts and correspondences that connect them with other characters in the text.

Gilić's films are based on the relationship between the plot and characters. *You love only once* - The world is corrupted by human nature, and despite the knowledge that someone is a hero and has survived the impossible, a saint cannot remain because human nature cannot bear that such people exist. *It takes three people to be happy* - The thematic destiny of a marginalized lawyer, who is in two love triangles in parallel, with a parallel problematization of the present conformism and fatality for the man himself.

Only *noticeable characters*²² become the object of our attention, whether they are part of our everyday life or roles from the screen. Although genre-diverse, the common denominator of recollections is the fact that the action in the story is created by personality traits. Meaning recipients often do not remember all the scenes in their favorite movies, but what remains permanently in the memory are the characters, their actions, moods, and personalities²³.

Gilić's female characters are impressive, almost like in the films of Almodovar, Antonio and Bergman, just as strongly as the scenes. The peculiarity of his director's handwriting is a strong male character, which is atypical for melodrama.

²¹ Endru Horton: Characters, the basis of the script, Clio, 2004, str. 57.

²² Characters made up of personal (internal) and interpersonal (social, public, and professional elements)

²³ The character and the personality are different, the information we get about the character is limited, and, about the personality (mental and psychological characteristics), we can polemicize indefinitely.

His "hero" did not consciously make a mistake. He has no flaws in his character. His guilt stems from insufficient knowledge of people, wrong assessment, somehow misunderstanding for which he does not bear moral responsibility. It is a game of illusion and reality, where people are not what they seem, so it is a melodrama and a story about revealing the truth. Grlić's melodramatic male characters range from misfortune to success and from defeat to victory.

The melodramatic opus in Rajko Grlić's films reveals the director's desire to present a simple dramatic form with close characters and situations (love and adultery), as well as the tendency towards a more universal and accessible film, dealing uncompromisingly and successfully with the relationship between man and woman. In each character, in their desperate behaviors and destinies, the intensity of various psychological frustrations is perceived, while Grlić's observation is directed towards their love relationships, more precisely, love defeat.

Characters for Gilić, like Bergman, represent *materials of vital importance* without which there is no success in the creative act and through which Grlić communicates. The real meaning of Grlić's work is in establishing contacts through characters with viewers. Through his work, the director tries to express emotional experiences and feelings that arouse different thoughts and reactions in the recipient.

Melodrama genre films, says Grlić, should have an *open ending*. The films are a symbiosis of reality manipulation and cliché manipulation. "I could never tell you whether the endings in my films are happy or sad, and I am afraid of interpreting my films because I believe it is wrong and contrary to what I offer."

CONCLUSION

Rajko Grlić's melodramatic work developed equally on social experiments and critique of an unconventional life in society, as well as on ethical principles. Encompassing series of social deviations (upper social stratum), as an artist, close to the world he is talking about, he assimilates autobiographical experiences in his films that Grlić does not deny.

His characters are often the bearers of deviant phenomena and amoral personalities who incarnate them, not getting an adequate reflection in their inner reaction, which *read* in their mere subtext. It is not a question of a standard relation - the author and the film as an action and the recipient as a receptor, which reacts to the film, but in the essence of the films themselves, as the integrity of its relationship. According to the debatable point of view, all the characters in the film are predisposed and prone to ethical corruption or latently contain it, while the *chances* for the fight are left to the positions of outsiders as the voice of *truth* from the lodge.

The constant in Grlić's work is dealing with male-female relationships and love, and thus eros, which is most pronounced in *You love only once*. In it, he shows how the repressive apparatus does not hesitate to enter the realm of intimacy. The immediacy and casual humor always close to the recipient (Billy Wilder's fascination) is present in all productions, whether melodramas or realistic social comedies of the Czech type, while the prevailing playfulness of the main characters often flirts with Balkan

machismo, as opposed to the established grimly outlined impotent figure of an intellectual, torn by irrational suffering as a consequence of alienation.

Often the tragic destinies of heroes and their stumbles are the consequences of their maladaptation and non-conformity. The conflict with the environment and turning to the antisocial comes from misunderstanding small, and for unconventional heroes problematic goals through which the outlines of social and civil anemia are outlined.

Grlić's film *view* was never a priori offensive and potentially provocative. The controversy surrounding his films arose without real foundation as each of his socially critical films was primarily artistic and benevolent to all characters of the film, including antagonists, while most of the objections related to routine and excessive creative leisure in some performances.

The revaluation of the past, the generation of that time, in terms of narration, reveals the director's sensibility and fondness for melodrama, which underlines Grlić's *tragic feeling of life*. Returning afresh to the *little things that mean life*, as he says, Grlić returns to his obsession with creating an opus based on inconspicuous moral stories from life, again returning to the genre of melodrama. As in the film *You love only once*, he confirmed himself as a director, allowing himself to remain in the position of a moralist who deals with small life details with particular emotional warmth.

Grlić performs his works anatomically, precisely, with narrative sections, ironically and directly using all the possibilities that the media offers him on the meta-plan of the structure. With melodramatic elements, Grlić emphasizes the function of critical objectification of our everyday life and kitsch as the dominant lifestyle, imposing questions: how to achieve the security that provides a person with space to express himself in his human appearance, which Grlić does not declare, registering things as they are, noting how media kitsch spreads to all our senses, articulating as the identity card of each individual. The melodramatic elements also allow for the condensation of sketches in the emotional rifts that frustrate its entrants until the moment they try to break with all that they are or have been.

Grlić elaborates various models characteristic of modern artistic expression and modern understanding of reality. He plays with narrative clichés, leads the recipient to accept narrative currents, incorporates psychoanalytic clichés into the film's template, and intervenes with the genre matrix. He treats the topics as if they have considerably penetrated the consciousness of the global audience. In such a game, a unique being of the work is constituted, which should be able to be separated from the contradictory subdominants that served it as a building tissue. Grlić deals thematically with life's problems, offering a film pattern that at the same time adequately treats and affirms formed the real situation.

This director pleads on the world film scene as a director whose work significantly contributes to the intensification of poetic currents within the seventh art. He adds new attributes to every aesthetic idiom, building archetypes from certain aspects of modern life, making Grlić's opus paradigmatic when it comes to contemporary film.

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