



## The Generic Game in *The Chiendent* by Raymond Queneau\*

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THE question of literary genres has been the central object of poetics for centuries. The genre of a text is one of the preliminary knowledge that responds to the reader's horizons of expectations and precedes his aesthetic experience. The notion of Jauss's horizon of expectation and Jean-Marie Schaeffer's theory of literary genres have modified the frozen nature of the genre by making it more dynamic. According to Julia Kristeva, this dynamism becomes the distinctive feature of the novel. For Kristeva, the novel is like a 'process', 'something that becomes'. Thus, this generic dynamism allows different genres to coexist. This coexistence or sometimes the generic interference gives birth to the concept of mixture or hybridization of genres, which is the central object of this study. Despite its profound incompatibility with the genre of novel, surrealism has indirectly encouraged novelists, especially Queneau, to write novels in a hybrid or sometimes undefined genre. The estimable genre according to Queneau is neither the ideal and marvelous genre proclaimed by surrealism, nor any of the undefined genres. In the present study, the issue of genre in Queneau's remarkable work *Le Chiendent* will be studied, by highlighting the hybrid aspect of this novel. The clues that led to characterize this novel as poetic, theatrical and cinematographic are specified.

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So, the main question that this article will attempt to answer, inevitably partially, is Queneau's attitude and thesis about novel as a literary genre and aesthetic form. The response to this question can only appear after a precise study of Queneau's work, concerning the idea of relativity or mixture of genres. It should be noted that Queneau was a great reader and no genre was strange to him. Thus, the generic complexity of his works is well calculated.

*Le Chiendent* is the exemplary corpus of this study. This choice is due to the fact that it is the main work of the author who deeply challenges (more than his other works) the fundamental notion of literary genre and leaves it in "the era of suspicion". Queneau plays well on the distinction between genres: for him, all of the genres are interchangeable.

The novel could be written as a poem and vice versa. In *Le Chiendent*, which participates in the hybrid genre and which is a novel-poem, that is to say, neither novel nor poem, Queneau implements a poetic structure through rhymes, symmetries and correspondences. This novel is constructed with as much internal rigor as a rondeau or a sonnet. This is the way that Queneau creates very rigorously this hybrid genre of the novel-poem by borrowing the structure of a poem. Besides, this novel-poem does not stop there and it invites other genres to join.

*Le Chiendent* has also a strong dramatic color and is interchangeable with a theater performance. To study the theatrical aspect of his work we refer again to the idea of relativity or the hybridization of genres. But how does the romantic representation of Queneau reveal itself as a spectacle or take the spectacular form? To answer this question, we will briefly undertake a study of the theatricality of this work in order to show how the author plays with the concept of genre. We will first point out the different demonstrations of the "performance" in the novel, then we will explain the theatrical aspects of the *Chiendent* by some significant examples.

*Le Chiendent* constitutes the scenes which have a remarkable spectacular attraction. One of the most recurrent scenes in *Le Chiendent* is that of "death". On this subject, six funeral spectacles were presented in this work, emphasizing their theatrical dimension.

We will see how theatrical techniques dominate Queneau's romantic work. It should be added that the spectacle also manifests itself in the structure of the text. It even fits into the structure of the novel. The book consists of seven chapters, each of them ends with an interlude in italics. These interludes produce pauses between the main "acts". It works as a form of diversion that shifts the reader's interest to other spectacles. Among theatrical games, the game of appearance and disguise has an active role in *Le Chiendent*. This game is so important because it is recognizable at the beginning and at the end of the novel.

According to the testimony of his biography, Queneau was passionate about the seventh art since his childhood. On the one hand, as a modern art

in the twentieth century, cinematic narrative has drawn much inspiration from literary works and, on the other hand, has done them a service by bringing them back to life on the big screen. From 1944, Queneau turned to the writing of film scripts and dialogues. It therefore seems quite natural if this writer interferes his cinematographic knowledge with his literary talents. Later, his passion for cinema will be passed on to his characters. In this part, we will briefly study how Queneau, by applying certain techniques of character presentation (slowed or accelerated) according to cinematographic processes, brings his novel closer to the film.

In this novel, the reader could identify some perspectives that can be changed at any moment. The use of such cinematographic methods in the romantic narrative and this generic interference gives the *Chiendent* a rather original aspect and already an air of modernity which we will find later in the new novelists. By applying the novel genre and integrating other genres (even that of cinematography) in his novel, Queneau launched a real generic game in the literature of the twentieth century.

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