

Abstract

In my doctoral thesis I analyzed the melodramas of the late modern period through the works of three film directors. My aim was to point at the artistic possibilities of the genre in an era when the audience – the spectators of the art cinemas, too – prefers the sensible and sentimental works to analytical and intellectual movies. I chose the melodramas of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Lars von Trier and Wong Kar-wai for analysis because these three filmmaker's life achievement represents three types of the genre.

First, I looked through the history and different theories of melodrama in order to synthesize the permanent thematic, stylistic and dramaturgic features of this adaptive genre. My definition of the melodrama is a narrative genre which characterizes its heroes as passive victims of an invincible force (natural, metaphysical, moral, social, psychological etc.) and whose dramaturgical mechanism aims to arouse compassion on its heroes. The brief summary of the history of melodrama revealed the changes of the nature of the invincible force from the embodied Evil to unfathomable power and of the more and more contradictory character of the victims. The process of modernity can be described as process of liberation from under different dominations therefore the late modern melodrama needs to use less striking, only through social, political or psychological analysis identifiable forces as narrative vehicles.

The first author whose works I analyzed is Rainer Werner Fassbinder whose life achievement makes transition from political modernity to post-modernity. His early melodramas analyze the psychologically interiorized ideological structures of capitalist society which makes victims its members who yearn after acknowledgement of others through love. The late melodramas of Fassbinder reveal the power structure of existing set of identities. The heroes of these melodramas become victims because of the rejection of the power which accompanies the possible gender roles. The melodramatic narrative describes the process of masochistic self-sacrifice in order to such utopian relationships that lack the economical and power structure. Beyond the fixed power structure of capitalist society, the permanent pain of the victims reveals the unavoidable suffering in life and threatening death.

The films of Wong Kar-wai represent the life of post-modern metropolises where goods and people are in equally speedy movement. After every kind of liberations, the invincible force in the Wong's melodramas is already not the moral principles or social obstacles between lovers but the time that inevitably changes the life and relationships of the heroes. Wong's characters become victims of time: either enter the market of human relationships where love is only a good which has an expiry date or give up fulfillment of love in order to save it unchanged. During permanent losses heroes of Wong's late melodramas face death as final result of time.

The cycles of melodramas in Lars von Trier's life achievement employ ironically the classical examples of the genre. Generally, Trier's melodramas take place in such closed, morally strict, bigoted tiny communities that can play the invincible force in the narrative, while the main hero is a female redeemer who becomes victim of the community. Although Trier considerably builds on the moral conflict and dramaturgical structure of classical melodrama, the natural acting style and the impoverished film technique serves as reality-effects in his works which make verisimilar its narratives for the contemporary art-film audience. The ironically treated moral allegory of classical melodramas reveals the loss of particular identity in face of oppressive society in Trier's work.

As the final conclusion of my doctoral thesis I claim that the authors of late modern melodramas make use the narrative features of the genre for emotional identification, meanwhile they change or query the dramaturgical patterns (sometimes with the ironic excesses) and open gaps on narrative chains in order to remove fixed signification and identities of the traditional melodrama and make wider the interpretative horizon.