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PhD Dissertation Title: *Comic structures and senses of metafiction in drama. A comparative study*

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Abstract

The main objective of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Comic structures and senses of metafiction in drama. A comparative study* is to reveal a comic potential of metafiction and to exemplify this phenomenon by Luigi Pirandello's and Witold Gombrowicz's theatrical output. The present study, being of comparative Polish-Italian nature, aims at demonstrating metafictional humour as a manifestation of convergences between Pirandello and Gombrowicz, also as far as postmodern connotations in dramas of both writers are concerned.

The scientific literature lacks a separate, comprehensive or detailed study of metafiction as a source of humour. The connections between metafictional and comic elements are barely signalled in specialist studies. Neither a comparative study of metafictional humour in both Pirandello's and Gombrowicz's theatrical output, nor any research on this phenomenon in dramas of each of the two authors has been developed so far. Nevertheless, theatrical works of Pirandello and Gombrowicz not only constitute a rich material for comparative research on the comic structures and senses of metafiction, but also show important resemblances and analogies in this regard.

In order to establish comic implications of metafiction and to delineate a broader comparative context of research. The state of art regarding intersections between metafictional and comic elements, as well as the studies on comic aspects and the ones comparing various aspects of the two authors' works were analysed. The terminology related to metafictional structures and comic forms was presented. The methodological approach was developed. The comic potential of metafiction was subsequently demonstrated based on examples of dramatic works by Pirandello and Gombrowicz. Among the dramas of the Italian writer the most representative material for the research is provided by works belonging to the phase of „theatre in the theatre”: *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), *Each in His Own Way* (1924) and *Tonight we Improvise* (1930) and – in terms of some elements – works of the „humorous-gnoseological” phase (*Henry IV*, 1922) and of the „myth trilogy” (*The Mountain Giants*, 1930). On the other hand, the metafictional structures present in all four Gombrowicz's dramatic works were analysed: *Iwona, Princess of Burgundy* (1938), *The Marriage* (1957), *Operetta* (1966) and *History* (1975). The research revealed essentially analogous metafictional structures (intertextuality, irony, metafictional characters and categories related to them, such as metalepsis, grotesque, absurd and fluidity) in the dramas of both authors and proved that they are determinants of comic senses. Finally, the relations between the theatrical works of Pirandello and Gombrowicz in terms of comic senses and structures were drawn.

The comparative analysis of metafictional structures and of the respective comic phenomena in Pirandello's and Gombrowicz's dramatic works enabled to develop a comic model based on metafiction. Verification of the proposed comic model proved the distinctness of Pirandello's and Gombrowicz's metafictional humour, as a sign of postmodern connotations, in comparison to a strictly postmodernist metafictional humour present in Woody Allen's works. The distinctive difference between the three playwrights is that in the case of the Italian and Polish author the metafiction first of all expresses certain artistic and existential dilemmas, while its comical overtones are secondary, while in the case of the American writer the metafiction is adopted - specifically because of the comic potential encoded in it - as a tool of postmodern literary play with a reader.

Keywords: metafictional humour, Pirandello, Gombrowicz, theatre, drama, comic forms, metafiction, comparative literature