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**Dissertation Abstract**  
**The Prosaic Poem - a New Theory of Genre**  
Based on Selected Works of R. M. Rilke  
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The prosaic poem is a classic example of the so-called “hybrid genres” and provides therewith a ‘generic problem case’. Thus the prosaic poem proves particularly useful in exploring the “boundaries” of literary genre. This dissertation presents a new consideration of the general theory of genre and offers a possible alternative to the popular and misleading conception of “boundaries” and “limits”.

The objective of this study is to present a new and critical investigation of the prosaic poem as a genre category, a definition that relies significantly on that of the definition of ‘genre’ itself. The questions of what a genre is, how it is established and how genre is differentiated from the related terms of ‘class’, ‘sort’, ‘type’ and ‘kind’ are dealt with in detail. Further, the limits of the term ‘genre’ are considered along with the question of if a prosaic poem can be considered as an equally stable genre category as lyric, epic and drama. In closing, the principal criteria for establishing the prosaic poem as a genre are presented.

The mediation between genre as a structure (its ‘system’) and as a process (its ‘history’) is the central and most difficult aspect of any theory of genre. A simplified methodological approach to this issue would be insufficient and would result in the extremes of pure historicism or a genre theory bordering on metaphysics. This consideration leads to a new detailed and multi-stage methodological approach to identify and define the so-called “general”, “relative” and “concrete” characteristics of the prosaic poem. The prosaic poem is then detailed on the basis of its structural components as a “general” genre term and considered in terms of its historically “relative” status to other genres, before being delineated from other “concrete” genres in terms of ‘familial resemblances’ (a concept introduced by Wittgenstein). This process synthesizes Hermeneutics, Analytics, Dialectics, Phenomenology and Communication theory into a new method for the systematization of literary texts and their interpretation.

In closing, the prosaic poem is regarded as a lyric genre distinct from that of the short epic. This conclusion bases itself on the increased presence of implicit rather than explicit terms. Further, a doubled perspective in regards to the subject and object matter is characteristic of the prosaic poem. In “concrete” terms, the prosaic poem is a text written in prose form that is not divided exclusively into sentences or syntactically coherent groups, but is typified by caesuras marking word repetition and parallel constructions.

The arguments presented in this study are based on a comparative analysis of three texts by Rainer Maria Rilke: the prosaic poem “Der Löwenkäfig”, the poem “Der Panther” and the 59<sup>th</sup> section of Rilke’s “Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge”. The passages that provide corresponding subject matter and motives between these texts provide the central focus of this work. The result is that the “shape” of genre - in its general, relative and concrete “moments” - becomes visible.