

2 Genre in Literary Traditions

In this and the next four chapters of Part 1, we will examine the various ways genre has been defined and used (historically and currently) in literary theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics (what is often called the “Sydney school” of genre study), historical/corpus linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, and Rhetorical Genre Studies (what is often termed “North American” genre study), with the goal of tracing how this dynamic, inter-related history has informed current understandings and syntheses (see for example the discussion of the Brazilian tradition in Chapter 5) of genre and its implications for writing instruction and writing program development. Certainly, an entire book, let alone a few chapters, will not be able to capture the complexity of this history in all the areas in which genre theory has played a significant role. Brian Paltridge, for example, has described the important work on genre done in folklore studies and linguistic anthropology, while Rick Altman and Steve Neale have examined genre in film studies. In the following chapters, we will instead describe the range of ways genre has been understood, synthesized, and used, over time, in those areas of study that have had the most impact on the study and teaching of writing: literary, linguistic, and rhetorical/sociological genre traditions. An understanding of these traditions will help situate various genre approaches and reveal their analytical and pedagogical possibilities, which Parts 2 and 3 will take up in more detail.

The traditions we examine illustrate a range of pedagogical and analytical trajectories, from textual trajectories that examine genres’ formal features for purposes of classification, description, and/or teaching to contextual trajectories that examine how genres reflect, shape and enable participants to engage in particular social and linguistic events, including how genres mediate social and linguistic events in ways that reproduce social activities and relations, how genres relate to larger social structures in ways that allow for cross-cultural analysis, and how genres can be used as forms of resistance and change. This range—

from taxonomic and descriptive approaches to explanatory approaches to pragmatic approaches to critical approaches that link genres to ideology and power—can be seen at work in literary approaches to genre study, which this chapter takes up.

Of the traditions we examine in Part 1, literary approaches to genre have been the least directly concerned with writing instruction and writing program development. Yet the analytical perspectives they offer, including those about genre and creativity (see Devitt, *Writing Genres* 163–90), and the ways that they have informed widespread beliefs about genre make literary genre traditions significant to scholarship in linguistic and rhetorical studies of genre. In what follows, we will first examine how literary approaches to genre have traditionally maintained culturally-widespread, bipolar attitudes toward genre as either an exclusively aesthetic object or as a constraint on the artistic spirit, and then we will consider more recent literary genre scholarship that challenges bipolar attitudes and offers a larger landscape for genre action that can include linguistic and socio-rhetorical studies of genres. We will describe what we perceive as five major trajectories of literary genre study: Neoclassical approaches to genre; Structuralist (or literary-historical) approaches to genre; Romantic and post-Romantic concerns about genre; Reader Response approaches to genre; and Cultural Studies approaches to genre. These trajectories will help highlight the range of ways literary theories have defined and made use of genre and their implications for the study and teaching of writing.

NEOCLASSICAL APPROACHES TO GENRE

In *The Fantastic* and “The Origin of Genres,” Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes between what he calls “theoretical” and “historical” approaches to genre, a distinction we can see at work in the first two literary traditions we will examine: the Neoclassical and Structuralist. Theoretical approaches define genres based on abstract, analytical categories that critics use to classify texts (*Fantastic* 13–14). These categories are “theoretical” because, rather than beginning with actual practices and texts, they begin with a priori categories, which are then applied to texts for purposes of classification. An example of such a theoretical approach, which Todorov critiques, is Northrop Frye’s well-known work in *Anatomy of Criticism*, which classifies literary texts according to archetypal themes and images. Historical approaches, on the other

hand, recognize genres as resulting “from an observation of literary reality,” meaning that genres are defined based on an inductive method, whereby critics identify genre categories based on perceived structural patterns in texts, as these texts exist historically within particular literary contexts (*Fantastic* 13-14). (Todorov’s approach to genre study can be described as historical in this way.) While Todorov does not deny the usefulness of theoretical or “abstract analysis” for the designation of what he prefers to call “types” of genres, he wants to reserve the word “genre” to designate “only those classes of texts that have been historically perceived as such” (“Origin” 198).

What we are calling Neoclassical approaches to genre utilize a theoretical, trans-historical set of categories (or taxonomies) in order to classify literary texts. Such taxonomic approaches start with apriori, macro-categories which are then used to define and clarify kinds of literary texts according to internal thematic and formal relations. As Todorov’s critique suggests, Neoclassical approaches to genre tend to rely on these taxonomies to classify and describe relations between literary texts, rather than examine how genres emerge from and are codified by users within actual contexts of use.

G rard Genette has described how Neoclassical literary taxonomies have their basis in the famous literary triad of lyric, epic, and dramatic, which is mistakenly attributed to Aristotle but is actually more the product of Romantic and post-Romantic poetics (Genette 6-12).¹ According to Genette, “the whole history of the theory of genre [within the literary tradition] is imprinted with these fascinating patterns that inform and deform the often irregular reality of the literary field” (45). This triad has traditionally been used to define the literary landscape: the novel, novella, epic (epical); the tragedy, comedy, bourgeois drama (dramatic); ode, hymn, epigram (lyrical) (49). As a taxonomy, the classical triad has also been used to describe genre change. For example, citing Ernest Bovet’s theory of how the triad evolved naturally to reflect biological and social evolution, Genette writes: “To Bovet, as to Hugo and the German Romantics, the three ‘chief genres’ are not merely forms . . . but rather ‘three basic ways of imagining life and the universe,’ which correspond to three stages of evolution, as much ontogenetic as phylogenetic . . .” (56). So within a given historical era, different periods will mark stages of generic evolution reflecting, say, an “epic world,” a “lyric consciousness,” and a “dramatic milieu” (Genette 62). At other times, the triad has been associated with spatial presence

and temporal perspective. Lyric, for instance, is at times defined as subjective, dramatic as objective, and epic as subjective-objective (Genette 38), so that in each formation we have a different notion of presence—each, that is, articulates a different spatial dimension in which a particular literary action takes place.²

As illustrated by the lyric, dramatic, and epic triad, what distinguishes Neoclassical genre approaches is their pursuit of systematic and inclusive rules based on universal validity for classifying and describing kinds of literary texts (Frow 52). As such, we can describe Northrop Frye's well-known work on genre as Neoclassical insofar as it seeks a transhistorical system of archetypes in order to describe literary texts and their relations. For example, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye identifies four archetypal mythos: comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony/satire. These narratives are associated with the cycle of the seasons, such that Winter is associated with irony/satire, Spring with comedy, Summer with romance, and Autumn with tragedy. Each of these narratives unfolds within archetypal plots (for example, the movement from one type of society to another within comedy), and each of these plots unfolds within archetypal phases (for example, the movement from complete innocence to tragic flaw to unrelieved shock and horror within tragedy). And the phases themselves are associated with archetypal characters and traits (for example, the quest plot of romance includes archetypal characters such as youthful hero, aged magician, sibylline, monster, nymphs, as well as archetypal imagery such as water, fertility, wooded landscapes, valleys, brooks, friendly companions, and so on). As Frye explains of Neoclassical approaches, "the purpose of criticism by genre is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a larger number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them" (247-48).

While Neoclassical taxonomies seek to organize relations between literary texts, the main critique of such approaches has been the way they universalize the ideological character of genres rather than seeing genres as emerging from and responding to socio-historically situated exigencies. In terms of their impact on writing instruction, such attitudes toward genre have helped to authorize the creation of decontextualized taxonomies which have resulted in the use of modes of writing such as the still widely-taught "description," "narration," "persuasion," and "exposition." These artificial modes isolate form from

content and presume that all writing (and associated cognitive processes) can be classified and explained by way of universally applicable categories. At the same time, such an abstract view of genre constrains writing teachers and students from treating genres as dynamic, situated actions, in ways articulated in more recent literary, linguistic, and rhetorical genre studies.

STRUCTURALIST APPROACHES TO GENRE

While Frye's archetype-based taxonomy invites criticism such as Todorov's for being theoretical rather than historical, Frye's work also provides a way of describing how literary texts do not function as free standing entities, but exist in systematic, intertextual relation to one another within a literary universe. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye proposes an approach to literary criticism rooted not in ideological perspectives, personal taste, and value judgments, but in a systematic study of literary texts, one that sought a "coordinating principle" through which to identify and describe literary texts as parts of a larger whole (16). In tracing the archetypal patterns (rituals, myths) that permeate and help distinguish literary texts, Frye delineated a complex, intertextual literary universe in which literary texts participate and are defined. All literary texts draw on a finite set of available archetypes, configuring these archetypes according to the genres in which the literary text functions. In this way, Frye's work can also be seen as operating in part within another of the literary approaches to genre: the structuralist approach.

Structuralist (or literary-historical) approaches understand genres as organizing and, to some extent, shaping literary texts and activities within a literary reality. In *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory*, David Fishelov explores the connections between literary reality and genre theory, explaining that the metaphor "genres are social institutions" is commonly used by literary scholars to describe how literary genres coordinate textual relations, organization, and change. Fishelov, for example, explains that as "a professor is expected to comply with certain patterns of action, and to interact with other role-players (e.g. students) according to the structure and functions of an educational institution . . . , a character in a comedy is expected to perform certain acts and to interact with other characters according to the structural principles of the literary 'institution' of comedy" (86).

So genres are literary institutions that make certain literary activities possible and meaningful, both in terms of the subjects who participate within them and in terms of the writers and readers who produce and interpret them. Structuralist approaches, thus, examine how genres structure literary texts and contexts within what Todorov calls “literary reality” (*Fantastic* 13-14).

Whereas Neoclassical approaches to genre use transhistorical categories (such as epic, lyric, and dramatic) to classify and clarify literary texts and their relations at an abstract level, Structuralist approaches are more concerned with how socio-historically localized genres shape specific literary actions, identifications, and representations.³ In this way, according to Fredric Jameson, “genres are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” (106). Likewise, Jonathan Culler explains, the activity of writing a poem or a novel “is made possible by the very existence of the genre, which the writer can write against, certainly, whose conventions he may attempt to subvert, but which is none the less the context within which his activity takes place, as surely as the failure to keep a promise is made possible by the institution of promising (116). This genre context is as conceptual as it is discursive, regulating not only certain formal and textual conventions, but also certain ways of organizing and experiencing literary reality. For example, Heinz Schlaffer, describing Walter Benjamin’s understanding of how the “wholeness and distinctiveness of the world of art is created,” writes: “Benjamin’s decisive contribution to genre theory lies in his thought that genres are condensed world-images. . . . Organized by means of ideas, genres are pregnant outlines which contrast with the endlessness and indefiniteness of the real world (qtd. in Beebee 259). Literary genres bound the “endlessness and indefiniteness of the real world” in ways that create particular literary-historical meanings and values.

One specific way that genres structure literary meanings and values is by establishing particular space-time configurations within which texts discursively function. Käte Hamburger, for example, argues that genres structure a particular temporal orientation, so that at the grammatical level, for instance, the “past tense in fiction does not suggest the past tense as we know it but rather a situation in the present; when we read ‘John walked into the room,’ we do not assume, as we would if we encountered the same preterite in another type of writing, that

the action being described occurred prior to one in our world” (qtd. in Dubrow 103).

At the same time, genres also structure our perceptions of literary actions, representations, and identifications. For example, Heather Dubrow asks readers to consider the following hypothetical paragraph:

The clock on the mantelpiece said ten thirty, but someone had suggested recently that the clock was wrong. As the figure of the dead woman lay on the bed in the front room, a no less silent figure glided rapidly from the house. The only sounds to be heard were the ticking of that clock and the loud wailing of an infant. (1)

How we make sense of this piece of discourse and the event it represents, Dubrow suggests, points to the significance of genre in structuring literary events. For instance, knowing that the paragraph appears in a novel with the title *Murder at Marplethorpe*, readers can begin to make certain decisions about the action taking place when they recognize that the novel they are reading belongs to the genre of detective fiction. The inaccuracy of the clock and the fact that the woman lies dead in the front room become meaningful clues in that context. Likewise, the figure gliding away is more likely to be identified as a suspect, in which case the gliding figure and the dead woman assume a certain genre-mediated cause/effect relationship to one another as possible murder victim/suspect. However, if, as Dubrow suggests, the title of the novel was not *Murder at Marplethorpe* but rather *The Personal History of David Marplethorpe*, then the way we encounter the same discourse changes. Reading the novel as a Bildungsroman (life novel), we will place a different significance on the dead body or the fact that the clock is inaccurate. Likely, we would not be trying to identify a suspect. The crying baby, as Dubrow suggests, will also take on more relevance, perhaps being the very David Marplethorpe whose life's story we are about to read. In short, the actors in the discourse embody particular actions, identifications, and representations in relation to one another within the structure of the genre.

In localizing the ideological character of genre and recognizing genre's role in structuring aesthetic worlds, Structuralist approaches acknowledge the power of genre to shape textual interpretation and production. Yet, as we will discuss later in this chapter and then in our

discussion of linguistic and rhetorical genre traditions, by focusing on genres as literary artifacts that structure literary realities, Structuralist genre approaches overlook how all genres, not just literary ones, help organize and generate social practices and realities in ways that prove important for the teaching of writing.

ROMANTIC AND POST-ROMANTIC APPROACHES TO GENRE

While Structuralist approaches understand genres as structuring textual actions and relations within a literary universe, certain Romantic and post-Romantic approaches have rejected genre's constitutive power, arguing instead that literary texts achieve their status, in fact, by exceeding genre conventions, which are perceived as prescriptive taxonomies and constraints on textual energy (Frow 26). Such a denial of genre, which asserts that "to be a modern writer and write generically is a contradiction in terms" (Rosmarin 7), can be traced to German Romanticism and the work of Freidrich Schlegel in the late eighteenth century. Schlegel insisted on the singularity of literary texts, with Romantic poetry serving as the ideal example: "only Romantic poetry is infinite as only it is free. . . . the genre of Romantic poetry is the only one that is more than a genre: it is, in a way, the very art of poetry[;] in a certain sense, all poetry is or should be Romantic" (qtd. in Threadgold 112). Following Schlegel a century later, Benedetto Croce argues that classifying any aesthetic work according to genre is a denial of its true nature, which is based in intuition, not logic. Genres, Croce claims, are logical concepts, and as such cannot be applied to literary works, which resist classification and are indeterminate (38). Perhaps the most famous dismissal of genre comes from Maurice Blanchot, who, in *Le Livre à venir*, writes:

The book alone is important, as it is, far from genre, outside rubrics . . . under which it refuses to be arranged and to which it denies the power to fix its place and to determine its form. A book no longer belongs to a genre; every book arises from literature alone, as if the latter possessed in advance, in its generality, the secrets and the formulas that alone allow book reality to be given to that which is written. (qtd. in Perloff 3)

In Blanchot's formulation, literature becomes a transcendental domain that exists outside of or beyond genre's ability to classify, clarify, or structure texts.

Jacques Derrida, for one, has seized upon the apparent contradiction in Blanchot's formulation of the text's autonomy and its relationship to Literature. In the "Law of Genre," Derrida acknowledges that "as soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind" (221). Yet he responds to Blanchot with this often-cited hypothesis: "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the *trait* of participation itself . . ." (230). In so doing, Derrida preserves what Blanchot recognizes as a text's indeterminacy while presenting that indeterminacy as emerging from a complex relationship between literary texts and genres. Texts do not *belong* to a genre, as in a taxonomic relation; texts *participate in* a genre, or more accurately, several genres at once. "Participation" for Derrida is a key word, as it suggests something more like a performance than a replication or reproduction. Every textual performance repeats, mixes, stretches, and potentially reconstitutes the genre(s) it participates in. As such, for Derrida, genres are not apriori categories that classify or clarify or even structure texts, but rather are continuously reconstituted through textual performances (Threadgold 115). Indeed, for Derrida, one of the marks of literary texts is their ability to "re-mark" (self-consciously, self-reflectively) on their performances: "This re-mark—ever possible for every text, for every corpus of traces—is absolutely necessary for and constitutive of what we call art, poetry or literature" (229). In short, genres are the preconditions for textual performances.

For all that it offers in response to Romantic and Post-Romantic denials of genre and contributes to a dynamic understanding of the relationship between texts and genres, Derrida's argument still ultimately perceives genre as an imposition on literature (Beebee 8), a necessary imposition, perhaps, but an imposition nonetheless which literary texts must grapple with, mix, and perform themselves against. For this reason, as John Frow argues, Derrida's argument "participates in . . . a familiar post-Romantic resistance to genre understood as a prescrip-

tive taxonomy and as a constraint on textual energy” (26). What matters in the end is the singularity of the literary text, which exceeds the genre(s) it performs. Such resistance to genre has had implications for writing instruction, in the form of debates over constraint and choice, convention and creativity. These dichotomies have created a false set of choices for student writers and their instructors, where students’ “authentic” voices and visions are perceived to be in tension with the “constraining” forces of genre conventions. As Amy Devitt has argued, however, and as we will discuss in Part 3, genres offer teachers and students a way of seeing constraint and choice, convention and creativity as interconnected (see Devitt, “Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre” as well as Chapter 6 of *Writing Genres*).

READER RESPONSE APPROACHES TO GENRE

Reader Response approaches to genre follow Derrida in presenting a complex relationship between texts and genres. Yet whereas Derrida recognizes a literary text as a performance of genre, reader response approaches recognize genre as a performance of a reader, particularly the literary critic, upon a text. In *The Power of Genre*, Adena Rosmarin identifies genre’s power in just this way: “The genre is the critic’s heuristic tool, his chosen or defined way of persuading his audience to see the literary text in all its previously inexplicable and ‘literary’ fullness and then to relate this text to those that are similar or, more precisely, to those that may be similarly explained” (25). Within such an approach, genre becomes an argument a critic makes about a text. Such an argument does not necessarily alter the text, being more of a localized and even temporary explanation of a text that may itself be subject to multiple genre explanations or performances. As Rosmarin explains, “The critic who explicitly uses genre as an explanatory tool neither claims nor needs to claim that literary texts should or will be written in its terms, but that, at the present moment and for his implied audience, criticism can best justify the value of a particular literary text by using these terms” (50-51). The same text can be subject to different genre explanations without compromising its integrity, so that, along with Rosmarin, a critic could say, “let us explore what ‘Andrea del Sarto’ [a poem by Robert Browning] is like when we read it as a dramatic monologue . . .” (46). Such an approach acknowledges

genre's constitutive power, albeit as an interpretive tool, involved in literary consumption, not literary production.

E.D. Hirsch has likewise argued for a view of genres as interpretive frameworks, claiming that a reader's "preliminary generic conceptions" are "constitutive of everything that he subsequently understands" and remains so until that conception is challenged or changed (Hirsch 74). Genres thus function as conventionalized predictions or guesses readers make about texts. Summarizing such an approach to genre, John Frow writes: "genre is not a *property* of a text but is a function of reading. Genre is a category we *impute* to texts, and under different circumstances this imputation may change" (102). Such an approach begins to offer a more dynamic view of genre that leads into Cultural Studies approaches, which we describe next, and it has offered a way of teaching reading in terms of what reading theorist Frank Smith has called "specifications," which enable a reader to identify, make predictions about, and negotiate a text. Yet by psychologizing genre as the performance of a reader and perceiving it as an interpretive tool, Reader Response approaches to genre have overlooked the social scope of genre and its role in the production as well as interpretation of texts.

CULTURAL STUDIES APPROACHES TO GENRE

While traditional literary approaches have contributed to culturally-widespread, bipolar attitudes toward genre as either an exclusively aesthetic object or as a constraint on the artistic spirit, the final tradition we will examine (Cultural Studies approaches to genre) challenges such bipolar attitudes and offers a larger landscape for genre action. Cultural Studies genre approaches seek to examine the dynamic relationship between genres, literary texts, and socio-culture—In particular, the way genres organize, generate, normalize, and help reproduce literary as well as non-literary social actions in dynamic, ongoing, culturally defined and defining ways.

In reaction to Reader Response approaches to genre, for instance, a Cultural Studies approach would be interested in how and which genres become available as legitimate options for readers or critics to use. Hirsch and Rosmarin, for example, do not account for the socially regulated ways that readers and critics impute genres to texts, suggesting instead that genres are interpretive frameworks readers simply select. In fact, however, there is a great deal socially at stake in what texts

are identified with what genres. Cultural Studies approaches are thus concerned with how genre conventions hail certain texts and readers in “shared and shareable ways, and are built into more or less durable infrastructures” (Frow 102), so that the choice of genre a reader or critic “selects” as an interpretive framework is guided by his or her knowledge of certain social practices. Focusing on genre in the film industry, Rick Altman suggests that “we may fruitfully recognize the extent to which genres appear to be initiated, stabilized and protected by a series of institutions essential to the very existence of genres” (85). These institutions include literary institutions, but also other social institutions such as schools, publishing companies, marketing agencies, and so on, which constitute what John Frow has called “reading regimes” that regulate habits of reading. According to Frow, “it is through our learning of the structure of reading regimes that we acquire the background knowledges, and the knowledge of rules of use and relevance, that allow us to respond appropriately to different generic contexts” (140). The knowledge of “rules of use and relevance” that shape how readers identify, select, value, and experience literary texts is acquired through social practices (including genres), thus linking literary genres to social institutions in more than simply the analogous ways suggested by structuralist approaches.

An important aspect of Cultural Studies approaches to genre is the way they define and use genres to examine dynamic relations between literary texts and historically situated social practices and structures. As Todorov puts it, “Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong;” as such, “a society chooses and codifies the [speech] acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of certain genres in one society, and their absence in another, are revelatory of that ideology . . .” (200). For example, in *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*, David Quint describes how epic as a genre “encodes and transmits” an “ideology of empire” by shaping human history into narrative (8). As Quint explains, “To the victor belongs epic, with its linear teleology; to the loser belongs romance, with its random or circular wandering. Put another way, the victors experience history as a coherent, end-directed story told by their own power; the losers experience a contingency that they are powerless to shape their own ends” (9). As such, epic carries an “idea of narrative itself” through western history, one that equates power with narrative in a way that

eventually becomes ‘universalized’ and codified as the epic becomes part of a larger literary history” (13-15). Far from being simply a Neo-classical category used to classify kinds of literary texts, then, epic reflects and participates in maintaining a view of narrative that has proven to be historically durable. Not only are literary genres linked in dynamic ways to ideology, so too, Peter Hitchcock claims, is the urge to classify genres, which is itself a historical and socio-cultural impulse connected to colonialism and nationalism. “The classificatory ambition in literature,” Hitchcock argues, “is indissoluble from a particular history of self and society” (308). For example, the urge to codify the novel as genre in the 1960s and 70s was a conservative gesture in the face of popularizations of and the rise in subgenres of the novel, especially connected to a rise in decolonization and postcolonial states asserting their autonomy and difference (Hitchcock 309-10). Hitchcock calls for a “mode of analysis that *takes genre seriously* enough to fathom the conditions under which particular genres may appear and expire . . . while allowing for a law of genre that is not in itself ahistorical” (311; emphasis added). Genre formations and transformations are linked to social formations and transformations in ideological, powerful ways; to take “genre seriously enough,” according to Cultural Studies approaches, means both examining how genres reflect and participate in legitimizing social practices *and* recognizing how generic distinctions maintain hierarchies of power, value, and culture.

In a way hinted at already, Cultural Studies approaches to genre tend to complicate traditional boundaries between literary and non-literary genres in ways that acknowledge how all genres reflect and shape texts and social actions. As John Frow offers, “Genre theory is, or should be, about the ways in which different structures of meaning and truth are produced in and by the various kinds of writing, talking, painting, filming, and acting by which the universe of discourse is structured” (10). Mikhail Bakhtin has been an especially important figure in describing the complex relations between genres: literary and everyday genres, written and spoken. We will revisit Bakhtin’s work on speech genres in Chapter 6, when we examine rhetorical approaches to genre. Here, we will focus on what we will describe as two axes of genre relations in Bakhtin’s work, horizontal and vertical. Horizontal relations describe the dialogic nature of genres, as one genre becomes a response to another within a sphere of communication. For example, a call for papers leads to proposals which lead to letters of acceptance

or rejection, and so on. Vertical relations involve what Bakhtin calls primary and secondary genres (“Problem” 61-62). For Bakhtin, primary genres take form in “unmediated speech communion,” meaning that they maintain an “immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others” (62). Examples of primary genres include rejoinders in everyday dialogue and private letters (62). Secondary genres (which for Bakhtin include “novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary”) are more complex: “During the process of their formation, [secondary genres] absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres. . . . These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones” (62). When we answer the phone with “hello” during an actual phone conversation, for instance, we are using a primary genre, but if that rejoinder and the phone conversation that ensues were recorded and included as part of a cross examination in a trial, then the primary genre becomes recontextualized and altered as part of the secondary genre of cross examination.

The vertical relation in which secondary genres absorb and alter primary genres (as well as other secondary genres) offers insight into how literary and everyday genres interact to form and transform social practices and actions. For one thing, it suggests that literary genres, which are secondary genres, are not pure but are rather made up of other genres, including everyday, vernacular genres such as phone conversations, tax forms, contracts, prayers, and so on. For Bakhtin, the novel offers the clearest example of such a heteroglossia of genres. The novel recontextualizes multiple genres into its symbolic world. According to Bakhtin, “Each of these genres possesses its own verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality. The novel, indeed, utilizes these genres precisely because of their capacity, as well worked-out forms, to assimilate reality in words” (*Dialogic* 320-21). In so doing, the novel can be understood as re-assimilating realities within realities, so that the realities represented by the various genres the novel incorporates become recontextualized within its own reality. The novel *uses* the various genre realities to construct its own reality. This process of genre transformation works in two directions. On the one hand, once a literary genre absorbs other genres, say legal genres, it transforms them, so that these genres are no longer defined by what Thomas Beebee calls their cultural “use values” as legal documents that have cultural consequences, such as getting someone put in jail.

On the other hand, though, a literary genre can supply an alternative vision of how everyday legal or public genres can be used, thereby transforming their cultural use values. That is, literary genres such as the novel have the potential to “de-form” or destabilize the realities represented by the genres they recontextualize. As Beebee explains, “In terms of my theory of genre as use-value, the purpose of the novel would be to provide a discursive space for different genres to critique one another” (154). In this way, literary genres can reveal cultural ideologies by denaturalizing and reconfiguring relations between everyday genres and their use values.⁴

For Beebee, “primarily, genre is the precondition for the creation and the reading of texts” (250), because genre provides the ideological context in which a text and its users function, relate to other genres and texts, and attain cultural value: “Genre gives us not understanding in the abstract and passive sense but use in the pragmatic and active sense” (14). It is within this social and rhetorical economy that a genre attains its use-value, making genre one of the bearers, articulators, and reproducers of culture—in short, ideological. In turn, genres are what make texts ideological, endowing them with a social use-value. As ideological-discursive formations, then, genres delimit all discourse into what Beebee calls the “possibilities of its usage” (278). Philippe Gardy describes this transformation as a “movement of actualization” in which “brute information” or the “brute ‘facts’ of discourse” (denotation) becomes actualized as “ideological information” (connotation) (qtd. in Beebee 278). So genre is an “actualizer” of discourse, transforming general discourse into a socially recognized and meaningful text by endowing it with what Foucault calls a mode of being or existence. It is genre, thus, that gives a text a social reality in relation to other texts. Beebee concludes, “The relation of the text to the ‘real’ is in fact established by our willingness to place it generically, which amounts to our willingness to ideologically appropriate its brute information” (278). Genres frame systems of relations (intra-generically and inter-generically) within which texts become identifiable, meaningful, and useful in relation to one another.

Bakhtin and Beebee offer a situated view of literary genres, one that is situated not only within a literary universe as Structuralist approaches understand it, but also situated in relation to other genres within a culture’s system of genres. Todorov has defined a system of genres as “the choice a society makes among all the possible codifica-

tions of discourse” (*Genres* 10). Such codifications include literary as well as legal, public, political, disciplinary, and other everyday genres, and together the complex relations of these genres organize and help generate a society’s social structures, practices, events, and discourses in dynamic inter-related ways. As a result, Todorov asserts, “in place of literature alone we now have numerous types of discourse that deserve our attention on an equivalent basis” (*Genres* 12). It is this understanding of the multiplicity of genres, their functions, and situations that, as Amy Devitt has argued, can integrate literary and rhetorical approaches. While literature courses may emphasize the role of the reader and composition courses the role of the writer, there is the potential for a shared understanding of “genres as involving readers, writers, text, and contexts; that sees all writers and readers as both unique and as necessarily casting themselves into common, social roles; that sees genres as requiring both conformity with and variation from expectations; and that sees genres as always unstable, always multiple, always emerging” (“Integrating” 715). In the next four chapters, we will describe how scholarship in Systemic Functional Linguistics, historical/corpus linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, rhetorical theory and sociology, and Rhetorical Genre Studies has paid attention to these other various types of discourse, in ways that have come to inform the study and teaching of writing.