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Defining Genre Studies

As a general definition, genre is a type of spoken or written discourse. Historically, genre studies have focused on textural patterns. For example, certain types of poetry, such as a limerick, have a very specific line and rhyming pattern. Thus, it is a type of genre. Genre can be studied in such terms, but more modern studies of genre have looked at different aspects of it. For one, genre studies analyze rhetorical situations and communities. The social implications and influence of genre are an important part of studying it.

It is critical for readers to be able to recognize a particular genre and, thereby, read more effectively. If text is understood as a particular genre, then there is a certain relationship between the reader and the writer that allows better understanding. Genres do not classify, but rather, they instruct for interpretation. Jolliffe wrote, "Genre-related features serve not only as information, but as 'instructions' for interpreting other coded information" (Jolliffe 280). Genres, therefore, help make sense of text, and are an invention to form.

The view of Heather Dubrow, who sorts genres according to subject matter, intended effect, attitude, tone, or some combination of those attributes, is similar to that of Paul Hernadi, who proposes that genres can be classified according to author's attitude, the text's effect on readers, verbal constructs employed, and the verbal world evoked. Both are similar in suggesting author's attitude and text effect as an important feature. Another view of genre is that of Pare and Smart, who wrote, regarding the work of Bazerman and others, "we propose to define genre as a distinctive profile of regularities across four dimensions: a set of text, the composing processes involved in creating these texts, the reading practices used to interpret them and the social roles performed by writers and readers" (Smart, 147). The views don't necessarily oppose each other, but rather, show different ways of studying genre.

Genre is a broad rhetorical strategy within a community created to regularize writer reader transactions. It can be said that the overwhelming purpose is to allow for the creation of a particular knowledge within a discourse community. Genre, therefore, insures the protection of community-based discourse. Genre helps writers make sense of rhetorical situations. Additionally, it helps the writer preserve the values of the community and the discourse. Genre can be seen as a very effective rhetorical strategy to further any community's purposes.

The implications of genres are important to understand, because they carry significant influence. For example, what is the

role of genre with exclusiveness? Is it possible for a particular genre to exclude certain groups? Within the professional community it is common to use professional jargon in order to keep laypersons from understanding the text. This practice is quite successful as a business strategy. But the same concept needs to be understood within other genres as well. For example, an informational pamphlet about a university is meant to target certain groups. Freeman and Medway wrote, "They are pregnant with possible conflict, not just about theory, but about practices affecting real interests, such as the flow of power, status and resources" (Freeman and Medway 11). The important question to consider is, "What attitudes, values, beliefs, and so forth, are reflected in the genre?"

Genre has a large variety of possibilities for examination. Many studies attempt to classify the specific aspects of genre. A much more popular and contemporary view is one wherein genre is studied in terms of contemporary rhetoric. It is an important part of genre studies to understand the actual implication of the genre, whether or not it is intended or merely an accident. Genre can be exclusive or can be targeted to a specific community. Simply put, the study of genre is the practice of classifying differing discourse, which can be accomplished in many diverse ways.