

REVIEW: Animated Categories: Genre, Action, and Composition

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Genre and the Invention of the Writer: Reconsidering the Place of Invention in Composition. Anis Bawarshi. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003. 207 pp.

The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change. Richard M. Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko, eds. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2002. 388 pp.

Writing Genres. Amy J. Devitt. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2004. 242 pp.

And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

—The Book of Genesis, King James Version

If I think any other man is able to see things that can naturally be collected into one and divided into many, him I follow after and walk in his footsteps as if he were a god.

—Plato, *Phaedrus*

If humankind reflects the image of God revealed in the first few lines of the Book of Genesis, nowhere is it more evident than in our capacity and/or obligation to categorize. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's work on metaphor suggests that making, unmaking, and naming by way of conceptual grouping provides us with pretty much all we think we know. To classify is to make order—to make doing, in a linear sense, possible. We live to sort, sort to live.

It is perhaps because these processes are so close to the very quick of consciousness that we typically fail to take notice of them, occupied as we are with the prod-

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ucts they generate. The current set of definitions and divisions that structures my role as writer and yours as reader, and binds us loosely (and perhaps only for the moment) into a collective (*college, English, composition*, and so on), encourages us to trace the question of *genre* back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, to which we customarily point as the origination of comedy, tragedy, and other genres. While one may read the *Poetics* and see something more complex than lists of bifurcations, Aristotle's tendency to divide essentialized concepts in exact opposition—and the tendency of Western history to follow along—effectively curtailed off the instability of the process, leaving us rather comfortable speaking about *writing*, more often than not, in terms of “kinds” and “classes.” Dependent as categorization is on observing commonalities for the purpose of declaring differences, to classify a text is to agree to see it as a bounded, static object. Thinking in conventional terms about genre, in other words, encourages us to focus on those attributes that *distinguish* a “thing” from what surrounds it rather than on how that thing might *relate*, dynamically, to other “things.”

More recently, a collective of international scholars in (the categories of) linguistics and professional writing have begun thinking about kinds of texts in different ways. Within new versions of *genre*, what is *apparent* about a given textual object is important in relation to how it functions in the situated, contingent, provisional context/s in which it operates. And *operation* is key, for a genre in this formulation is most meaningfully understood by the action it performs. Widely recognized as the seminal proponent of contemporary genre theory, Carolyn Miller's “Genre as Social Action” argues that “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (151). The three books considered here, all of which will be increasingly important as composition studies continues to expand its interest beyond form and the individual writer's processes, begin with the notion that genre is important precisely in terms of its role in both regulating and enabling social action.

GENRE AND RHETORICAL INVENTION

In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Anis Bawarshi develops a theory of invention that weds Miller's notion of rhetorical action to Aristotle's spatial metaphor for the generation of ideas in order to describe genres as “sites of action” (19). By inserting *genre* in place of *structure* in Anthony Giddens's theory of the duality of structure, Bawarshi refigures genre as a recursive socioliterate practice by which individuals both enact and produce social order. As “typified rhetorical strategies” (17), genres constitute the *topoi* through which social exigencies are framed and altered, including the roles individuals occupy while performing those actions. “[H]uman actors, in their social practices,” Bawarshi argues, “reproduce the very social conditions

that in turn make their actions necessary, possible, and recognizable, so that their actions maintain and enact the very conditions that consequently call for these actions” (40). Genres, then, function as mediating conventions that “constitute both our need to respond and the way in which we do so” (44–45).

Following Giddens, Bawarshi argues that genres embody the very possibility for rhetorical action by structuring the “motive potential” that individuals recognize as their own; careful to sidestep the trap of overdetermination, however, Bawarshi identifies a whole series of variables—including “social and psychological experiences, [. . .] social position, and [. . .] metacognitive awareness of the genre” (91)—that limits the structuring role of genre motive to “a potential that requires individual interpretation and articulation” and allows for resistance and transformation within genres (91–92). Nonetheless, whether a fitting response to an exigency is understood to be complicit with or resistant to convention, it is within genre that invention takes place. And Bawarshi’s dominant project is to wrest invention away from the process movement, which he charges with reducing it to introspection, and locate it within genre, at the “intersection of the dialectic between the social and the individual, where agency is acquired, negotiated, resisted and deployed” (50).

In Chapter 3, “Inventing the Writer in Composition Studies,” Bawarshi traces rhetorical invention from its conceptual origins in the “collected wisdom” of classical Greek and Roman rhetoric, to its demise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to its resulting “privatization” throughout composition’s long, current-traditional-*cum*-process slumber. Bawarshi finds an uptake for his work in Karen Burke LeFevre’s very popular *Invention as a Social Act*, and draws on some of the field’s most widely cited texts to establish this chapter’s argument, the foundation for the pedagogical claims about genre he goes on to make. Readers even passingly familiar with composition’s dominant historical narrative will find this chapter remarkably familiar, if clear and cogent.

Similarly, readers with a solid orientation in contemporary theories of genre will find little new in the following chapter, “Sites of Invention: Genre and the Enactment of First-Year Writing.” Here Bawarshi rather straightforwardly synthesizes with Giddens’s theory of structuration three theoretical models for understanding multiple genres as interrelated—“genre sets” (Devitt), “genre systems” (Bazerman), or “activity systems” (Russell, “Rethinking”). By creating each other genre’s necessity, coordinated genres define a system or “sphere” of social interaction. “Within a site of activity,” Bawarshi explains, “we will encounter a constellation of related, even conflicting situations, organized and generated by various genres” (115). It is through genres that various activity systems overlap—“micro-level” systems of activity can be related to explain “macro-level” systems at the institutional level and beyond. Russell’s prior work advances these claims and demonstrates them at work in school settings with attention to “classroom genres”; Bawarshi adopts the model

to explain the typical first-year writing course as an activity system organized and maintained by the syllabus, writing prompt, and student essay. As one familiar with Russell's work might expect, Bawarshi finds the syllabus to subtly *produce* not only the subjects who will respond to its expectations in appropriate ways, but its author the teacher as well, who through his or her own syllabus becomes an instantiation of institutional desires; the prompt structures student subjectivity in ways appropriate to the syllabus, and calls out for a student essay commensurate with the ideology of the prompt. As Bawarshi explains, the genre system expects that students will "manage this discursive transaction by recontextualizing the desires embedded in the prompt as their own seemingly self-prompted desires to write" (138).

It is at precisely this moment—"between the acquisition and articulation of desire"—that Bawarshi locates invention. To function effectively in the space of the composition classroom, students must "manage the interplay between coercion and complicity" in a way that reflects a subjectivity structured by the syllabus and prompt while sustaining an "illusion of self-sufficiency" (141). This leads to the book's central claim, that making genre (and genre systems) "analytically visible" (141) to students allows for more meaningful and critical participation in genred sites of action. In the final chapter of *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi argues that by relocating invention away from the writer and within the interplay of genre, first-year writing can become a site for learning "how to navigate disciplinary contexts rhetorically, thus forging real links to WID [writing in the disciplines] rather than consciously or unconsciously serving mainly the aspirations of English departments" (154). Bawarshi, however, is not hostile toward English departments; indeed, the nature of his analysis and the conclusions it leads to may have more in common with composition studies as a subfield of English studies than is immediately apparent—a matter to which I will return in a moment.

Bawarshi's conclusion tracks nearly the same ground as Russell's 1995 contribution to *Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction*, a landmark collection in the unfolding critique of "GWSI," or general writing skills instruction. It is Russell's application of activity system theory to genre that makes Bawarshi's analysis possible, and he anticipates precisely those deficiencies that Bawarshi finds with the current state of first-year writing. In "Activity Theory and Its Implications for Writing Instruction," Russell favors a "general introductory course *about* writing" rather than one grounded in the "myth of autonomous literacy" (73). Further, Russell frames the value of such a course in its ability to foreground for students the role of genred activity systems "from the point of view of writing—a point of view that is central to a critical understanding of their workings" (74). Finally, like Bawarshi, Russell figures such a course as a precursor to curriculum-wide programs that mainstream writing instruction.

The two arguments differ, however, precisely in terms of what Russell might call “point of view.” Bawarshi’s analysis of the genres of first-year writing in Chapter 5 makes no attempt to satisfy some other fields’ expectations for methodological rigor. Bawarshi’s analysis of the syllabus and writing prompt, for example, do not appear to proceed from examination of actual syllabi and prompts, but rather from generalizations—“typified rhetorical features” (121). Indeed, Bawarshi does not make clear that he looked at any syllabi or prompts himself; the specific references to instances of both genres are derived from the prior research he summarizes. While he does refer to half a dozen student essays, Bawarshi doesn’t tell us anything about the context from which they come, except to relate them to the prompt. From outside composition studies, where Carol Berkenkotter sets up shop in her contribution to Ann M. Johns’s *Genre in the Classroom*, Bawarshi’s book may be perceived to have more in common with “impressionistic narratives” found in “mainstream composition journals such as *CCC* and *CE*,” which, “for the last several years, rather than publishing research,” have presented articles that display a “hostility against empirical research” (Berkenkotter 287). For example, contrast Bawarshi’s analysis with Russell’s in “The Kind-ness of Genre” (included in Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko), which is explicitly identified as a “study” and, if Berkenkotter is right, deploys expressions sure to send readers of *College English* into a tizzy, such as “($n = 89$)” (230).

I compare and contrast Russell and Bawarshi not at all to disparage either of them, but to point to the significance of Bawarshi’s book—not as a source of new knowledge, but for synthesizing and interpreting genre theory in ways that will encourage compositionists to listen. Further, it seems important that while Russell, in the *Reconceiving Writing* essay, cites an *introductory* course in writing to foreground a crucial, apparently “advanced” role for curriculum-wide writing programs, Bawarshi elaborates a pedagogy for first-year writing that checks the radical contextualism sometimes used to justify WID. Russell attributes to curriculum-wide writing initiatives a “clear object(ive): the study and improvement of the roles writing plays in teaching and learning in specific disciplines and professions”; his attention to the role of disciplines in “selecting and socializing neophytes” (71), however, no doubt disturbs those who understand a role for writing in the humanities as a vehicle to disrupt the unquestioned acceptance of values through the tacit acquisition of discourse conventions. On the other hand, by declaring a sort of metagenre awareness not only the goal of a reconceptualized first-year writing, but a “transferable [. . .] rhetorical awareness” (165), Bawarshi seems to preserve for composition studies an *interdisciplinary* function. By wedding genre study in first-year writing perhaps too quickly to WID, Bawarshi cuts short the most dynamic possibilities for the social and rhetorical adaptability he proposes as the best reason for teaching genre awareness.

SITUATION, CULTURE, AND RELATED GENRES

It is a violation of genre, in the conventional sense, for an academic text to foreground interpersonal relationships among scholars. Authors pay homage to distant points in the intertext while assiduously papering over the most immediate of influences; reviewers tacitly agree to ignore what they may know. In the same way that today's soft fly ball "looks like a line drive in tomorrow's paper," publication invites us to see scholars as isolated and disconnected except through print. It would be remiss, however, to discuss Amy J. Devitt's *Writing Genres* in concert with Bawarshi's book and not mention that he studied under her for a significant portion of the time she has been an authority on new theories of genre. Each acknowledges the other warmly and at some length in their prefaces, and with Mary Jo Reiff they have authored a genre-centered writing textbook (*Scenes of Writing*). To read both books in close association is to imagine countless conversations and note both overlap and variation as if one were listening in.

Like Bawarshi, Devitt moves from a broad, well-articulated overview of the transition from form to action. Drawing on Lloyd Bitzer's landmark article, Devitt ruminates on the phenomenology of situation, concluding that notions of genre are further problematized by the inability to objectively encompass a point in space and time; situations, she concludes, are reciprocal, mutually constructed, and integrally interrelated (25). Devitt expands the idea of genre beyond the immediate rhetorical triangle by treating "culture" in a broad ideological and material sense, and assessing its role "in the dynamic construction of genre" (25–26). In this way, Devitt rejects the idea that genre is a response to a recurring situation, arguing that it is rather a "reciprocal dynamic within which an individual's actions construct and are constructed by recurring context of situation, context of culture, and context of [other, related] genres" (31).

Like Bawarshi, Devitt draws on Giddens to define genres not as tools, but as situated activity bound up in a constitutive relationship with individuals and other social structures in a reciprocal process of ongoing construction. "[T]he differing ways people gather [. . .] will surely influence the genres people use to achieve their purposes" (46), Devitt writes, sustaining the decade-old critique of discourse community theory by proposing a range of social groups that use genres. She proposes as well to work toward a broader theory of genre than that laid out by Russell's notion of the activity system, which she fears diminishes the complexity of the fluid relationship among individuals, groups, and the genres with which they reciprocate. Fundamental to Devitt's theory of genre, and reflective of her connection to those theorists Johns labels proponents of the "New Rhetoric," is her attention to the ideological dimension of genres, their capacity to embody and sustain "a group's values, epistemology, and power relationships" (60). While she does insist that the

ideological function varies by degree in different types of groups, Devitt suggests that it is in the nature of genres to do ideological work.

Taking care to elaborate the alternate dangers of attending exclusively to situation or of taking too-broad historical strokes, Devitt elaborates her claims by examining a number of genres in multiple contexts to elaborate her claims—those of tax accountants, writing students and teachers, and business managers. Concerned about the tendency toward a monolithic determinism in some theories of genre, Devitt devotes considerable attention to individual agency and personal influence on genre change, which she accounts for through attention to contexts of situation, culture, and related genres. Devitt rereads JoAnne Yates's *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* to foreground instances in which “strong” or “powerful” individuals were able to create “contextual pressures” capable of accelerating the tendency of genre to change gradually over time (112). Devitt foregrounds the late composition scholar Robert J. Connors as an example of such an individual, citing Connors's unquestionably influential *CCC* article, “The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse,” a publication she credits with contributing to “the slow decline (and near death?) of the mode genres” (115).

A scan of the tables of contents of a great many composition readers and the lesson plans of legions of high school teachers preparing students for competency exams suggests that the death of the modes may be apparent for the most part only in composition *scholarship*. More to the heart of Devitt's claims, however, it might be pointed out, following Foucault, that the privileging of an author's name, and the community status and value that attach to it, is a function of the humanist scholarly genre in which Connors wrote. As Bawarshi notes, what Foucault calls “the author function” is often the very generic feature that occludes attention to genre (21). It is not my intention to diminish Connors's accomplishments or Devitt's attention to individuals in contexts of situation and culture; each of us has experienced conditions in which committed individuals have altered circumstances so as to alter the relationship among readers and writers. As Devitt discusses the importance of individuals, however, perhaps because of the disciplinary tendency of composition scholars to foreground *writers* (as she points out elsewhere in the book), she tends to ignore the roles that powerful individuals play in sorting and shaping genres by authorizing or nixing the choices (or as Bawarshi might say, “motive potential” [89]) of individual writers. One wonders, for example, where or whether Connors's essay might have appeared had not Richard Larson tripled the allowable length of manuscript submissions to *CCC* when he assumed the editorship in 1980 from Edward P. J. Corbett, who rarely published anything in excess of four or five pages (Goggin 97). As Devitt acknowledges, the manifold “reciprocal variables” that genres represent make precision in describing them difficult (115); future scholars of genre will no

doubt expand Devitt's attention to the potential influence or functional roles of discrete personalities on genre change.

Like Bawarshi, who insists "[w]e need a concept that can account not only for how certain privileged discourses function, but for how all discourses function" (22), Devitt too hopes for elaborate explanatory power by seeking a theory of genre that will "account for all genres" (163). However, the overarching goal of Chapter 6, "A Comparison of Literary and Rhetorical Genres," turns out to be oriented more toward unifying the "multiplicity and instability" (189) of literature and rhetoric camps within departments of English, and that task frustrates the attempt to articulate a unified theory of genre. In what is perhaps the book's most troubled chapter, as its title suggests Devitt begins by isolating some genres—the literary ones—from the rhetorical nature of genre she promotes elsewhere in the book. Rhetoricians may wonder if modifying a given genre with the adjective *literary* is not an instantiation of the very sort of classification-based thinking that contemporary genre theory is meant to disrupt. Devitt does not appear to have fully anticipated the question—or perhaps she mistakes the positions she synthesizes from literary and rhetorical *scholarship* to adequately represent conditions constructed by language use within the material spaces of English departments.

While it may be true that "[m]ost literary and rhetorical genre theorists" agree that "all texts participate in genres, that those genres are conceptual rather than formal [. . . and] that genres are dynamic and situated in specific historical circumstances" (168), such claims have little influence over the way *genre* continues to be defined in the genre set of most English departments. Consider how other genres that circulate within departments heavily entrench *genre* in conventional classificatory connotations—syllabi, course descriptions, program descriptions and major requirements, summer reading lists, job ads, job application letters, literary anthologies, literary glossaries, comparative analysis assignments and their resulting student products, professional biographies, etc. Embodying the powerful inertia set in motion by Aristotle's *Poetics*, these genres persist in delimiting *literary* genres in contradistinction to the more critical components of contemporary genre theory; not least among these points, some of which Devitt acknowledges, are that texts tacitly classified as *literary* are often understood to transcend material situation and context, exhibit solitary authorial genius or "originality," rise above utility, and present a relatively consistent catalog of formal features that is stable across time, space, and culture. Indeed, such texts are not infrequently defined by their capacity to "resist" genre altogether. Devitt asks of literary genres those questions proposed by the genre theory she articulates: "What are the functions of literary genres? And what communities do literary genres serve?" (179). However, she does not begin to develop the sort of inquiry grounded in contexts of situation, contexts of culture, and contexts of related genres that she elaborates in the first two chapters.

Having already agreed to modify some genres with an adjective that privileges them in relation to the immediately functional genres with which they interact, Devitt implicitly sustains rather than analyzes the ideology embodied by the complex of genres that defines an English department. That the study of rhetoric and the teaching of composition occupy less significant positions of value in most departments of English is evident along too many standards of measure to dispute; that the division between rhetoric and literature in most departments is grounded in a hierarchical order of genre valuation is obvious; that a theory of genre grounded in function and action would radically disrupt the very literariness on which most English departments rest is inescapable. The genre repertoire in English functions ideologically to preserve the elevated status of some genres (as formal categories) over others, and to sustain the institutional and cultural value of those who preserve the arrangement.

Genre theory, however, is itself an ideological product. It is not irrelevant, given the divisions within English departments that are widely perceived to work against compositionists, that genre theory seems so attractive. As a projection of values and commitments—developed from a number of oppositional, but largely detached and decidedly abstract “locales” within English studies—contemporary genre theory is unlikely to achieve organizational sway over the institutionalized project of “Literature.” By developing her argument exclusively on a synthesis of scholarly positions and the relatively narrow range of participants and genres involved in the production of scholarship about genre, Devitt does not attend to the material site(s) in which a broader genre repertoire and wider range of participants construct (and are constructed by) the definitions of *literature*, *rhetoric*, and *composition*. A site-based analysis of the manifold genres that define the workspace and learning space of a non-PhD-granting English department, such as those named above, would no doubt encourage us to see genre-as-situated-action as *the* locus of ideological struggle between the categories of literature and composition.

GENRE AND DIFFERENCE

It is perhaps the optimism for unification that Devitt acknowledges at the end of Chapter 6 that encourages her away from a more ideologically attentive situational analysis of interrelated genres in an English department. In Chapter 3, an expansion of an article now nearing twenty years old, “Intertextuality in Tax Accounting: Generic, Referential, and Functional,” Devitt accounts for power relationships, and proposes that a broader methodology of genre analysis may reveal ideology to be complex and variegated within groups. In this way, parts of Devitt’s book can be read as a positive response to the limitations of early situation-based genre analysis outlined in *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre*, an expansive collection edited by Richard Coe, Lorelei Lingard, and Tatiana Teslenko.

While both Bawarshi and Devitt *introduce* new genre theory to those of us in American departments of English, Coe and his colleagues assume an audience already competently situated in a tradition of research that stretches back at least to Bakhtin's work on speech genres, across national borders into the scholarship of Australia, Canada, and Eastern Europe. The result may be a treatment of genre theory that offers in some ways a more formidable, truly expansive, and challenging reading experience—less suitable, perhaps, than Bawarshi or Devitt for use in a gateway graduate seminar. However, the wider scope of *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* suggests more apparent consonance between genre theory and other models for explaining relationships between individuals and texts in social formations of unequal power relations.

To characterize the development of new genre theories as a global phenomenon is not an understatement, and assessing the value and implications of *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* may require a more complete overview of the contexts in which those theories have emerged than my space allows here. Johns, in *Genre in the Classroom*, offers a serviceable snapshot by grouping the essays in her own book into different “schools” of genre theory, which can be oriented by two “divergent theoretical foci: whether a theory is solidly grounded in language and text structure or whether it stems primarily from social theories of context and community” (4). An essay like Brian Paltridge's, included in Johns's book, represents the first focus—an analysis grounded in “text structure” and attentive to “text types” that are “similar in terms of internal discourse patterns, irrespective of genre” (Paltridge 74–75). Johns herself, however, in elaborating the second focus of genre theory points to the limitations of text-type analysis and exclusive attention to formal features. The very practice of analysis for the purpose of decontextualized recognition and production of genre, she suggests, necessarily removes writing from the fields of action where it works, resulting in empty formalism (“Destabilizing” 239). It is instructive that an essay authored by Coe anchors Part 5 of Johns's book, titled “The New Rhetoric.”

Published nearly synonymously with *Genre in the Classroom*, Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko's *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* can be seen as an amplification of what Johns calls “The New Rhetoric.” “Genres survive because they work for someone” (3), they write, and that functionality embodies the potential “to discipline, erase, and elide some voices while serving the dominant political interests” (5). Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko argue that often genre analyses are marked by a “descriptive tendency,” animated by the goal of assisting the underprepared to write in functional settings. Catherine Schryer's contribution, “Genre and Power,” presents a detailed articulation of the historically differentiated rhetorical and linguistic “traditions” within contemporary genre theory. To illuminate the descriptive presentation of textual features and the lived experience of individuals engaged in the re/production of particular genres, Schryer argues for “disciplinary forms of analysis”—“close read-

ing of texts that instantiate genres in order to describe and critique the strategies that some genres activate in order to represent power” (80–81). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s dialectical theory of habitus and field, Schryer goes on to model the method by presenting a case study in which she analyzes the textual features of letters written by insurance company employees in the context of the writers’ own accounts of their writing practice. The synthesis demonstrates ways in which specific generic features preserved a set of power relations that harnessed the writers to the work of denying long-term disability benefits while constructing passive and powerless readers.

Two excellent essays, by Charles Bazerman and Anthony Paré, explore the relationship between identity construction and participation in situated genres. “As our grandmothers warned,” Bazerman writes, “if you hang around the race track long enough, you become one of those race track characters” (14). The connection between writing and identity formation has been central to composition theory since Kenneth A. Bruffee, James A. Berlin, and others opened the field to social constructionism in the 1980s; the sorts of analyses taken up in genre theory, however, give considerable definition to the murky outlines provided by discourse-community theory. Paré shows how Inuit social workers are moved by generic expectations of the workplace toward “divided and disembodied” personae (66), their obligations as agents of the state separating them from client advocacy and the motivations that may have moved them into social work.

With seventeen essays in four sections totaling more than 370 pages of text, *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre* is a substantial collection. Given its scope, as one might imagine, the fusion of linguistic and rhetorical analysis is not always accomplished in the manner Schryer achieves. Nonetheless, the clear focus on the ideological character of genre and genre sets throughout begins to reveal the potential of genre theory to interact with other theoretical constructions of positionality—those “various other forces” and “x-factors” at which Bawarshi hints (11). There is considerable capacity in genre theory to complexify inquiry into “contact zones,” for example, by accounting for the interrelated functions of texts and people who construct and maintain them. The same might be said for theories of writing and place, the notion that writing “cannot be separated from place, from environment, from nature, or from location” (Dobrin 13). As situated action, genre would seem to give conceptual shape to place and inhabitants through signage and related rhetorical action. The emergent field of alternative discourses (Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell) may achieve even greater explanatory power by using genre theory as a lens to examine concepts such as “home language” and “home dialect” (Bean et al. 27). Perhaps inquiry into the remarkable homogeneity of “creative writing” (Ritter) would be extended by a consideration of the genres that structure it—short fiction, poetry,

and categories of literary nonfiction—as situated action that sustains the normative and largely invisible middle-class subject position interrogated under the rubric of “whiteness” (West).

TEACHING GENRE

The value of attending to ideology in work on genre—on its normalizing, restrictive potential—is perhaps best summed up in Judy Segal’s contribution to Coe, Lingard, and Teslenko. Research on genre is structured by attention to replication. This focus on the familiar, the repetitious, “simply makes difference harder to see” (Segal 172). Composition studies is a field historically structured by a faith in similarity, a sort of grammatical and stylistic uni-form authorized by what Segal calls “‘genrelization’—a rationale for the rehearsal of the typical in discourse” (172). Best seen, perhaps, as a resistance movement theorized in opposition to the “truism” that Mary Macken-Horarik summarizes—“students at risk of school failure [. . .] need explicit induction into the genres of power if they are to participate in mainstream textual and social processes within and beyond the school” (17)—new genre theory indicates a pedagogy less “in” than *about* genre. If enculturation within a genre system turns ways of writing into ways of looking, one’s degraded place in relations of power can seem fixed, natural, and even necessary.

Devitt’s final chapter, “A Proposal for Teaching Genre Awareness and Antecedent Genres,” places a knowledge of genre in front of the value of facility in any given genre—a claim that aligns the three books considered here. Devitt argues that genre awareness is a route to rhetorical understanding and a hedge against the unconscious assimilation of ideology. As Devitt implies, genre awareness extends the work that most writing teachers imagine themselves to be already doing—nurturing rhetorical competencies that students can deploy in writing contexts in which they will go on to find themselves later. Like Bawarshi, Devitt imagines that “a pedagogy of genre awareness can rescue first-year writing courses” (202)—students cannot help learning genres in a writing class, and those they learn explicitly, with attention to the ways in which they structure ideology and action, will become “antecedent genres,” stepping stones or “bridges” into new contexts (203). To avoid simply prepping students for the tacit acceptance of their places within genre systems they go on to occupy, Devitt (like Schryer, Segal, Johns, and others) argues that students must be able to recognize genres also as potential sites of resistance, transformation, variation, and creativity.

It is for that reason, perhaps, that new theories of genre seem to hold great promise for enriching the undergraduate curriculum, beyond the first year, with what compositionists know. The emergence of genre theory in composition schol-

arship reflects the field's increasing attention to the idea, eloquently framed by Maureen Daly Goggin, that "learning to write may be contingent on [. . .] learning about multiple, complex, interdependent practices of reading and writing in diverse contexts and media" (203). We should not ignore the potential of genre theory to improve first-year writing, but neither should it be used to further entrench "composition" exclusively within the preparatory sphere. The lessons these three excellent books provide help underwrite the project of making *writing* (in its noun form) the future subject of composition studies.

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