GENRE TRAJECTORIES

IDENTIFYING, MAPPING, PROJECTING

Edited by **Garin Dowd**
and **Natalia Rulyova**

Genre Trajectories

Genre Trajectories

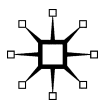## Identifying, Mapping, Projecting

Edited by

Garin Dowd
University of West London, UK

and

Natalia Rulyova
University of Birmingham, UK

palgrave
macmillan

Contents

v

Figures and Tables

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

Contributors

Natasha Artemeva is an associate professor in the School of Linguistics and Language Studies at Carleton University, Canada. She co-organized an international conference on genre studies, Genre 2012, held there. She is an award-winning author of journal articles and a co-editor of *Rhetorical Genre Studies and Beyond* (2006), *Writing in Knowledge Societies* (2011) and *Genre Studies around the Globe: Beyond the Three Traditions* (forthcoming).

Peter Buse is Professor and Head of School of Performance and Screen Studies at Kingston University, London, UK, and an executive member of the London Graduate School. He has written many articles and books on theatre, film and photography, including *Drama Plus Theory: Critical Approaches to Modern British Drama* (2001) and *The Camera Does the Rest: How Polaroid Changed Photography* (forthcoming).

Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert is Senior Lecturer in French in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Birmingham, UK. She has published widely in French literary stylistics and 20th-century literature. Her current research focuses on post-Second World War literary narrative: forms of personal and social memory, myth and the everyday with reference to war and post-Holocaust culture, with a particular interest in pyschoanalytical approaches to trauma and the works of Julien Gracq, Patrick Modiano, J. M. G. Le Clézio and Henry Bauchau.

Garin Dowd is Professor of Film, Literature and Media in the Ealing School of Media, Art and Design at the University of West London, UK. He is the author of *Abstract Machines: Samuel Beckett and Philosophy after Deleuze and Guattari* (2007), co-author (with Fergus Daly) of *Leos Carax* (2003) and editor (with Lesley Stevenson and Jeremy Strong) of *Genre Matters* (2006).

Katya Krylova is Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of German Studies, University of Nottingham, UK. Her Leverhulme project examines the treatment of the past and Austrian identity in contemporary Austrian literature, film and culture. Her monograph, *Walking*

through History: Topography and Identity in the Works of Ingeborg Bachmann and Thomas Bernhard (2013), was the winner of the 2011 Peter Lang Young Scholars Competition in German Studies.

Donald N. Myles is an experienced English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) and English for academic purposes (EAP) instructor, with teaching experience in Canada and elsewhere. He holds an MA in applied linguistics and discourse studies from the School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, Canada, and he is an instructor in the EAP programme at the same institution.

Timothy S. Murphy is Houston-Truax-Wentz Professor of English at Oklahoma State University, USA. He is the author of *Wising Up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* (1997) and *Antonio Negri: Modernity and the Multitude* (2012), editor of *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri* (2 volumes, 2005–2007) and translator of Negri's *Subversive Spinoza* (2004), *Books for Burning* (2005), *Trilogy of Resistance* (2011) and *Flower of the Desert* (2015). He was general editor of the scholarly journal *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* from 2000 to 2013.

Sarah Parker is a research fellow at the University of Stirlng, UK. She is the author of *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889–1930* (2013). She is currently working on her second monograph project, provisionally entitled 'Women Poets and Photography, 1850–1930'.

Natalia Rulyova is Lecturer in Russian in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Birmingham, UK. She co-authored (with S. Hutchings) *Television and Culture in Putin's Russia: Remote Control* (2009). She co-edited (with B. Beumers and S. Hutchings) *Globalisation, Freedom and the Media after Communism: The Past as Future* (2009), (with B. Beumers and S. Hutchings) *The Post-Soviet Russian Media: Conflicting Signals* (2009) and (with J. Morris and V. Strukov) a special issue of *New Media in New Europe-Asia*, *Europe-Asia Studies* (2012, 64(8)).

Anne Smedegaard is a doctoral fellow in the Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Her research concerns genre appropriation in institutional settings.

Erin K. Stapleton is a lecturer in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She was awarded a

PhD in 2014 by the London Graduate School and Kingston University, UK, for her thesis 'The Intoxication of Destruction: Georges Bataille's Economy of Expenditure and Destruction in Visual Cultures'.

Lesley Stevenson is an independent scholar. She has written numerous books, articles and book chapters about French artists including Manet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Renoir and Gauguin. Her books have been translated into French, Spanish and Japanese. With Garin Dowd, she co-edited *Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism* (2006).

Michael Stewart is Senior Lecturer in Film, and Film and Media Programme Leader, at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK. His research is focused on film melodrama. His articles on this subject have appeared in various journals, including *Cinema Journal*, *Scope* and *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, and he recently edited an international collection of essays on contemporary film and television melodrama, *Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television* (2014).

Michael Volek is Academic Coordinator for English Language and Effective Writing Skills at Athabasca University, Alberta, Canada. His PhD dissertation examines the contribution of Bakhtinian theory to contemporary sociolinguistic research.

Introduction

Garin Dowd and Natalia Rulyova

Since Plato and Aristotle, debates concerning the centrality of tax-
onomy, classification and type to knowledge formations have been
conducted across multiple disciplinary fields. Such debates have been
accompanied by interrogations of what and how types, categories,
varieties, *genera*, kinds and demarcations appear and operate both endur-
ingly and temporarily in the arts, but also in the sciences and in
philosophy. Increasingly, however, an intensification of applications
of genre as a coordinating concept, often deriving impetus from so-
called rhetorical genre studies models, has taken place in fields such as
the social sciences, education studies, law and communications studies.
Developments within these diverse fields are in part driven by changes
in different political and social approaches to the study of classification,
to 'the order of things', in Michel Foucault's phrase (Foucault, 1970,
p. xxiv), a characteristic which Carolyn Miller has analysed in terms of
the concept of emergence (Miller, 2011).

  One of the common resources and thus problems for theoretical
analysis in the humanities (including the digital humanities) remains
this question of kind. The genealogy of 'genre' itself functions as an
often privileged and foregrounded, but also frequently generative but
occluded, structuring device and regulator of models of meaning, rep-
resentation, interpretation and analysis. As Jacques Derrida asserts in
his essay 'The Law of Genre', the 'remark' of generic identity within
a text or work in any discursive medium can be reflexively presented,
while it may, and he argues always is, equally be unconsciously inscribed
within the performative supplementarity of a text or work (Derrida,
1980, p. 211). In the *Republic*, Plato places the questions of the perfor-
mance of genre at the very heart of an idea no less significant than the
very constitution and maintenance of the political State itself (Plato,

1

1974). The city will be assisted in the regulation of its *polis* all the better if it establishes a hierarchy between three categories of poetry (or more generally artistic expression) to be employed for the enrichment of the populous: simple narrative or diegesis (the dithyramb), dramatic poetry characterized by a particularly damaging form of mimesis, and the mixed genre (associated with Homer) which combines narrative and mimetic elements. Taking these Platonic models of classification, and taking a significant distance from them, Aristotle introduces further criteria for the identification of type (Aristotle, 1976). Derived from the object of imitation and from the medium of expression, Aristotle's classical system of genres (or, more accurately, modes) distinguishes between, *inter alia*, tragedy, epic and comedy (including parody). These classifications – often taking on what Gérard Genette describes as 'the too seductive pattern of the triad [i.e. drama, comedy, epic]' (Genette, 1992, p. 44) – continue to be reviewed many times throughout the centuries, as fundamental models for the registration (in literature as this term has been understood since the beginning of the 19th century) of events, affective states, embodied socio-political structures and systems, resistances to received modes of classification (of ways of being) and as aesthetic criteria. Genre's defining quality might well be this combination of prescriptive decree and in-built critique. As such, acting as a point of registration, genres are fundamentally unstable models, and are paradoxically applied as something that is always already inaccurate, and historically located. Genre is always untimely, and for this very reason it retains a gravitational force for scholars, artists, scientists, poets, musicians, writers and linguists interested in articulating their models of the world.[1] As the call for papers for the 2013 conference Emerging Genres, Forms, Narratives in New Media Environments at North Carolina State University put it, 'As social recognitions that embed histories, ideologies, contradictions – as sites of inventive potential – as recurrent social actions – genres are constitutive of culture.'[2]

The forms and trajectories of genre theory thus remain temporally contextual, yet have been productive of many recognizable ways of seeing, perceiving and being in the world. German romanticism, for example, provides a pivotal moment in the conceptual development of genre theory. The triadic distinction made by Friedrich Schlegel between subjective form (the lyric), objective form (the dramatic) and subjective-objective form (the epic) initiates a reconsideration of the Platonic and Aristotelian founding texts of genre theory by questioning the very notion of a 'truth' of representation (or a finality inherent in the kind), even though and because of the ironic nature of 'types

of representation', or what we describe as genre, ultimately provides a critical position from which no transcendent position can be claimed. Schlegel's interest in the fragmentation of a text, and the text as inherently fragmentary, and the implications of this for writers, poets, literary theory and genre analysis, finds its apogee in the early 19th-century circle of which he was the leading figure, known now as the Jena romantics (Schlegel, 1971). The use by this group in the texts published in the journal *Athenaeum* of an interrogation of genre such that the classificatory template is transcended was later echoed in the work of symbolist authors (e.g. Mallarmé) and in the 20th century by modernist authors (e.g. Proust, Woolf and Joyce). These, among others, open up the field for the theorization of writing as writing (textuality, *écriture*, literature as literature) and analysing the collapse of the viability of the genre systems that dominate the period between Aristotle and themselves (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 1988).

Beyond the domain of theorizations of genre and its undoing in the field of literature (which has nonetheless been the most important in terms of the theorization of genre in itself, divorced from actual empirical content), in the 20th century, different theories and framings of genre emerge, often both responding to and driving forward innovations and changes in the fields of radio, film, television, gaming and more recent communication technologies. The proliferation of different forms of technological mediation occasioned by the implementation of digital platforms since the 1990s has enriched the field of genre studies and stimulated new areas of research. In her paper given at the first Genre Studies Network (GSN) workshop at the University of Birmingham in 2012, leading genre studies scholar Carolyn Miller asserted a link between surges in technological progress and developments in genre theory by comparing an increased interest in genre in the European Renaissance and in the early 21st century (Miller, 2012).

Through technological change, engagement with 'genre' in both its theoretical guises and its more vernacular usages, the term has become ubiquitous in academia and among the general public, the latter encouraged by internet search engines, online retail and new platforms for the dissemination of film to think in patterns, types and categories. Writing in 2000, and thus in advance of some of the latter developments, in his introduction in *Modern Genre Theory*, David Duff observed that

> the increasing cultural dominance of the popular genres themselves (in literature, film and television), and of labelling and labelling

systems that accompany them, have ensured that it is less and less plausible to portray our era as one that has, in any decisive sense, moved 'beyond genre'.

(Duff, 2000, p. 2)

The assertion becomes all the more pertinent in the era of social networks, something which emerges in different ways in several of the chapters in this volume. Changes in genre are not just due to semantic shifts, nor to technological developments, as many contributions to genre studies would assert, but rather, as the research in this volume details, are tacitly and explicitly involved in engaging political discourses of expression, representation and the production of subjectivity in the context of the societies and cultures in which they emerge.

The overarching ambition of this volume is the exploration of trends and developments in genre studies in the early 21st century. While the first approach to genre trajectories is undoubtedly one of identification, the chapters here engage in paradoxical and dynamic manifestations problematizing the idea of a succession of genres. This book comprises six parts: Reassessing Theoretical Traditions; Memory, Testimony, Politics; Revisiting Literary Genres; Visual Cultures; Film Genres; and Pedagogies.

Part I, 'Reassessing Theoretical Traditions: From Ancient Greece to Bakhtin', begins with Garin Dowd's 'Philosophy's Broken Mirror: Genre Theory and the Strange Place of Poetry from Plato to Badiou' (Chapter 1). Dowd argues that poetry, as its form shifts in meaning in the work of Plato, Wallace Stevens and Alain Badiou in particular, plays a paradoxically constitutive role in the development of genre theory, and of philosophy as genre theory. Michael Volek's 'Remembering to Forget: The Role of Time, Space and Memory in Mikhail Bakhtin's Treatment of Language' (Chapter 2) examines the links between genre, memory and the Bakhtinian chronotope. Volek comes to the conclusion that traditions associated with the memory of genre are important in that they help engage the present.

One of the emerging trends captured by the volume is that genre plays an increasingly crucial role in memory studies. In Part II, 'Memory, Testimony, Politics', this trend is represented by Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert (Chapter 3) and Katya Krylova (Chapter 4), who explore the relationship between fiction and non-fiction in literary, dramatic and cinematic texts about the Holocaust. Specifically, Damamme-Gilbert explores the tension between fictional and autobiographical discourses in the work of Modiano, in the context of the German occupation

of France, in her chapter 'The Question of Genre in Holocaust Narrative: The Case of Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder* (1997)'. She argues that Modiano's Holocaust texts tend to blend genres and challenge established literary conventions. Katya Krylova's 'Genre and Memory in Margareta Heinrich and Eduard Erne's *Totschweigen* and Elfriede Jelinek's *Rechnitz (Der Würgeengel)*' further explores this theme by focusing on Heinrich and Erne's documentary film *Totschweigen* (*A Wall of Silence*) and Jelinek's play *Rechnitz* (*Der Würgeengel*). She examines how both works manage to uncover truth about the Holocaust through a complex engagement with the multiplicity of genres employed.

Part III 'Revisiting Literary Genres: Writing Back/Writing Forward' begins with the theme of resistance to established associations between roles prescribed by genre conventions. Sarah Parker in 'The Muse Writes Back: Lyric Poetry and Female Poetic Identity' (Chapter 5) examines lyric poetry as a genre with particular gender conventions, related to the roles of the muse and the poet, and how these conventions developed over time and were subject to increasing challenge both within the lyric genre and in the commentaries on it. Timothy S. Murphy's examination of the object of genre itself in 'How (Not) to Translate an Unidentified Narrative Object or a New Italian Epic' (Chapter 6) describes how established literary genres translate, or rather fail to translate, into other languages, examining the New Italian Epic and how it has been interpreted in English by American translators, and the consequences of mis/translations.

Part IV 'Visual Cultures: Technologies, Institutions and Genres' begins with Lesley Stevenson's '*Seduced by Art*: The Problem of Photography' (Chapter 7), which explores the impact of curatorial strategies and interpretative templates on the reception of visual art forms. She argues that the influence of established hierarchies in fine art on the mediation in gallery institutional contexts of photographic genres is stronger than may be thought at first glance. In relation to contemporary visual culture, genre-based approaches continue to respond to both rapidly changing technological contexts and to the pulse of a longer duration. Thus in his 'Vernacular Photographic Genres after the Camera Phone' (Chapter 8), Peter Buse presents one of the first in-depth studies of the 'selfie' as a genre that is, on the one hand, related to the old and well-known genre of self portrait and, on the other hand, rooted in new popular social practices facilitated by recently developed technologies.

Part V, 'Film Genres: Endurance and Transformation', explores both established genres and an emerging subgenre. In his 'The Enduring

Reach of Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Culture' (Chapter 9), Michael Stewart looks at the metamorphoses in the genre and mode of melodrama with a particular interest in how certain aspects of melodrama are developed in contemporary cinema. Erin K. Stapleton's 'Objects after Adolescence: Teen Film without Transition in *Spring Breakers* and *The Bling Ring*' (Chapter 10) identifies an emerging subgenre of the teen film which stages and interrogates the excessive consumption which characterizes advanced capitalist societies as mediated and sustained by the burgeoning cult of celebrity.

Finally, in Part VI, 'Pedagogies: Applications in Education', Anne Smedegaard's 'Student and Teacher Constructions of the "Generic Contract" in High-School Essays' (Chapter 11) discusses the use of the essay as a genre in comparison with other genres that are used in examination in the context of Danish high schools. Her analysis draws on the Bakhtinian concept of voice, and the linguistic use of personal pronouns by pupils. In their 'Perceptions of Prior Genre Knowledge: A Case of Incipient Biliterate Writers in the EAP Classroom' (Chapter 12), Natasha Artemeva and Donald N. Myles transport the reader to North America and discuss the significance of genre approaches to teaching and learning in the multilingual environment in Canada. They consider the effect of often innate and unarticulated genres learnt in the first language in the development of academic bi- or multiliteracies.

This volume is based on the papers given at the seven workshops organized as part of the Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded international GSN led by one of the editors (Rulyova at the University of Birmingham) and organized jointly with the other (Dowd at the University of West London). The workshops took place in Birmingham, London and Leeds in the course of a year, between October 2012 and October 2013. The chapters of this collection emerge from the themes of the workshops: genre theory, genre and gender, genre and translation, genre and new technologies, genre and memory, and genre and visual culture. Examining the trajectories of these different fields of genre enabled the momentum for the volume to be created.

Insofar as it is concerned with embracing three trajectories – in the geometrical sense – cutting across the family of trajectories known as genre studies, then, the volume seeks both to evoke and to problematize genre and genre studies by exposing the field to new identifications, mappings and projections. By virtue of the ambition announced in its subtitle and made manifest in its contents, it makes the claim that genre studies remains a fertile ground for genre studies activities, and for a broader engagement with the political, social and economic contexts of

our time, as, for example, Lievrouw's (2011) analysis of various modes of online activism argues.

Beyond their academic codification according to medium or artform (e.g. photographic, cinematic or literary genres), which in this volume works as one type of organizing principle, there lie many other ways of thinking about trajectories in genre and in genre studies. The chapters collected here pose several questions for the field: Do certain areas of genre studies find themselves propelled along a common trajectory? Are there many different trajectories coexisting with and/or in conflict with one another? What happens when trajectories cross and something unexpected occurs? One of the aims of the volume (and of the AHRC network upon whose resources it draws) is to create the conditions for the emergence of new zones of engagement with the hermeneutic and creative possibilities of genre-centred approaches to cultural production.

Notes

1. Thus, for example, Alain Badiou, writes in 2005, against what he calls 'the democracy of opinion': 'true democracy, as Plato saw, is equality before the Idea and the repudiation of imitative "communications." Today in particular, when, as in Plato's time, the city is collapsing into futility, democracy is equality before the political Idea, which must be reinvented against its dissolution in the play of interests' (Badiou, 2006, p. 40).
2. At the time of writing, a book, edited by Carolyn Miller, is forthcoming from the proceedings of this event in 2015.

References

Aristotle (1976) *Poetics*, trans. and Introduction M. Heath (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

Badiou, A. (2006) 'Plato, Our Dear Plato', trans. Alberto Toscano, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 11(3), 39–41.

Brunetière, F. (1922) 'La doctrine evolutive et L'Histoire de la Littérature', *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française*, 6th series, 4th edn (Paris: Hachette).

Derrida, J. (1980) 'La Loi du genre'/'The Law of Genre', in *Glyph* 7, pp. 176–201/pp. 202–232.

Duff, D. (ed.) (2000) *Modern Genre Theory* (London: Longman).

Foucault, M. (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock).

Genette, G. (1992) *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. J. Lewin (Los Angeles: University of California Press).

Lacoue-Labarthe, P. and J.-L. Nancy (1988) *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. P. Barnard and C. Lester (Albany: State University of New York Press).

Lievrouw, L. (2011) *Alternative and Activist New Media* (Oxford: Polity), pp. 19–27.

Miller, C. (2011) 'Preliminary Reflections on Emergence', *USC Rhetorical Theory*, http://www.uscrhetoricaltheory.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Miller-Preliminary-Reflections-on-Emergence.pdf, accessed 17 March 2015.

Miller, C. (2012) Unpublished talk delivered at the Genre Studies Network, University of Birmingham, 6 October.

Plato (1974) *The Republic*, 2nd edn, trans. Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

Schaeffer, J.-M. (1989) 'Literary Genres and Textual Genericity', trans. A. Otis, in R. Cohen (ed.), *The Future of Literary Theory* (London: Routledge), pp. 167–187.

Schlegel, F. (1971) *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. and Introduction Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

Schlegel, F. (1980) *Literarische Notizen 1797–1801*, H. Eichner (ed.) (Frankfurt: Ullstein Materiaien).

Part I

Reassessing Theoretical Traditions: From Ancient Greece to Bakhtin

1
Philosophy's Broken Mirror: Genre Theory and the Strange Place of Poetry and the Poem from Plato to Badiou

Garin Dowd

This chapter explores the rather striking manner in which at key moments in the history of philosophy, in the discipline's attempts at self-definition, the genre or literary form of poetry plays a key role. Philosophy, at these moments, has been defined, *inter alia*, as the enemy of poetry, the guiding light for the philosopher who can only try and inevitably fail to emulate its brilliance, or as the anomalous guest at the philosophical table with whom the host discipline has relations which result in either generative or degenerative effects. Insofar as it lays claim to or liaises with philosophy – as we have come to know it today – poetry has thus played a part in the self-definition of genre theory. The aim of this chapter is to capture a very specific set of transfers, transpositions, metonymies and other modes of reversible relations of substitution and surrogacy between philosophy and poetry, and along the way between genre-theory-as-philosophy and poetry.

In the *Republic*, Plato, through the voice of Socrates, casts doubt on the good of purveyors of poetry (and the imitative artforms for which it stands) for the walled-in *polis* of Athens; in his *Poetics*, Aristotle would likewise urge a resistance to mimesis; at the close of the 19th century, the group convened around the journal *Athenaeum* would reverse this position and find in poetry and in its particular embodiment of *poiesis* a model and refuge for philosophy itself – which along with the *polis* was one of the recipients of protection in different ways in Plato and Aristotle. If the Jena romantics mark a turning point in the development

11

of genre theory, they do also in the theorization of the relationship between poetry (as mimesis) and thought (as *dianoia*). In this respect they also issue in what Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe call the 'literary absolute' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, 1988). Such an advent is for Alain Badiou also the inauguration of what he calls the Age of the Poets, the debilitating play operative in philosophy of imitation and deception via false autorecognition (and 'suture') of which he advocates the undoing (Badiou, 1999). In each of these moments, philosophy enters into a particular relationship with poetry and also in the course of this negotiation enters a self-reflexive exploration of genre, of philosophical utterance and poetic utterance in generic terms, as effects of genericity (Schaeffer, 1989) or of what Derrida calls 'degenerescence' (Derrida, 1980), which for him is ultimately the paradoxical mark and remark of the genre gesture.

In her book *Genres of Philosophy*, Robyn Ferrell summarizes the play of repetition, reflection and mirroring, modulated by difference and repetition, which operates between philosophy and the matter of genre:

> *Genre emerges for philosophy as an ontological question.* Genre is the concept which seeks to capture the generative in thought. One might articulate this process of a reproduction of thought as one in which the new thinking is produced but not immaculately. It is the process whereby new thinking can represent something of the old while being an original departure, *reiterating* something *as* new.
>
> (Ferrell, 2002, p. 8)

Repetition and difference: we are very much observing here the standard terrain of genre theory. One of the most significant moments in the modern history of the field was the 1979 Colloque International on Genre at the University of Strasbourg. This conference belongs to a key period in the history of humanities disciplines which had, in 1979, undergone a significant period of self-scrutiny under the impetus of Derridean deconstruction. As the bulletin serving to situate the colloquium states, as the hold of structuralism weakened,

> in recent years much of the interest previously directed at the discovery of or elaboration of scientific models for humanistic research has shifted towards those forms of articulation that have historically engaged the enigmatic aspects of language in the most radical manner. Of these practices, the equivocal but dynamic interrelation of

literature and philosophy has progressively emerged as a decisive area
of investigation.

<div align="right">(Chartin et al., 1980, p. 234)</div>

The Strasbourg bulletin locates the crux of its interests in a particu-
lar historical context, namely in Jena romanticism of the late 18th
and early 19th centuries. Hence it goes on to state that the focus of
the colloquium will not be genre theory but, rather, the transition, in
thinking about genre, from the plural to the singular; specifically the
event will explore 'the *singularisation* of the concept . . . [as] this transi-
tion was effected most of all by German romanticism' (Chartin et al.,
1980, p. 235).

   The aim in what follows is to reprise and reframe some of the ques-
tions associated with the transition. In particular, however, through a
discussion of Alain Badiou's proposition that what he calls the Age of
the Poets inaugurated by the Jena romantics and perpetuated in his
view by philosophy, to its own detriment it will be argued that a return
to the questions posed at the 1979 colloquium, as well as in Plato
and Aristotle, offers insights for contemporary genre theory and genre
studies.

   The interrelated questions to be pursued hereunder then are the fol-
lowing: Why is it that in some ways and to some degree, that when the
discipline of philosophy attempts to define itself, it has so often felt the
need to have recourse to the explanatory power of the genre (or liter-
ary form) of poetry or the poem? Why has poetry so frequently been
synonymous with the beyond of literary taxonomy, while at the same
time it seems to be the core element of genre theory? How can poetry
and philosophy be both anomalous and synonymous, at one and the
same time? And why is it that philosophy and poetry are so strange and
familiar to each other?

Poetry and philosophy

The first significant intervention in this topic is not by any means the
Strasbourg colloquium. Commentators frequently mention the great
philosophical poem of being written by Parmenides. In Parmenides,
philosophy and poetry are born together, not as non-identical twins
but as conjoined. If we turn to Plato and Aristotle we find poetry to
be at the core both of philosophy's self-definition by means of nega-
tion (in the case of Plato) and as providing the occasion for the first
major instalment in the tradition of genre theory as such (Aristotle).

If for Plato poetry is what philosophy first and foremost is not, for Aristotle poetry stands in as the very exemplar of genre or kind of literature.

In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato returns to his theme of the banishment of the poets from the State. He does so for two reasons. The first of these is that he wishes to elaborate on, and provide further support for, the judgement as expressed earlier in Part III of Book III. There he asserts:

> So if we are visited in our state by someone who has the skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and represent all sorts of things, and he wants to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall treat him with all the reverence due to a priest and giver of pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city.
>
> (Plato, 1974, 398 b)

In this edict, Plato would have banished almost all poets and artists aside from those dedicated to specifically pedagogical tools serving military purposes (398 b). The second reason is that Plato seems to wish to offer the illusion of a potential reprieve to the poets and musical performers (and their advocates). For though the poets deserve, for the pleasures they afford, to be, in Book III, praised ('anointing him with myrrh and crowning him with fillets of wool' [398 b]), Plato would still have them escorted to the perimeter of the city. In Book X, however, the notion is at least hypothetically entertained that it is not impossible that one day someone may come, either in poetry or in prose, successfully to argue the case for the poet and associated artists (607 d–e). At least, in Book X, the ranks of admissible works now include 'hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men' (607).

With regard to the first aim, however, namely confirming the need for the banishment of the poets, Plato in Part X of Book X has this to say: the danger inherent in poetry resides in its appeal to the imagination rather than to reason, or, as he puts it, 'the instinctive desires of a part of us' (606 b). Moreover, given its position, at a third remove from the world of forms, poetry has what Plato calls a 'low degree of truth' (605 b).

To give political power to poets would be equivalent to handing over the affairs of state to its worst-equipped citizens. To yield authority to the poet is, for Plato, to delegate to someone who is incapable of a sense of proportion; someone incapable of maintaining the proper hierarchy

of form-copy-simulacrum; the poet is one who views with indifference the distinction between the truthful and the chimerical.

Genre, in this case exemplified in the empirical instantiation of poetry (in various forms), is concerned both with form and with politics. This genre with its constituent types, of poetry as understood by Plato, produces political effects; it alters the shape of the polity. In particular, if it is allowed free rein, it has the capacity to deform the latter. The deformation of the polity by the redistribution of values and the distortion of perspectives and shake up of proportionality brought about by the genre of poetry is to be accounted for by the distance from truth at which it is found to operate.

The two gestures – in Plato – are suggestive of the definition of genre itself as they also are of the paradox of genre. For a work to be included in a genre, it has to alter that genre; the act of belonging to a genre is in some ways the act of belonging to itself as constitutive and founding of that embracing category. It is this paradoxical ambiguity of the whole genre enterprise that informs the philosopher's ludic erasure of literary taxonomy (as in Derrida's *loi du genre*) as well as the more sober retrenchments (Todorov, Genette, Schaeffer) of literary theorists all taking place in, or in the aftermath of, the 1979 colloquium on Genre at the University of Strasbourg.

The colloquium explicitly set itself up as a forum for addressing literature and philosophy. Continental (and, in particular, French) philosophy has regarded the legacy of the Aristotelian and Schlegelian attempts to think genre into the two quite different modes of philosophy and the poem, respectively, with an attentive eye. Under the sway of continental philosophy, the Strasbourg colloquium was presided over by the theoretical mantras developed by one of its organizers, Jean-Luc Nancy, in collaboration with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, taking the themes of their book, published but a few years prior to the colloquium, *The Literary Absolute* (1978). Clear traces of the presiding influence of this doctrine may be seen in the 'Bulletin' issued in advance to the speakers, signed also by Jean-Jacques Chartin and Samuel Weber:

> the literary work came to be considered as an autonomous process, self-instituting and self-reflexive, entailing the laws of its own production and of its own theory. Hence, genre, in the sense of the literary genre, became the genre of self-generation . . . in its generalized and self-generating movement, literature seems to imply its own specification.
>
> (Chartin et al., 1980, p. 236)