Genre

Definition

When the word *genre* is used, people often think in terms of textual forms—for example, the form that a sonnet or a review takes. Other times, people think in terms of categories of items they enjoy—for example, the genre of country music, epic films, or first-person shooter video games. Understood as categories, genres can be helpful as we try to group items by similarity or difference.

But writers often understand genres somewhat differently, in two important ways. First, writers understand that a genre is a response to a situation; in seeking to understand and respond appropriately to a situation, writers employ a given genre. Second, writers understand that genres function in a larger context. They are available for use, but they have both a history and a future; when we write within them, we participate in the genre's future, regardless of the shape that genre may take.

Importance to the Field

Genre, a term that in the modern history of composition has received less attention than the expression *writing process*, is just as important. It helps us understand what we do when we write: composers rely on the conventions of a genre when they write within them *and* when they write against them. Genre also helps us understand the continuity and flexibility of writing and texts: we see in the long histories of genres the ways that they have developed, always in response to the needs of a situation, and can sense the way that they may develop in the future.

Resources

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