

**Genre Theory Seminar**  
PO ENG 170L (Spring, 2013)  
Crookshank 01, MW 11:00-12:15

Professor Dara Regaignon

Office Hours: Thursday 10:30-11:00am  
& by appointment  
Crookshank 203

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### **Course Description**

Exploration of genre as a category of analysis that provides not only a means to define, describe and catalogue kinds of texts, but also to define, organize and generate rhetorical and social action in a textually-mediated world. Focus is on both literary and rhetorical theories of genre; students will select the particular written genres and texts. Prerequisite: 67.

The genre of the course description is one we might usefully consider in our explorations this semester. It is—like most other short genres, such as tweets or sonnets—quite rigid, and doesn't necessarily allow for elaboration or detail. As I note above, in this seminar we will grapple with both literary and rhetorical theories of genre. Rhetorical genre theory typically focuses our attention on authors (or speakers), and is often more interested in *typical* examples of a genre than in atypical ones. It also directs us outward, to the rhetorical (and hence social) situation of the genre or text. By contrast, literary genre theory focuses on *readers* (including critics) and prefers to consider the anomalous or unusual instance. Cultural context or rhetorical situation—of the text's creation or, for that matter, its reception—are interesting, but are not found essential to interpretation, or to the genre itself.

Can we reconcile these two ways of reading, of thinking about text and kind? This is our question this semester. Our task—jointly and severally—is to work together to investigate these questions and to generate new ones about how genres function, shaping knowledge, perception, invention, and reading. From the outset, we will define “genre” broadly, including new media genres (tweets, blog posts, tumblrs), “traditional” literary genres (novels, sonnets, essays, plays), and what might be called “transactional” genres, such as memos, email, scientific articles, self-help books, and the like.

### **Course Expectations & Requirements**

Texts (available at Huntley; required)

- Anis Bawarshi and Mary Jo Reiff, *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* (Parlor Press, 2010).
- John Frow, *Genre. New Critical Idiom*. (Routledge, 2006).
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (Verso, 2005).

*Additional readings are available on Sakai.*

### Attendance & Participation

A seminar is an exercise in the collaborative construction of knowledge. To that end, attendance is mandatory in both body and mind. Our readings this semester are dense. You should come to class with questions, observations, curiosities, and half-formed responses. You should bring annotated copies of the readings, with notes directing your (and, as a result, *our*) attention to the particular passages that most intrigued you. This will allow us to work through the questions, observations, curiosities, and half-formed ideas together. You may miss four (4) classes over the course of the semester without penalty. (I do not need to know the reason, but it is courteous to let me know in advance if possible.) After 4 classes, your final grade will be lowered by half a letter grade for every additional absence (a B+ will become a B, and so forth.) If you miss eight (8) classes, you will find it difficult to pass the course.

### Assignments

The central work of this seminar is for you to develop your own working theory of genre and to undertake some sort of genre analysis. The written and oral assignments (in addition, of course, to participation in seminar) are designed to give you occasions to move your thinking along that path.

- Seminar Paper. In your seminar paper (20-25 pages), may take one of two approaches to the central question(s) of the course. You may either 1) investigate a problem or question in genre theory, developing and articulating a theory of your own or 2) undertake the theoretically-informed analysis of a genre or genre set. These seminar papers—like scholarly articles, one of their antecedent genres—should be ambitious, rigorous, thoughtful, and provocative. Our readings in the final weeks of the course will come from your research.

I have broken this process down for you into what I hope are manageable steps. These steps are modeled on some of the common genres academics write as they work on articles. **Final Drafts are due Wednesday, May 8 (seniors) and Friday, May 10 (non-seniors).**

- *Proposal/Abstract*. Typically, when scholars wish to participate in a conference or publish in a journal, they first submit a proposal or abstract. This is often the first formal writing done for a new project, and its rhetorical task is to interest a new (and powerful!) reader in your ideas. It needs to intrigue the audience, and to convince them that the project will make a significant contribution to the scholarly conversation. Your proposals—completely with titles and preliminary lists of works cited—are due on **Friday, March 29**.
- *Conference Paper*. Conferences are often the first place scholars share a project with peers. It's therefore a kind of public first draft, where feedback is given in person rather than through a written (and typically anonymous) review. In literary studies, conference presentations are written out and read aloud (dynamically, one hopes). In recent years, they have come increasingly to include visuals, as appropriate. As part of the Senior Exercise, Pomona senior English majors must participate in the Senior Symposium on **Friday, April 19**.

We will have our own Symposium the following Monday in class for our non-seniors. This is therefore both an oral and a written assignment; hard copies of the Conference Papers are due two days after the relevant Symposia: **Sunday, April 21** for seniors and **Wednesday, April 24** for non-seniors.

- *Optional draft.* I assume that every piece of writing you turn in for this course will go through many drafts and revised in light of the feedback of many smart readers before I see it. You have one another and the Writing Fellows with whom you can work in progress, as well—I hope!—a network of friends whose critical eyes you trust. For the Seminar Paper, you *may* turn in a draft to me for feedback. If you do so, I must have it by **Monday, April 29** if I am to be able to get you comments in time for them to be useful.
- Reflections. Writing about theoretical texts and questions provides its own peculiar pleasures and challenges. In order to give you the chance to focus your thinking about these abstract ideas and to hone your close reading skills as you bring them to bear on theoretical texts, the first several weeks of the semester will be spent with shorter writing assignments. **You must turn in three (3) Reflections** over the course of the first five full weeks of the semester. Reflections are due on Fridays by 5:00pm and should be at least 600 words (two pages) in length. They should include appropriate citation information and may consider any of the readings from that week.
- Discussion. You will each be responsible for launching and guiding discussion on two occasions this semester.
  - *Launch.* At some point before Spring Break, you will each *launch* our discussion on one day of class. In launching discussion, it will be your responsibility to elicit the foci and interests of the group before helping us choose a particular area of concentration for that day's seminar investigation.
  - *Research Discussion.* Starting shortly after Spring Break, our readings will be drawn from those you have identified and selected from your research, and you will each lead discussion of those materials for roughly 40 minutes. Materials will be due to me **one week** before your discussion is scheduled, so that I can post them on Sakai for distribution to the class.

*A note on formatting.* Please remember to format your papers so that there are no extra spaces between paragraphs, the pages are numbered, the text is double-spaced, and the margins and font are of a reasonable size (that is, margins of about an inch and text of 11- or 12-point). Do title your papers and include your name and the date on the first page. All work should be turned in via the Sakai Drop Box, unless we've made specific alternative arrangements.

### Grades

I think that it is easier to write when you understand the genre, including the expectations for it. To that end, my grading rubric for Conference and Seminar Papers is available on Sakai (→Resources→Syllabus), as is that for Reflection Papers. Before the first of you leads discussion, we will spend time in class generating criteria for successful discussion, so that I

can generate clear guidelines for those, as well. I welcome questions about the feedback I give you throughout the semester.

### *Final Grade Breakdown*

- Attendance & Participation (10%)
- Written Assignments (65%)
  - 3 Reflection Papers (5% each, or 15%)
  - Proposal/Abstract (10%)
  - Conference Paper (10%)
  - Final Draft (30%)
- Oral Assignments
  - Launch (5%)
  - Symposium Presentation (10%)
  - Research Discussion (10%)

### Academic Honesty

Your work for this class is an occasion for you to develop your ideas about the topics and texts of the course. To that end, I assume that the work you submit to me 1) was written by you (and only you) and 2) has not been previously submitted in another class. Including language *or ideas* from others in your paper without proper citation is an act of academic dishonesty. Please don't do it. But *do* discuss your paper and ideas with others, and include a sentence or two acknowledging their contributions to your thinking and writing.

You can see the Pomona College Academic Honesty Policy here:

<http://catalog.pomona.edu/content.php?catoid=7&navoid=394>. If you are worried about whether or not to cite something, please refer to the *MLA Style Guide*—or ask me.

### Resources

No scholar works alone, as the genre of academic acknowledgements reveals. The Writing Center (on the ground floor of Pearsons Hall) offers students free, one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process—from generating a thesis and structuring an argument to fine-tuning a draft. Consultations are available by appointment, which you can make online: [http://my.pomona.edu/ics/Academics/Writing\\_Center\\_Page.jnz](http://my.pomona.edu/ics/Academics/Writing_Center_Page.jnz).

You are *required* to meet with me for an individual consultation a total of four (4) times over the course of the semester:

- The day before you launch discussion, so that you can get feedback on your plan.
- Between the two library sessions (Feb. 20-Mar. 11), to get early feedback on your Seminar Paper project.
- Prior to the Symposium/Conference Paper deadline.
- Before turning in your Research Discussion materials.

If you turn in a draft of the Seminar Paper, we will also meet after I've sent you my comments to brainstorm your revision plan.

In addition, Gale Burrow, the librarian who will be working with our course, is available to consult with you individually on your Seminar Paper projects. By appointment.

To request academic accommodation due to a disability, please contact Dean Dan Tzuang. He can be contacted via e-mail at [dan.tzuang@pomona.edu](mailto:dan.tzuang@pomona.edu) or at 909 607-2147.

### Class Schedule

(Readings marked with "S" can be found on Sakai.)

#### Literary & Rhetorical Theories of Genre

- W 1/23      Introductions & Definitions
- M 1/28      Reading Generically  
              Frow, chapter 1  
              Dubrow, *Genre*, chapter 2 (S)  
              *Recommended*: Bawarshi & Reiff, chapter 1
- W 1/30      Literary Theories of Genre I—**Brendan**  
              B&R, chapter 2  
              Frow, chapter 3
- \*\*\*F 2/1**      **Reflection paper due**
- M 2/4      Literary Theories of Genre II—**Rachel**  
              Dubrow, *Genre*, chapter 4 (S)  
              Frye, "Rhetorical Criticism" (S)
- W 2/6      Rhetorical Theories of Genre I—**Emily**  
              B&R, chapters 5 & 6  
              *Recommended*: Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" (S)
- \*\*\*F 2/8**      **Reflection paper due**
- M 2/11      Rhetorical Theories of Genre II—**Julia**  
              Devitt, *Writing Genres*, chapter 1 (S)  
              Frow, chapter 5  
              *Recommended*: Bazerman, "What Written Knowledge Does" (S)
- W 2/13      Genre as Social Action—**Priscila**  
              Miller, "Genre as Social Action" (S)  
              Berkenkotter & Huckin, "Rethinking Genre from a Sociocognitive  
              Perspective" (S)  
              *Recommended*: Miller, "Rhetorical Communication" (S)
- \*\*\*F 2/15**      **Reflection paper due**
- M 2/18      Genre Sets & Systems—**Chandler**  
              Bazerman, "Speech Acts, Genres, and Activity Systems" (S)  
              Russell, "Rethinking Genre in School and Society" (S)

W 2/20 Library Session (meet in Honnold)  
\*\*\*F 2/22 **Reflection paper due**

M 2/25 Genre Knowledge  
*Guest Speaker: Anis Bawarshi, University of Washington*  
Devitt, *Writing Genres*, chapter 5 (S)  
Reiff & Bawarshi, "Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use  
Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate Writing Contexts in First-  
Year Composition" (S)

**4:15, ENA THOMPSON ROOM**

**PROFESOR BAWARSHI'S TALK, TITLE TO BE ANNOUNCED.**

*(Attendance is required.)*

W 2/27 Uptake—**Sam**  
Freadman, "Anyone for Tennis?" (S) and "Uptake" (S)  
*Recommended:* Ede & Lunsford, "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked"  
(S)

\*\*\*F 3/1 **Reflection paper due**

M 3/4 Addressivity—**Aliza**  
Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres"

W 3/6 Reading for (Historical) Readers  
Packet from my research materials, to be distributed.

M 3/11 Library Session 2 (meet in Honnold)

W 3/13 New (Media) Genres  
From *Genres in the Internet* (S) (chapters TBA)

March 16-24 SPRING BREAK

### **High (Genre) Theory**

M 3/25 Todorov, "The Origins of Genres" (S)

W 3/27 Thomas Beebee, from *The Ideology of Genre* (S)  
\*\*\*F 3/29 **Proposals/Abstracts due**

M 4/1 Fredric Jameson, from *The Political Unconscious* (S)

W 4/3 Derrida, "The Law of Genre" (S)

M 4/8 Moretti (chapters TBA)

W 4/10 Student-led Discussions  
• Chandler  
• Aliza  
Readings to be determined

### Reading Generically

M 4/15 Student-led Discussions  
• Brendan  
• Rachel  
Readings to be determined.

W 4/17 Student-led Discussions  
• Julia  
•  
Readings to be determined.

**\*\*\*FRIDAY, 4/19: Senior Symposium**

**\*\*\*SUNDAY 4/21 Conference Papers due (Seniors)**

M 4/22 Junior Symposium (in class)

W 4/24 Student-led Discussions  
• Priscila  
• Emily  
Readings to be determined.

**\*\*\* F 4/35 Conference Papers due (Juniors)**

M 4/29 Student-led Discussions  
Readings to be determined.

**\*\*\* by 5:00pm Draft of Seminar Paper due (optional)**

W 5/1 Student-led Discussions  
Readings to be determined.

M 5/6 *PMLA* Special Issue: Remapping Genre (selections) (S)

W 5/8 *PMLA* Special Issue: Remapping Genre (selections) (S)

**\*\*\* by 5:00pm Seminar Papers due (Seniors)**

**\*\*\* F 5/10 by 5:00pm Seminar Papers due (Juniors)**