

Genre Across Borders

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Over the last few years I have been fortunate to work on the *Genre Across Borders* project, an international and interdisciplinary network for genre researchers, with Carolyn R. Miller, in collaboration with several colleagues.¹ The *Genre Across Borders* project, in many ways, tackles the questions this issue of *Rhetor* addresses, namely how national identities intersect with intellectual traditions. Genre studies has proliferated across disciplines and national borders to establish a large, diverse, and robust body of scholarship. *Genre Across Borders* aims to be a hub for researchers across nations and disciplines to connect with, to draw on the resources and theories from those in allied areas of research, and to facilitate pedagogical resources for the variety of students we teach. More concretely, *Genre Across Borders* functions as a website where original research overviews are published, teaching materials can be shared, and an ever-growing glossary of terms and bibliography serve as foundational materials for genre research across disciplines.

Miller's 1984 "Genre as Social Action" revitalized a rhetorical sense of genre. She argued for what seemed a stifled term that has bloomed into a social rhetorical concept used across rhetorical studies, from presidential and political rhetorics to studies of health and medicine and various pedagogical

inquiries and interventions. Genre studies has multiple historical trajectories as well, with theories of genre emerging and evolving in different traditions and with different regional affiliations. Hyon attempted to account for these “significantly different” traditions, and mapped three well-established schools of genre, and perhaps most interestingly here, she mapped two of these intellectual traditions with geographical borders. The first, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which deals primarily with genre as a mechanism for professional communications, is broadly studied and taught. The second genre school is that of the New Rhetoric, or North American, genre scholars. Third, we learn about the Systemic Functional Linguistics traditions, descended from “British-born scholar Michael Halliday” (696), and now a prolific Australian tradition often referred to as the “Sydney school” (Bawarshi and Reiff 4). And if North America seems too wide a cut, some years ago Segal even suggested that a “rhetoric of the professions” has a distinct flavour in Canada where “rhetoricians of science are not easily distinguishable from genre rhetoricians, and, sometimes, a thesis in the text or subtext of their work is that genre study can have implications for professional social action” (66). More recently genre scholars have considered the Brazilian school of genre theory, which has been “energized by the Brazilian Ministry of Education’s National Curricular Parameters and the International Symposium on Genre Studies (SIGET), held since 2003” (Bawarshi and Reiff 5). There are also emerging traditions in the UK and France, as well as emerging Scandinavian schools of genre (see: Miller and Kelly, 2016).

Particular education and training lead to certain ways of producing knowledge and engagement in certain discourse communities and theoretical traditions. However, the agency of these individuals might become embedded in different kinds of systems of knowledge production or discourse communities. A scholarly tradition that seems aligned with certain national institutions does not prescribe the movement of individual scholars across borders. We know this and we know the demands of academic markets take agency to move individuals around. Perhaps my own case of moving from Canada to the United States and back is one such example,

with the affinities to rhetorical genre studies firmly established, but my own agency and an apparatus beyond me of material conditions, mentors, and disciplinary tides helped sweep me along. Arguably this movement is also an important condition for international scholarship, as an experience that will inform one's scholarship and understanding of broader pedagogical and theoretical concerns.

Even short exchanges and visits and engagements help reify the international reach of conversations about genre. Take, for instance, the 1994 Rethinking Genre conference held in Ottawa, Canada, or the Genre 2012: Rethinking Genre 20 Years conference, also held in Ottawa. Miller's 2013 Emerging Genres, Forms, and Narratives in New Media Environments conference at North Carolina State University in the United States similarly drew an interdisciplinary and international crowd. Several conferences in Brazil under the SIGET banner have drawn a range of scholars for a number of years, as well. Another important effort has been a scholarly exchange program sponsored by the Brazilian government that has supported doctoral students who wish to study abroad with prominent genre scholars. With such wide reach, genre studies demands a serious effort for an international exchange. And building on efforts to cross disciplinary and national boundaries, *Genre Across Borders* attempts to aid in such a program.

Genre Across Border's advisory board includes scholars working in Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United States. Despite new communication technologies (including a multitude of ways for researchers to connect across vast regions), interdisciplinary and international research networks demand thoughtful attention, curation, and our ongoing efforts. Original research introduction articles are commissioned for the site from top scholars across disciplines and regions, and the results of the work have been translated from English to Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, and we hope many more languages. Research introductions provide important resources for researchers working in genre because they provide history and context for a particular tradition. Joining a scholarly conversation of

course requires some understanding of these varied traditions so we can productively consider and challenge different theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and pedagogical practices.

Volumes emerging from the two Ottawa conferences—Freedman and Medway's *Genre and the New Rhetoric* and, following the 2012 conference, Artemeva and Freedman's *Genre Studies Around the Globe*—continued to put different genre traditions into conversation. Another effort to put these conversations together is *Emerging Genres in New Media Environments*, edited by Carolyn R. Miller and me. The book is a collection of genre and new media studies from scholars in Canada, the United States, England, and Brazil, offering an international view of genre, and, importantly, a view which begins to tease apart the relationship between genres and new media forms. From “Natural User Interfaces” (McCorrle) to video games (Mehlenbacher and Kampe and also Randall) to video-recorded and socially shared personal narratives (Ding, Arduser, and Hartelius) and beyond, each chapter offers different disciplinary traditions, conceptions of genre, and even problem sets.

But what of the influences that might shape rhetoric in a particularly Canadian context? Certainly material affordances that undergird our research infrastructures shape the disciplinary context within particular borders. Returning to Segal we find an optimistic stance on this matter, when she suggests, “One reason that Canadian rhetoricians are drawn to socially situated research is, I think, rhetorical optimism—an optimism that comes from Canada's relative smallness, centrism, and liberalism” (66). On the heels of the creation of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Segal argues that “in this new climate of health research spending in Canada, a humanist is an imaginable member on a research team on, for example, mental illness—a team that might include as well, a biochemist, a psychiatrist, a neuroendocrinologist, and a medical anthropologist. The humanist on any number of health research teams might certainly be a rhetorician” and in these kinds of research efforts there is a “promise of making a difference” through applied research in the rhetoric of professional

discourse Segal describes (67). Scholars are situated from different vantages in departments of Communication, of Education, of English studies; in writing centres, and even in health sciences programs. Here Canadian rhetorical studies brings together rich intellectual traditions and interests to unique national problems and pedagogical mandates. This is to say nothing of how strong Canadian schools of thought on media studies (namely, the Toronto School) might influence how we imagine genre and its relationship to material and media.

While historical, political, social, cultural, and material influences of a nation-state are likely to shape the work produced by those scholars studying and working within that context, it is not in those constraints that we find strengths *per se*. Rather it is the proclivity to look to others (those who are achieving success in education, social progress, and so on) that can also be our strength as scholars. Histories, political realities, social norms, cultures, and material realities may differ across nations, states, or provinces.

Works Cited

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Notes

1. *Genre Across Borders* is an online resource, and can be found at:
<http://genreacrossborders.org>