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Hybrid Genres

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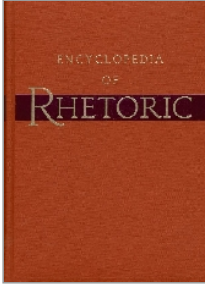
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Hybrid Genres

Disciplines

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	<h2>Encyclopedia of Rhetoric</h2>
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Hybrid genres.

Genre is a word borrowed from the French to signify a distinct species, form, type, or kind. The act of isolating genres implies that significantly similar characteristics inhere in works of the same type regardless of author and period of production. A genre of rhetoric contains elements that share characteristics distinguishing them from elements of other rhetorical genres.

For centuries, the discipline of rhetoric anchored itself in the generic distinctions of Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who classified rhetoric as deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. Aristotle's view was that genre is defined by the kind of audience that makes a certain sort of decision on a distinctive issue, developed through recurring lines of argument, characterized by a typical style, and employing certain strategies that are particularly apt for these circumstances. Genres are not only dynamic responses to circumstances but also a potential fusion of elements that may be energized or actualized as a strategic response to a situation. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1978) defined genres as dynamic fusions of substance, style, and situational elements and as constellations that are strategic responses to the demands of the situation and purposes of rhetoric.

Hybrid genres can be a fusion of elements of existing genres arising from unprecedented rhetorical situations, or they can be the product of antecedent genres. “Rhetorical hybrid” is a metaphor intended to emphasize the productive but transitory character of these new combinations of rhetorical acts. Hybrids are important to understanding the coherence of complex rhetorical forms. Stable or constant rhetorical situations over time will encourage generic standardization of forms. Variance or change in rhetorical situations will encourage generic modification. To the extent that exigencies, media, audience expectations, and the natural context remain constant, a rhetorical situation may be viewed as unchanging. Alteration in any of these variables will encourage generic modification.

Because speech acts are governed both by the rhetorician and by the situation, complex combinations will bring about new kinds of discourse. A literary genre, for example, will maintain a standardized form only so long as it is capable of carrying the intended meaning of authors. When authors are unable to express their vision within the prescribed generic confines, those authors will either create a flawed work or will alter the stock genre to fit their needs. Unable to express his symbolic vision within the confines of the narrative novel, Flaubert expanded the options of future novelists by writing *Madame Bovary*.

Rhetorical critics, in their analysis of great speeches, have come to recognize that the elements of forensic, epideictic, and deliberative genres identified by Aristotle overlap and combine in practice. Harold Zyskind (1950) details the complex intertwining of epideictic and deliberative elements in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Michael Leff and Gerald Mohrmann (1974) identified in Lincoln's address at Cooper Union a fusion of deliberative and epideictic elements into a form they labeled the campaign oration. This fusion produced a new kind of genre.

Another hybrid—the deliberative eulogy—fuses the elements of the ceremonial address, which Aristotle called epideictic, and the legislative form, which he called deliberative. In her analysis of the eulogies by members of Congress in honor of Robert Kennedy, Jamieson (1982) identified rhetorical moments when the situation warranted generic modification and a shift to rhetorical hybrids. Eulogies are required to mark the death of another person. Even if speakers have never heard or read a eulogy, they will, if they are not insensitive to the situation, deliver eulogistic rhetoric. The situation demands it and audiences expect it. In Western culture, a eulogy will acknowledge the death, transform the relationship between the living and the dead from present to past tense, ease the mourners' terror at confronting their own mortality, console them by arguing that the deceased lives on, and encourage unity within the community. The eulogies of Robert Kennedy met those criteria.

These eulogies went further, however, and in the process created a hybrid genre. Those members who were supporters of Kennedy and his legislative actions also called for handgun control—a call appropriate to deliberative discourse. The situation at issue was that of the assassination of an active legislator by a man with a gun. In this context, the eulogies prompted demands for gun control as a means of memorializing RFK. If Kennedy had opposed such legislation, these calls would have been inappropriate. Because the deliberative subform risks dividing the community that the eulogy must reknit, there is little likelihood that calls for action would be controversial or that they would contradict the presumed wishes of the deceased. Kennedy, however, was a proponent of handgun legislation. Colleagues who supported Kennedy's proposals while he lived were comfortable using the situation to call for their enactment as a memorial. Colleagues who did not share Kennedy's legislative proposals did not include a deliberative section in their eulogies but instead memorialized his integrity and character.

Rhetorical fusions, then, are rule governed. In the eulogies of Kennedy delivered in Congress, the eulogistic requirements predominated and deliberative appeals were subordinate. Deliberative elements fuse to form organic wholes when they are consistent with and contribute to the goals of the eulogy. In observing these eulogies, one can draw three conclusions. First, in eulogistic settings, one generic form predominates. Second, hybrids are called forth by complex situations and purposes and, as such, are transitory and situation bound. Identification of different generic elements and occasionally of whole genres within such acts allows the critic to understand how such acts work and to predict their appearance.

Eulogistic hybrids, such as the one occasioned by Robert Kennedy's death, occur infrequently and under variable circumstances. As a result, they have not altered the expectations audiences bring to eulogistic occasions or rites of investiture. There are times, however, when a fusion occurs with some regularity and creates formal expectations in knowledgeable audiences. The fusion of some hybrids is sustained by a recurrent situation, such as presidential inaugurations, which combine constant epideictic elements with varying deliberative elements. Lincoln's first inaugural masterfully blended these two genres. He called for the unifying of the nation while reaffirming core communal values; these were epideictic elements. And he asked the audience to consider whether or not secession was the appropriate solution to the problem of sectional disputes; these were deliberative elements. Successful inaugurations will establish unity after a divisive campaign, rehearse traditional values, and reassure the citizenry that the newly-elected president is not a tyrant but a person who needs the help of God, the people, and Congress in order to govern. At the same time, they outline the philosophy or tone of the administration and set its agenda.

The fusion of other hybrids is sustained by an institution such as the papacy, illustrated by encyclicals that fuse the elements of the apostolic letter with those of the Roman imperial decree. The papal encyclical is a didactic letter. In an encyclical, the pope, speaking as Christ's visible representative on earth, addresses his intended audience on matters of serious moral concern. The content, intent, and form of the papal encyclical betray its apostolic ancestry. The imprint of

early epistles is particularly evident in the salutations and concluding exhortations of the contemporary encyclicals. The apostolic epistles and papal encyclicals situate themselves to their audiences in a dichotomous fashion as either fraternal or paternal. Finally, the contemporary encyclicals' use of classical Latin, an authoritative tone, and use of protocols echo the epistles. When rhetoricians are confronted with unprecedented situations, often they perceive the situation through antecedent genres. This perception facilitates the emergence of hybrid genres.

Genres should not be viewed as static forms but as evolving phenomena. The notion of hybrid genres frees rhetoric from a concern that genres are fixed and unchanging. Rhetoricians perpetually modify genres. These modifications, as a result of new institutional structures or situations, give rise to rhetorical hybrids, oftentimes arising out of antecedent genres. Some scholars have proposed that rhetorical criticism would be advanced by constructing hierarchies or exhaustive taxonomies of genres. By their very nature, rhetorical hybrids, formed out of variable generic elements, will be difficult to place in such a hierarchy. Moreover, they may confound efforts to construct exhaustive generic taxonomies as new situations and generic combinations develop.

Generic analysis enables us to appreciate the idiosyncratic as well as the recurrent, and to recognize the appropriate response to a complex situation. It enables a critic to describe the special characteristics of an address. It further allows the critic to recognize when conflicting demands from the audience, the institution, or the rhetorician will arise, and the circumstances under which elements from different genres are demanded. Genre analysis provides the critic with the ability to parse the rhetorical constraints governing their successful combination.

A generic critic recognizes the combination of recurrent elements that forms a hybrid. At the same time, such a critic can perceive the unique fusion that is a response to the idiosyncratic needs of a particular situation, institution, and rhetorician. The rhetorical hybrid represents a fusion of elements that, however transitory, stands as a potential kind of response to situations that future rhetoricians perceive in similar ways. Without a generic perspective, a critic would be less likely to perceive the recurrent elements as recurrent or the variable elements as an extension of the recurrent core of the eulogy or the presidential speech. Without the concept of the rhetorical hybrid, the critic would be less likely to capture the dynamic nature of rhetorical invention operating within the constraints of the situation. [See INVENTION.]

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