2
THE GENRE FUNCTION

> [W]hat we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have. . . . As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality.
>
> CAROLYN MILLER, "Genre as Social Action"

> We are written only as we write, by the agency within us which always already keeps watch over perception, be it internal or external. The "subject" of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata: the Mystic Pad, the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found.
>
> JACQUES DERRIDA, "Freud and the Scene of Writing"

At the beginning of *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke wonders: "What is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (1969a, xv). Burke describes and locates this question of motive in a dramatistic pentad made up of scene (where an action takes place), act (what is taking place), agent (who is performing the action), agency (how, through what means, is the action carried out), and purpose (why is the action being carried out). Motive, he explains, does not reside in the agent alone, a romantic concept, but in the relationships between all five terms of the pentad, all of which conspire to define and enact the drama of motive. Within the scope of this book, I essentially ask the same question as it applies to the study and teaching of invention in composition studies: what is involved when we say what writers are doing and why they are doing it? In response, I answer that *genre* is involved. Genres are

discursive sites that coordinate the acquisition and production of motives by maintaining specific relations between scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose. And when writers begin to write in different genres, they participate within these different sets of relations, relations that motivate them, consciously or unconsciously, to invent both their texts and themselves. In this way, genre functions as what Miller calls "an aspect of cultural rationality" (C. Miller 1984, 165), a "stabilized-for-now or stabilized-enough site of social and ideological action" (Schryer 1994, 107) in which writers acquire and articulate motives to write. In this chapter I turn to scholarship in literary theory, applied linguistics, and rhetoric and composition to describe genres as such sites of action.[1] Then in later chapters I will examine how writers get positioned within and negotiate these sites of action, and will consider the ways this positioning can inform our understanding of invention as well as our study and teaching of writing.

The past twenty years have witnessed a dramatic reconceptualization of genre and its role in the production and interpretation of texts and culture. Led in large part by scholars in applied linguistics (Bhatia, Freedman, Halliday, Kress, Martin, Medway, Swales), communication studies (Yates and Orlikowski), education (Christie, Dias, Paré), and rhetoric and composition studies (Bazerman, Berkenkotter, Campbell, Coe, Devitt, Giltrow, Jamieson, C. Miller, Russell, Schryer), this movement has helped transform genre study from a descriptive to an explanatory activity, one that investigates not only text-types and classification systems, but also the linguistic, sociological, and psychological assumptions underlying and shaping these text-types. No longer mainly used to structure and classify a literary textual universe as Northrop Frye (1957) and others in literary studies have traditionally offered, genres have come to be defined as typified rhetorical strategies communicants use to recognize, organize, and act in all kinds of situations, literary and nonliterary. As such, there is a growing sense among those who study genre that genres do not just help us define and organize kinds of texts; they also help us define and organize

kinds of situations and social actions, situations and actions that the genres, through their use, rhetorically make possible. This notion of genre as a dynamic site for the production and regulation of textured, ideological activities (a site in which habitual language practices enact and reproduce situated relations, commitments, and actions) has a great deal to offer to the study and teaching of invention in composition studies. For instance, by maintaining the desires they help to fulfill, genres provide a way for us to interrogate analytically how writers get positioned within these textured desires to act at the same time as they enable writers to articulate and fulfill these desires as recognizable, meaningful, consequential actions. It is the overall argument of this book that we can and should make these "genred" discursive spaces (Bazerman 2002, 17) visible to students, not only for the sake of fostering in students a critical awareness of what genres help us do and not do, but also for the sake of enabling students to participate in these spaces more meaningfully and critically.

To make such a claim for genre, to argue that genres are sites for literate, ideological action, is to endow genre with a status that will surely make some readers uneasy. After all, in literary studies, genre has traditionally occupied a subservient role to the writer and the text he or she produces, at best used as a classificatory device or an a posteriori interpretive tool in relation to already existing texts and motives, and at worst censured as formulaic writing. Suffice it to say, genre has not enjoyed very good standing in literary studies, particularly since the late eighteenth century when interest in literary "kinds" gave way to a concern for literary "texts" and their writers, a shift that can be characterized as moving from "poetics" to the poem and the poet. So it is not surprising that the work done to reconceptualize genre over the last twenty years has come predominantly from scholars working outside of literary studies, scholars who are interested in how and why typified texts reflect and organize everyday social occasions and practices.[2] It is their work, with its basis in applied linguistics and sociology, that informs a great

deal of the theoretical underpinnings for this book. This chapter will examine some of these underpinnings. But breaking with what has become common practice in nonliterary reconceptualizations of genre—or what is becoming referred to as "rhetorical genre studies"—I do not want to ignore literary considerations of genre or, for that matter, to argue that literary theories of genre are inimical to rhetorical theories of genre. Instead, by reviewing more recent studies of genre by literary scholars alongside studies of genre by scholars in rhetoric, composition, and applied linguistics, I hope to demonstrate how much literary and rhetorical theories of genre have to contribute to one another, indeed, how when we build on the knowledge of both, we can measure the extent to which genres are constitutive both of literary and nonliterary contexts as well as of literary and nonliterary writers. Putting literary and rhetorical theories of genre in dialogue with one another will allow us to see how all genres, far from being transparent lenses for identifying and organizing texts, indeed function as sites in which communicants use language to make certain situated activities possible. Since genres locate all writers within such situated language practices, ideologies, and activities, they enable us to examine more fully the "social organization of cognition" (Bazerman 1997a, 305)—the conditions and assumptions that shape the choices writers make when they begin to write, conditions and assumptions that, as I will explore in later chapters, will shed more light on the study and teaching of invention.

FROM AUTHOR FUNCTION TO GENRE FUNCTION

In describing genres as sites of action, I build on what Michel Foucault calls the "author-function" in order to describe how the same principles that govern literary activity, when expanded from the author to the genre function, are at work governing a wider range of socio-discursive activity. In "What Is an Author?" Foucault attempts to locate and articulate the "space left empty by the author's disappearance" (1994, 345) in structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory. If the author can no longer be

said to constitute a work, Foucault wonders, then what does? What is it that delimits discourse so that it becomes recognized as a work which has certain value and status? Sans the author, in short, what is it that plays "the role of the regulator of the fictive" (353)? For Foucault, the answer is the "author-function." The author-function does not refer to the "real" writer, the individual with the proper name who precedes and exists independently of the work. Instead, it refers to the author's name, which, in addition to being a proper name, is also a literary name, a name that exists only in relation to the work associated with it. The author-function, then, endows a work with a certain cultural status and value. At the same time, the author-function also endows the idea of "author" with a certain cultural status and value. So the author-function not only constitutes the work as having a certain cultural capital; it also constitutes the producer of that work into the privileged role of "author" as opposed to the real writer with "just a proper name like the rest" (345).

The author-function delimits what works we recognize as valuable and how we interpret them at the same time as it accords the status of author to certain writers: "these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo . . ." (Foucault 347). The role of author, therefore, becomes akin to a subject position regulated, as much as the work itself, by the author-function. Constituted by the author-function, the "real writer" becomes positioned as an "author," "a variable and complex function of discourse" (352). In this position, "the author does not precede the works[;] he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (352–53).

Symbolically as well as materially, the author-function helps delimit what Foucault calls a "certain discursive construct" (346) within which a work and its author function, so that the way we recognize a certain text and its author as deserving of a

privileged status—a text worthy of our study, say, rather than "simply" to be "used"—is regulated by the author-function. Not only does the author-function, then, play a classificatory role, helping us organize and define texts (346); more significantly, Foucault argues, it marks off "the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its *mode of being*. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (346; my emphasis). Insofar as the author-function characterizes a text's "mode of being," it constitutes it and its author, providing a text and its author with a cultural identity and significance not accorded to texts that exist outside of its purview. As Foucault explains, "The author-function is . . . characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of *certain* discourses within a society" (346; my emphasis). For example, he identifies such texts as private letters and contracts, even though they are written by some*one*, as not having "authors," and, as such, as not constituted by the author-function, ostensibly meaning that their mode of being is regulated not by an author's name but by some other function.

In English studies, we use the author-function to designate certain works we call "literary," works most often recognized, valued, and interpreted in relation to their authors' names, which become cultural values we ascribe to these works. So, for example, a traditional literary scholar might state, "I study D. H. Lawrence" or "I am reading a lot of Virginia Woolf these days," whereas a scholar in rhetoric and composition, say, might more likely state, "I am studying the research article." Not only does the author-function privilege the author to the exclusion of genre, but in using it to characterize and clarify only certain discourses' modes of existence, we also stand to ignore a great many other discourses and their existence, in particular, how and why nonliterary discourses assume certain cultural values and regulate their users' social positions, relations, and identities in certain ways. Foucault describes, for instance, how the author-function, endowing a certain text with an author-value,

"shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumable. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status" (346). But what about the "everyday speech *that merely comes and goes?"* Since it does not exist within the realm of the author-function, what is it that regulates such discourse? We need a concept that can account not only for how certain privileged discourses function, but for how all discourses function, an overarching concept that can explain the social roles we assign to various discourses and those who enact and are enacted by them. Genre *is* such a concept. Within each genre, discourse is "received in a certain mode" and "must receive a certain status," including even discourse endowed with an author-function. In fact, it is quite possible that the author-function is itself a function of literary genres, which create the ideological conditions that produce this subject we call an "author." And so, I propose to subsume what Foucault calls the author-function within what I am calling the *genre function*, which constitutes all discourses' and all writers' modes of existence, circulation, and functioning within a society, whether the writer is William Shakespeare or a social worker and whether the text is a sonnet or an assessment report.

Just as the author-function delimits how individuals conceptually value and materially use certain discourses, I argue that the genre function also delimits discursive action both conceptually and materially. As a site of action, genre is both a concept and its material articulation and exchange. On one level, genre functions as part of what Berkenkotter and Huckin call individuals' "situated cognition" (1993, 485). A genre conceptually frames what its users generally imagine as possible within a given situation, predisposing them to act in certain ways by rhetorically framing how they come to know and respond to certain situations. Genres help endow situations with a "logic" or "common sense." But genres do not only function conceptually. It is in their material manifestations—their modus operandi—that genres exist.

Genres function in the social practices that they help generate and organize, in the unfolding of material, everyday exchanges of language practices, activities, and relations by and between individuals in specific settings. It is in such actual uses of language, uses endowed with material consequences and meaning within different genres, that genres appear and operate. The genre function, then, comes to be and structures social action through its use, through the way its users play its language game. In such a sense is genre both and at once a concept and a material practice, framing our dispositions to act as well as enabling us to articulate and exchange these dispositions as language practices.[3]

The genre function, thus, constitutes how individuals come to conceptualize and act within different situations, framing not only what Foucault calls a discourse's mode of being, but also the mode of being of those who participate in the discourse. Such inquiry into the social mode of being of discourse and its participants has driven much of the work in genre studies, especially since Carolyn Miller's ground-breaking article, "Genre as Social Action," first appeared in 1984. Based in part on Miller's work and the work of Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen M. Jamieson (1978), Kenneth Burke (1969b), Lloyd F. Bitzer (1968), and M. A. K. Halliday (1978) whose work Miller extends, genre theorists have begun to question traditional views of genres as simply innocent, artificial, and even arbitrary forms that contain ideas. This container view of genre, which assumes that genres are only transparent and innocent conduits that individuals use to package their communicative goals, overlooks the socio-rhetorical function of genres—the extent to which genres shape and help us generate our communicative goals, including why these goals exist, what and whose purposes they serve, and how best to achieve them. Carolyn Miller, for example, defines genres as "typified rhetorical *actions* based in recurrent situations" (1984, 159; my emphasis). In so doing, Miller shifts the focus of genre study from shared features to shared actions, so that genres come to be defined not just by their typified features but also by the typified actions they make happen. She argues

that genres are not only typified rhetorical responses to recurrent situations; they also help shape and maintain the ways we rhetorically know and act within these situations. In other words, as individuals' rhetorical responses to recurrent situations become typified as genres, the genres in turn help structure the way individuals conceptualize and experience these situations, predicting their notions of what constitutes appropriate and possible responses and actions. This is why genres are both functional and epistemological—they help us function within particular situations at the same time as they help shape the ways we come to know and organize these situations.

To argue that genres help reproduce the very recurring situations to which they respond (Devitt 1993) is to identify them as constitutive rather than as merely regulative, which is also what Foucault was claiming for the author-function. John Searle distinguishes between regulative and constitutive rules as follows: "Regulative rules regulate a pre-existing activity, an activity whose existence is logically independent of the rules. Constitutive rules constitute (and also regulate) an activity, the existence of which is logically dependent on the rules" (1969, 34). Those scholars who define genre as regulative perceive it, at best, as being a communicative or interpretive tool, a lens for framing and identifying an already existing communicative activity (see, for example, Hirsch 1967 and Rosmarin 1985 in literary studies; Bhatia 1993 and Swales 1990 in linguistics), and, at worst, an artificial, restrictive "law" that interferes with or tries to trap communicative activity (Blanchot 1959, Croce 1968, Derrida 1980, to name just a few). As Devitt and Miller argue, however, and as I will demonstrate in later examples, genre does not simply *regulate* a pre-existing social activity; instead, it *constitutes* the activity by making it possible by way of its ideological and discursive conventions. In fact, genre reproduces the activity by providing individuals with the conventions for enacting it. We perform an activity in terms of how we recognize it—that is, how we identify and come to know it. And one of the ways we recognize an activity is by way of the genres that constitute it. Genres help organize and generate our social

actions by rhetorically constituting the way we recognize the situations within which we function. In short, genres maintain the desires they help fulfill.

Charles Bazerman, in his recent "The Life of Genre, the Life in the Classroom," articulates a similar view of genres as sites of action. He writes:

> Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are environments for learning. They are locations within which meaning is constructed. Genres shape the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact. Genres are the familiar places we go to create intelligible communicative action with each other and the guideposts we use to explore the unfamiliar. (1997b, 19)

Indeed, genres play a role in helping us organize, experience, and potentially change the situations within which we communicate by functioning at the intersection between the acquisition and articulation of desires to act. Genres shape us as we give shape to them, which is why they constitute our activities and regulate how and why we perform them. In this way, we can attribute to the genre function many of the claims Foucault makes for the author-function, except that the genre function accounts for all discursive activities, not just those endowed with a certain name or author-value. The genre function, as such, allows us to expand our field of inquiry to include the constitution of all discourses and the social commitments, practices, relations, identities, and silences implicated within them. Such an expanded view of genre will enable those who study and teach writing to account more fully for what writers do when they write, why they do it, and what happens to them as a result. In order to make the case for how genres function as sites of action, I will first turn to literary studies to examine how the genre function is at work organizing and generating literary practices and relations in a way that will later serve as a basis for examining how, in much the same manner, genres function to organize and generate everyday social practices and relations,

including how processes of textual invention locate all writers within these practices and relations.

GENRE AS SITE OF LITERARY ACTION

The relationship between genre and text has historically been and still remains an uneasy one in literary studies, with most scholars subordinating genre to an a posteriori classificatory status that privileges the autonomy of the text and its author. In such a configuration, genre is treated at best as a category, a transparent lens for looking at and organizing texts that presumably function independently of it, and at worst as an imposition on the text and its author's indeterminacy.[4] The genre function, however, elevates genre from a transparent category to a site of action. A number of literary scholars have recognized genres as such sites of action, and it is to their work that we will now look in order to see how genres frame the ideological and material conditions within which literary writers, texts, and their activities and relations function. As I will argue, such scholarship exposes the constitutive nature of genres in ways that complement and augment the work of rhetorical genre scholars. But because this work in literary genre theory tends to confine the function of genre only to literary actions and relations, we ultimately need to go beyond literary genre theory, as I will do in the next section, to see how genres constitute a wider range of social activities. First, though, I will examine how genres function as sites of literary action.

Heather Dubrow begins her 1982 survey of literary genre theory by asking readers to consider the following paragraph:

> The clock on the mantelpiece said ten thirty, but someone had suggested recently that the clock was wrong. As the figure of the dead woman lay on the bed in the front room, a no less silent figure glided rapidly from the house. The only sounds to be heard were the ticking of that clock and the loud wailing of an infant. (1)

How, Dubrow asks, do we make sense of this piece of discourse? What characteristics should we pay attention to as significant

about it? What state of mind need we assume to interpret the action it describes? The relevance of these questions, Dubrow claims, points to the significance of genre in helping readers delimit and interpret discourse. For example, knowing that the paragraph appears in a novel with the title *Murder at Marplethorpe*, readers can begin to make certain interpretive decisions as to the value and meaning of specific images, images which become symbolic and material when readers recognize that the novel they are reading belongs to the genre of detective fiction. The inaccuracy of the clock and the fact that the woman lies dead in the front room become important clues when we know what genre we are reading. The figure gliding away assumes a particular subject position within the discourse, the subject position of suspect. If, Dubrow continues, the title of the novel was not *Murder at Marplethorpe* but rather *The Personal History of David Marplethorpe*, then the way we encounter the same text changes. Reading the novel as a *Bildungsroman*, we will place a different significance on the dead body or the fact that the clock is inaccurate. Certainly, we will be less likely to look for a suspect. That is, we will not be reading with "detective eyes" as we would if we were reading detective fiction. The crying baby, as Dubrow suggests, will also take on more relevance, perhaps being the very David Marplethorpe whose life's story we are about to read.

Dubrow's example is significant for what it reveals about what I am calling the genre function. Not only does the genre function in this case constitute how we read certain elements within the discourse, allowing us to occupy certain interpretive frames as readers of the discourse, but it also constitutes the roles and relations we assign to the actors and events within the discourse. The actors in the discourse—the crying baby, the dead woman, the inaccurate clock, the gliding figure—all assume subject positions within and because of the genre. Genre thus coordinates both the actors involved, including the reader and the characters, as well as their actions in specific textured relations and orientations so that, for example, the figure

who glides rapidly away from the house can either be recognized as in the act of escape or in the act of seeking help, depending on the genre. The type of action taking place within the text, then, is largely constituted by the genre in which the text functions, because genre frames the conditions—what John Austin in his theory of speech acts calls the "felicity conditions" (1962)—within which utterances become speech acts. The meaning of the utterances in the Marplethorpe paragraph, including the actions these utterances are performing, the roles of the characters doing the performing, and even the sequence and timing of the utterances, are all interpretable in relation to the contextual conditions maintained by the genre. These genre conditions allow readers to limit the potentially multiple actions sustained by the utterances to certain recognizable social actions. As Bazerman explains, "even though multiplicity of action remains [especially in literary texts], attribution of genre still helps to limit the domain and focus the character of the multiplicities offered by, or to be read out of, the text—that is, genre recognition usually limits interpretive flexibility" (1994a, 90). Suffice it to say, we recognize, interpret, and, in the spirit of reader-response theory, also construct (and deconstruct) the discourses we encounter using the genre function. Genres, in short, function as sites of action that locate readers in positions of interpretation.

In her work, Dubrow acknowledges the genre function when she explains, following E. D. Hirsch (1967), that genre acts like a social code of behavior established between the reader and author (1982, 2), a kind of "generic contract" (31) that stabilizes and enables interpretation. Such a recognition, echoed in the work of Beebee (1994), Cohen (1989), Perloff (1989), Threadgold (1989), and Todorov (1970), understands genre as a psychological concept rather than a classification system, a disposition a reader assumes in relation to a literary text. But genres not only establish a relationship between reader and text in what amounts to a psychological relationship; they also establish a relationship between texts in what amounts to a sociological

relationship—a kind of literary culture within which readers, writers, and texts function.

In the Marplethorpe example, we have already discussed the way that genres function on a psychological level as conceptual frameworks for interpretation, helping readers construct what reading theorist Frank Smith calls "specifications" with which to predict, navigate, and interpret texts (1994). On a sociological level, genres function to create a literary culture within which texts are defined and operate in relation to one another. Sociology is the science of social relations, organization, and change, what Anthony Giddens calls the study of "human social activities" and the "conditions that make these activities possible" (1984, 2). Sociologists study how social life is enacted and organized, how social activity is defined and related to other social activity in space-time. In his book *Metaphors of Genre*, David Fishelov explores the connections between sociology and genre theory, explaining that the metaphor "genres are social institutions" is commonly used by literary scholars to explain genre (1993). Like social institutions, genres coordinate textual relations, organization, and change. In fact, like social institutions, genres also frame the conditions that make literary activity possible and even meaningful, the discursive sites within which readers and writers organize, define, and enact textured language practices and relations.

Following Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Fishelov describes genres as shaping and governing a specifically literary universe, so that genre theory becomes akin to the sociology of literary culture or what is more commonly understood as "poetics." As René Wellek and Austin Warren put it, literary genres are institutions in the same way as church, university, and state are institutions (1942, 226). Fredric Jameson similarly describes genres as "essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (1981, 106). Genres thus endow literary texts with a social identity in relation to other texts within this "universe of literature" (Todorov 1970, 8),

constituting a literary text's "mode of being" in that universe. This genred universe organizes and generates practices of textual production, circulation, and interpretation.

As sociological concepts, one way that genres organize and generate literary activity is by establishing particular space-time configurations within which texts function. Käte Hamburger, for example, argues that each genre choreographs a particular orientation, especially a temporal orientation, so that, for instance, the "past tense in fiction does not suggest the past tense as we know it but rather a situation in the present; when we read 'John walked into the room,' we do not assume, as we would if we encountered the same preterite in another type of writing, that the action being described occurred prior to one in our world" (qtd. in Dubrow 1982, 103). Genres synchronize our perceptions of time. But they also synchronize how we spatially negotiate our way through time, as both readers and writers. Recall, for example, the Marplethorpe paragraph discussed earlier. If we read it as detective fiction, then we immediately begin to make certain space-time connections: the gliding figure and the dead woman assume a certain spatial-temporal relationship to one another as possible murder victim and suspect. That is, they assume a genre-mediated cause-effect relationship in terms of their spatial proximity and their temporal sequence. The gliding figure may simply be a gliding figure, peripheral to the plot. However, if we read the paragraph as detective fiction, then this figure's gliding away from the site of a dead body at this particular time and at this particular distance makes this figure a suspect and the dead body a victim. The actions of each actor, in other words, along with the inaccurate clock, combine together within the genre to form a genre-mediated socio-rhetorical orientation in which space and time are configured in a certain way in order to allow certain events and actions to take place. Bakhtin refers to this articulation of space and time as "chronotope," which Schryer adapts to genre theory by positing that "every genre expresses space/time relations that reflect current social beliefs regarding the placement of human individuals in space and time and the

kind of action permitted within that time/space" (1999, 83). Genres are discursive articulations of the chronotope.[5]

As conceived by the aforementioned scholars in literary studies, literary genres play a significant role in the "sociological" constitution of literary culture by helping to identify the various roles that texts and their authors play within it and how these roles get performed within the space-time configurations it constructs. This is why genre theorists often define genre in terms of literary social institutions, institutions that enable and shape "human social activities" and the "conditions that make these activities possible" (Giddens 1984, 2). David Fishelov, for example, explains that as "a professor is expected to comply with certain patterns of action, and to interact with other role-players (e.g. students) according to the structure and functions of an educational institution . . . , a character in a comedy is expected to perform certain acts and to interact with other characters according to the structural principles of the literary 'institution' of comedy" (1993, 86). It is these "structural principles," which often function and are articulated at the level of genre, that make the activity at once possible and recognizable, socially and rhetorically. And just as social institutions coordinate institutional positions and relations, so genres coordinate genre positions and relations, both in terms of the subjects who participate within them and the writers and readers who produce and interpret them. Yet the problem here, as has been the case traditionally within literary genre theory, is that literary scholars limit genre positions and relations only to literary activities. For many such scholars, genres function only to help organize and generate a literary institution, in which various literary activities and identities are enacted.

We can go a long way toward understanding genres as sites within which individuals acquire, negotiate, and enact everyday language practices and relations if we identify genres not only as *analogical* to social institutions but as *actual* social institutions, constituting not just literary activity but social activity, not just literary textual relations but all textual relations, so that genres

do not just constitute the literary scene in which literary actors (writers, readers, characters) and their texts function, but also constitute the social conditions in which the activities of all social participants are enacted. For example, to what extent is the university as a social institution mediated by its genres, including research articles, grants, syllabi, assignment prompts, lectures, student essays, course evaluations, oral exams, memos, and committee minutes, to name just a few? This is the question that theorists in rhetorical genre studies have been asking over the last twenty years, and it is the question that we will now begin to consider. Answering it will allow us to begin synthesizing the literary as well as the nonliterary ways that the genre function is at work in making all kinds of social practices, relations, and subject positions possible and meaningful within situated space-time configurations. Answering it will also set the stage for later chapters to examine how the genre function positions writers and their processes of invention within specific social and rhetorical sites of action, whether these writers are D. H. Lawrence, a social worker, or a student in a first-year writing course. Understanding how genres situate and help generate rhetorical and social activities will allow us in composition studies to acquire a richer understanding of the writer and invention.

GENRE AS SITE OF SOCIAL ACTION

Not all literary scholars limit genre's jurisdiction only to the literary world.[6] In "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin argues that genres mediate all communicative activity, from novels to military commands to everyday short rejoinders (1986). In so doing, Bakhtin takes perhaps the most significant step toward a view of genre as social, not just literary, action. Defining speech genres as typified utterances existing within language spheres (60), Bakhtin claims that "we speak only in definite speech genres[;] that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole*" (79; Bakhtin's emphasis). Such generic forms of the utterance shape and enable what Bakhtin calls a speaker's "speech plan" or

"speech will" (78). After all, Bakhtin quips, "the speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (93). Instead, every speaker's utterance exists in a dialogical relationship with previous utterances and can be understood through that relationship. Speech genres function as sites for the articulation and exchange of utterances. Bakhtin explains:

> The speaker's speech will is manifested primarily in the *choice of a particular speech genre*. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication. . . . And when the speaker's speech plan with all its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen genre, it is shaped and developed within a certain generic form. Such genres exist above all in the great and multifarious sphere of everyday oral communication, including the most familiar and the most intimate. (78; Bakhtin's emphasis)

Genres, therefore, do not just constitute literary reality and its texts. They constitute all speech communication by becoming part of "our experiences and our consciousness together" and mediating the "dialogic reverberations" that make up communicative interaction (78, 94).

Individuals communicate by choosing (and being chosen by) a particular genre (or by combining genres) within a system of related genres in a given sphere of speech communication—what is popularly referred to in composition studies as a discourse community but more accurately depicted by Bazerman (1997a) and Russell (1997), following Cole and Engeström, as an "activity system."[7] Avoiding the abstraction and homogeneity often associated with the idea of discourse community, an activity system describes the complex, coordinated, ongoing, and often contradictory interactions of individuals within "systems of purposeful activity" (Russell 2002). These systems are mediated by a constellation of related, sometimes conflicting genres, what Devitt (1991) calls "genre sets" and Bazerman (1994a) calls "genre systems," which enact and organize these interactions. An individual's choice of genre, then, is based to a large

extent on his or her participation in and knowledge of the sphere of communication and its related genres, although of course it is also possible for communicants to import and export genres from one sphere to another as they travel through the various systems of activity that make up their lives. Within their chosen genres, communicants assume certain genre-constituted positions and participate in certain language games while interacting with one another. Bakhtin refers to the participants within language games as "speech subjects" (1986, 72). The speech subject's "speech plan" is mediated by his or her chosen genre, as is his or her style. In addition, the speech subject's very conception of the addressee is mediated by genre, because each genre embodies its own typical conception of the addressee (Bakhtin, 98). In fact, at the level of diction the very word and its relation to other words are also mediated by speech genres: "In the genre the word acquires a particular typical expression. Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances" (Bakhtin, 87). Speech genres thus organize and generate the very communicative conditions within which speech subjects—both speakers and addressees—interact, in the same way that literary genres constitute the literary contexts within which literary subjects—writers, readers, and characters—interact.[8]

Trajectories of Inquiry: Genre and Register

In applied linguistics, the site of this dialectical relation between language and its situations of use is often defined as "register," the "conceptual framework for representing the social context as the semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings" (Halliday 1978, 110). The concepts of register and genre are closely related, but because this relationship is not always clear (some scholars see them as interchangeable; some see them as hierarchically distinguished, with either genre or register as the higher order concept; and some see them as

different in value, with either genre or register as more useful to a systematic study of language), it is worthwhile briefly to examine the relationship between the two, especially since such an examination will contribute to an understanding of how genres organize and generate the conditions of discursive production in which writers and writing take place.

In his functional approach to language, articulated in *Language as Social Semiotic*, M. A. K. Halliday (1978) describes how "the network of meanings" that constitute any culture, what he calls the "social semiotic" (100), is to a large extent encoded in and maintained by its semantic system, which represents a culture's "meaning potential" (13). As such, "the construal of reality [social semiotic] is inseparable from the construal of the semantic system in which the reality is encoded. In this sense, language is a shared meaning potential, at once both a part of experience and an intersubjective interpretation of experience" (1–2). This is why, as Halliday insists, language is a form of socialization, playing a role in how individuals become socialized within formations of culture he calls "contexts of situation."

Language is functional not only because it encodes and embodies the social semiotic but also because it helps enact the social semiotic. Language, therefore, makes social reality recognizable and enables individuals to experience it, others, and themselves within it. Halliday explains: "By their everyday acts of meaning [their semantic activities], people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and of knowledge" (2). The semantic system, representing what Halliday calls a culture's "meaning potential," in turn constitutes its individuals' "behaviour potential," which characterizes individuals' actions and interactions within a particular social semiotic. The semiotic system, which is social in nature, becomes cognitively internalized as a system of behavior when it is manifested in the semantic system, so that we internalize and enact culture as we learn and use language. The semantic potential (what a communicator can

do or mean within social reality) constitutes the "actualized potential" (what a communicator does or means within social reality) (40).

Halliday explains that contexts of situation are not isolated and unique, but often reoccur as "situation types," a set of typified semiotic and semantic relations that make up "a scenario . . . of persons and actions and events from which the things which are said derive their meaning" (28–30). Examples of situation types include "players instructing novice in a game," "mother reading bedtime story to a child," "customers ordering goods over the phone" (29). Because contexts of situation reoccur as situation types, those who participate in these situations develop typified ways of acting and interacting within them. As these situation types become conventionalized over time, they begin to "specify the semantic configurations that the speaker will typically fashion" (110).

Halliday refers to this typified social and semantic scenario as "register." Register is "the clustering of semantic features according to situation types" (68), a situated and typified semantic system which describes the activities of communicators, including their contexts and their means of communication, within a particular type of situation. Register assigns a situation type with particular syntactic and lexicogrammatic properties, becoming a linguistic realization of a situation type. As a framework within which a situation type is linguistically realized, register describes what actually takes place communicatively (the "field"), who is taking part (the "tenor"), and what role language is playing (the "mode"). For example, the "field" of discourse represents the setting in which language occurs; that is, the system of activity within a particular setting. The "tenor" of discourse represents the relation between participants—their interactions—within the discourse. And the "mode" of discourse represents the channel or wavelength of communication adopted by the participants (33). All three levels interact in particular and fairly typified ways within register. When linguists identify a "scientific register," then, they not only describe a style

of language, but also the set of words, structural choices, and interactional patterns associated with scientific contexts.

Halliday locates genre as a mode or conduit of communication, one of the textual and linguistic means available within register that helps communicants realize the situation type. Functioning at the level of *mode*, within the field, tenor, and mode complex, genre represents the vehicle through which communicants interact within a situation type. In Halliday's model, genres are thus relegated to typified tools communicants use within registers to enact and interact within a particular type of situation. It is this situation, Halliday explains, "that generates the semiotic tensions and the rhetorical styles and genres that express them" (113). Yet, as we have been discussing so far, genres perform more than just an expressive function; they do not simply describe how participants typically communicate in typified situations. Rather, genres function in relation to other genres as typified sites of action that position their users within situated motives for action, language practices, and social relations and activities. And so, I propose to assign genres more of a constitutive role in Halliday's theory of language, imagining them as bounded discursive sites for the organization and realization of situation types, including the complex relations of field, tenor, and mode that take place within situation types.[9]

Elevating genre study as a method of inquiry over register not only allows us to identify and examine specific ideological, semantic, and lexicogrammatic configurations and activities within situation types, but it also allows us to interrogate the very nature of situation types. The study of register generally assumes a situation type as a precondition of language use and then goes on to describe that language use. Rhetorical genre study tends to offer genre as a location for the production and articulation of situation types. Part of the action genres accomplish, through their use, is the reproduction of the situations that require their use. As such, genre theory provides what might be called a "thicker" description of the textured, situated activities that reflect and generate complex forms of social organization. And

so, although register is valuable for identifying and describing the language interactions within recurrent situations, it seems pitched at too abstract a level to help account for the specific activities and relations that comprise situation types. Within the same situation type, for example, more than one genre is often at work, and, as I will argue in more detail in chapters 4 and 5, each genre within a situation type constitutes its own situated register—that is, its own system of activity, its own subject positions as well as relations between these positions, and its own rhetorical and formal features.

Each genre, I argue, organizes and generates its own field, tenor, and mode complex—its own site of action—in relation to other genres within a larger sphere of action or "activity system." The genres that form this constellation function together to coordinate the dynamic relations that make up the larger activity systems. Within such systems, genres not only constitute particular participant positions and language practices; they also regulate how participants recognize and interact with one another. As such, any typified social activity is mediated by a range of genres, each of which frames its own situated genre identities and actions, including motives and intentions, as well as relations. This notion of situation type as one resulting from and mediated by a set of genres can be clarified if we look at an example.

If we take a situation type, say "teacher instructing students in a classroom," we recognize that there cannot be only one register at work within it. This situation type is much too dynamic—actualized by a range of shifting, even conflicting, situational activities, participant relations, and rhetorical styles and goals—to be embodied by a single register. What is at work within the situation type is a system of related genred sites of action that constitute what we recognize as this overall situation type. For instance, the lecture represents one genre which constitutes a particular field (literally the physical configuration of the room, with teacher in front, students facing teacher in rows, etc.), tenor (the way students raise their hands and wait for signals from the teacher to ask questions, and the power dynamic this

sets up), and mode (how the teacher organizes the lecture itself, the question-answer nature of the dialogue, and so on). But it is not the only genre. Others include the assignment prompt, which in turn constitutes a different field, tenor, and mode; the student papers; the teacher's comments on the students' papers; the syllabus; the course description; and so on. Each of these genres organizes and generates a particular site of action which both students and teachers come to recognize and which in turn shapes and enables their various positions, activities, and relations within the situation type (see chapter 5 for more on the classroom as a genre-mediated environment).

Halliday writes that "reality consists of meanings" (139). Genres do not just express or help communicate these a priori meanings as part of register; rather, genres organize and generate these meanings. As such, genres are not merely classification systems or innocent communicative tools; genres are socially constructed, ongoing cognitive and rhetorical sites—symbiotically maintained rhetorical ecosystems, if you will—within which communicants enact and reproduce specific situations, actions, relations, and identities. As individuals make their way through culture, they function within various and at times conflicting genred spaces, spaces that reposition them in specific relations to others through the use of specific language exchanges as well as frame the ways they recognize and enact their language practices, activities, and themselves.

GENRE AND THE ENACTMENT OF SOCIAL MOTIVES

In later chapters, we will consider how writers' rhetorical inventions, including their motives and intentions to invent, take place within and against the very genred sites of action that construct their subject positions and social relations. Here, though, I would like to conclude this chapter by examining how, as sites of action, genres maintain the desires that writers acquire, negotiate, and articulate—how, that is, genres locate writers in relation to desires that inform the choices they make when they begin to write.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens argues that human activity—including motive, intention, and agency—is constituted by, enacted within, and helps reproduce social systems. Giddens explains: "Human social activities . . . are recursive. That is to say, they are not brought into being by social actors but continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible" (1984, 2). Giddens describes this ecological process as the "duality of structure," which is based on the theory "that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction" (19). I will address Giddens's theory of structuration in greater detail in chapter 4. For now, let me just note that human actors, in their social practices, reproduce the very social conditions that in turn make their actions necessary, possible, and recognizable, so that their actions maintain and enact the very conditions that consequently call for these actions.

Giddens's theory of structuration, echoing Raymond Williams's (1981) Marxist formulation of the dynamic correspondence between the *base* (productive forces) and *superstructure* (cultural practices), has much to offer genre studies. Carolyn Miller (1994), for one, has explored the connections by arguing that genres, as typified socio-rhetorical sites of action, play a mediating role in enabling their users to reproduce the very conditions of production within which they in turn function.[10] Miller writes: "The rules and resources of a genre provide reproducible speaker and addressee roles, social typifications of recurrent social needs or exigencies, topical structures (or 'moves' and 'steps'), and ways of indexing an event to material conditions, turning them into constraints and resources" (1994, 71). But how do genres do this? How do they maintain the desires that they help to fulfill?

We function within genre-constituted conditions that we socially and rhetorically sustain in our practices because, as Miller has argued (1984), genre is recursively and inseparably

linked to the concept of exigence, defined as a situation or event that we recognize as requiring immediate attention or response. Exigencies compel us to respond and/or act. Yet our compulsions to act are not as intuitive or unmediated as we might think. On a physiological level, of course, we certainly do respond instinctively, as when we quickly withdraw our hand after touching a hot stove. But exigence, as Miller explains, is not instinctive in the same way. Rather, exigence is learned behavior, a learned recognition of significance that informs why and how we learn to respond in and to various situations. In our social interactions, all sorts of conventions mediate how we recognize exigencies as social motives to act. Genres are examples of such mediating conventions. As cultural artifacts, they embody exigencies, and in using genres, we enact and reinforce these exigencies as recognizable, meaningful, consequential actions.

An example will help clarify how genres predispose us to act and/or respond in certain ways by rhetorically framing how we conceptualize certain situations as social motives. Like many other events, death is a physical and social reality in our world, one that calls for various and often culturally idiosyncratic reactions. At some basic level, our response to death is certainly instinctive, perhaps even biological, but at the ideological level in which we function as social beings, our response to death is mediated by a range of social and rhetorical conventions, including genres, each of which constitutes death as a slightly different exigency recognized as a particular social motive requiring a particular type of immediate attention or response. The various ways in which individuals recognize, experience, and respond to death, therefore, become informed by the genres available to them and those they "choose" to use.

As a situation type, the "response to death" is represented and realized by a variety of genres in contemporary Western culture, each of which constitutes it as a specific exigency, calling for a particular kind of response to fill a particular social need. So each genre constitutes its own site of action within which death takes on a particular social meaning and becomes

treated as a particular social action (field), within which those involved take on particular social roles and relate to one another in particular ways (tenor), and within which certain rhetorical strategies and styles are used (mode). In our culture, for example, we have elegies, eulogies, obituaries, epitaphs, requiems, even greeting cards, just to name a few. Each of these socially sanctioned and typified rhetorical responses is not just a form or a tool we use to express our feelings about death as an a priori exigency; instead, each comes to constitute one of the various, sometimes conflicting ways we make sense of and treat death in our culture by transforming it into a specific social motive. The obituary and the elegy, for instance, rhetorically respond to death differently because each genre represents death as a slightly different exigency, serving a different social motive and requiring a different type of immediate attention and remedy. Thus, the genres we have available to us are integral to the ways we construct, respond to, and make sense of recurring situations, even when these situations revolve around the same physical event. At the same time, genres are related to the subject positions we assume, the language practices we enact, as well as the relations we establish between ourselves and others within these situations.

We recognize obituaries, for example, as notices of a person's death, usually accompanied by a short biographical account. They serve to notify the general public, and so do not play as direct a role as, say, the eulogy does in helping those who are grieving deal with their loss. The purpose of the obituary, then, is not so much to console those closest to the deceased or to help them maintain a sense of continuity in the face of loss, but to ascribe the deceased with a social identity and value, one that is recognizable to others within the community. So the obituary's purpose is not, like the eulogy, to assess and praise the meaning of the deceased's life and death; rather, it is to make the deceased's life publicly recognizable, perhaps even to celebrate the value of the individual-as-citizen. Rhetorically, therefore, the obituary often begins with an announcement of death, often

without mention of the cause, and a notice of where the funeral services will be held. What is most telling about the obituary, though, is how it biographically represents the deceased. Unlike the eulogy, in which the deceased's personal accomplishents, desires, even disappointments are celebrated, the obituary describes the deceased's life in terms of its social value: who the deceased's parents are, who his or her spouse(s) and children are, where the deceased was born, lived, and died, what jobs the deceased held over the span of his or her life, what organizations and clubs the deceased belonged to, and so on. In other words, the obituary narrates a certain public identity for the deceased, one that makes him or her recognizable to the general public in terms familiar to them: as a fellow citizen. As a genre, then, the obituary constitutes death as an exigence that motivates us to reaffirm, using the occasion of someone's death, the public worth of that individual. The obituary positions the deceased as a public citizen, whose life is told in terms of the public institutions in which he or she participated. In short, the obituary constitutes death as a different kind of exigency endowed with a different social motive that requires a different rhetorical action, a different relation among the participants, and different social roles than does the eulogy or other related genres.

Carolyn Miller argues that because "situations are social constructs that are the result, not of 'perception,' but of definition," the very idea of recurrence is socially defined and constructed (1984, 156). What we recognize and experience as recurring is the result of our construing and treating it as such. Moreover, the way we recognize a recurring situation as requiring a certain immediate attention or remedy (in short, an exigence) is also socially defined. Over time, a recursive relationship results, in which our typified responses to a situation in turn lead to its recurrence. As Giddens would put it, we reproduce a situation as we act within and in response to it. In all this, exigence plays a key role, at once shaping how we socially recognize a situation and helping us rhetorically enact it. As Miller explains, "exigence is a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of

objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need" (157). Exigence becomes part of the way we conceptualize and experience a situation by endowing it with social meaning—meaning that shapes how individuals act within the situation. This dynamic process is bound up in and made possible by genre. Exigence, as such, is not only a form of social knowledge but also specifically a form of *genre* knowledge. We rhetorically recognize, respond to, and potentially change exigence through genres, because genres are how we socially construct situations by defining and treating them as particular social motives.

We recognize this phenomenon when we look at the genre of the greeting card. The greeting card may have emerged as a response to recurring physical and social exigencies (birth of loved ones, marriage, and so on), but the greeting card also serves to transform these exigencies into social motives by endowing them with a certain social significance that in turn sanctions them as deserving of a greeting card, a typified rhetorical action. Today we see the extent to which the greeting card as a genre constructs the very recurring exigencies to which it responds in such examples as the "secretaries' day card," the "bosses' day card," the "grandparents' day card," etc. The greeting card, then, like the obituary (and like all genres, literary and nonliterary), becomes part of its users' "regularized social relations, communicative landscape, and cognitive organization" (Bazerman 1997b, 22). Within this genre environment, writers and other communicants "acquire and strategically deploy genre knowledge," which refers to situated cognition (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995, 3); assume genre identities; and, as we saw earlier, reproduce the very recurrence that they come to recognize as a situation type. Genre, therefore, is not merely a rhetorical tool that comes after the semiotic fact; it is itself the semiotic fact—the site of "social and ideological action" (Schryer 1994, 107) in which social motives are maintained and enacted.[11]

Because genres are one of the ways that exigencies are transformed into social motives—that is, because genres constitute

both our need to respond and the way in which we do so—I argue that genres are sites which enable and shape communicative action by first staging the social situation in which communication takes place and then motivating the way communicants rhetorically act within it, including the positions they assume and the relations they enact. It is how and why these genre-constituted positions, relations, commitments, and practices affect the choices writers make when they begin to write that will be the focus of the remainder of the book.

SUMMARY

This book is based on the premise that genres function as sites of action in which writers acquire, articulate, and potentially resist motives to act. It conceives of genre as operating on both an ideological and a material level—both a disposition and its articulation. Fundamental to this understanding is the notion that genre is a social motive and a rhetorical instantiation of that motive. Genre *is* what it allows us to do, the potential that makes the actual possible, the concept and its practice, the "con-" and the "-text" at the same time. As such, genre allows us to study the social situation and the rhetorical action as they are at work on one another, reinforcing and reproducing one another. This is why genre is both social and rhetorical, the articulation and effect of what we do and the reason and means for why we do it.

As we write various texts, then, we rhetorically enact and reproduce the desires that prompted them. This recursive process is what genre *is*. And as we rhetorically enact and reproduce these desires, we also rhetorically enact, reproduce, and potentially resist and/or transform the social activities, the roles, and the relations that are embedded in these desires. It is the genred positions, commitments, and relations that writers assume, enact, and sometimes resist within certain situations that most interest me. In particular, I am interested in the way these positions, commitments, and relations inform the choices writers make during the scene of invention. As we make our way

from day to day and from situation to situation, we assume various and at times even conflicting genre identities, identities which are certainly informed by our gender, our sexual orientation, our class, our race, our ethnicity, our personal history, our immediate context, and our genetics. In chapter 4, we will consider how these factors affect genre identity formation and potential transformation. Yet, as we will also see, there is always the ideology of genre at work, an ideology with which we have to contend. Some genres invite more resistance than others. Literary genres, for example, are more self-conscious than most nonliterary genres. As Thomas Beebee argues, literary writers often resist their generic categorizations even as they exist within them, so that they self-consciously position themselves on the margins of different genres: "the meaning of a literary text can depend on the play of differences between its genres" (1994, 250). Other, more "rhetorical," genres are less pliable but just as transformable. No matter our motives, whether to resist or conform to social and rhetorical conventions, the choices we make as writers before and when we begin to write are always mediated by genres. Invention takes place within genres, and can be a site of conformity and/or resistance.

For example, there are the cases in which women poets have sought to invent differently by subverting male-dominated genres such as the elegy. Peter Sacks, for instance, has argued that the elegy performs what Freud terms the "work of mourning," and so "each elegy is to be regarded . . . as a work, both in the commonly accepted meaning of a product and in the more dynamic sense of the working through of an impulse or experience" (1985, 1). The elegy as a genre, just like the obituary as a genre, shapes and enables how we as a culture "work through" our experiences with death, albeit in different ways. According to Sacks, the elegy helps us work through our mourning in its very poetic movements, representing, as such, a rhetorical journey in which our loss becomes compensated by the elegy itself (6). Intended to overcome grief, this compensatory function of the elegy, Allison Giffen explains, represents male desire for

Oedipal resolution (1997, 121). In a very interesting twist, however, Giffen claims that early American women poets strategically appropriated the elegy for their own ends. Because grief was one of the few socially permissible emotions a woman could express poetically, early American women poets began to write elegies at an unprecedented rate, so much so that "the elegiac voice emerges as one of the most distinctive features of the poetess" (118). But they subverted the elegy by using it to sustain grief rather than to overcome it—to resist resolution and to maintain attachment with the lost beloved rather than to seek poetic compensation. The reason for this is not so much that these women poets had more of an inherent or intuitive store of grief; rather, by sustaining grief, Giffen explains, these women poets could continue to write: "to cease grieving, would mean to give up her poetry" (119). So these women poets adopted an elegiac identity while partly undermining the social purpose of the elegy, so that, within the "marginalized site of grief, [these poets are] able to articulate desire for a lost love object and thus define [themselves] as speaking subject[s]" (118). Such an elegy-mediated identity gave these poets a voice, but also defined them as grieving subjects, "characterized as saccharine, pious, and maudlin" (118). As much as gender played a role in how these women poets positioned themselves within the genre, ultimately the elegy allowed them to "define [themselves] as speaking subject[s]" only by *defining them* as speaking subjects. Even resistance to genre still leaves us functioning within genre.

What happens to writers when they write? This is, in its most general form, the question this book seeks to answer. What motivates the choices writers make before and as they begin to write? What happens to writers as they move from one genre to the next? In what way is a writer's subject position shaped by the genre in which he or she writes? How are a writer's intentions shaped by the genre in which he or she writes? How do writers transform genres as they work within them? And, as a result, to what extent does invention involve writers in the process of acquiring and articulating a rhetorical subjectivity within genre

rather than the process of expressing self-possessed motives? The notion that genres are sites of action, as I have examined it in this chapter, suggests that a writer's ways of (re)cognizing—that is, both identifying and knowing—and carrying out his or her purpose, subject matter, and even intentions is organized and generated by the genres in which he or she writes. We can learn a great deal about how and why writers invent by analyzing how writers get positioned within these genred sites of action. We can also, I will argue, demystify invention by teaching students how to make these sites of action visible to themselves in a way that allows them to participate more consciously and critically at the intersection between the acquisition and articulation of motives where agency and beginnings take place.