The ideology of genre

Preface

Às tres meninas da minha vida:

Jizelda, Palavina,

Chavaya

The work that appears in this book was written over a fifteen-year period, from my undergraduate days, when I completed my first comparative paper on Bob Dylan and Franz-Josef Degenhardt, to the writing on Walter Benjamin done at Penn State after I had grown too stubborn, truculent, tenured, and published-and-perishable to be corrected by anyone. Over such a long period, many people have read parts of this work, and have undoubtedly since forgotten them; they may be slightly shocked at coming across their names in these pages, especially grouped as they are with the names of people they have never met. I thank Patsy Baudoin, Lincoln Faller, Christian Wolf, Charles Hamm, Konrad Henkel, Louis Renza, and Nathaniel Wing for these very early readings of my work and for their encouragement in the discipline of comparative literature.

The book as a whole has had three very sharp-eyed and learned critics: Douglas J. Canfield, Ross Chambers, and James Jollison. It has also had an excellent proofreader, Michelle Meilly, and copyeditor, Andrew Lewis, and a generous sponsor, Philip Winsor. Without the support of a fund created by Melvin and Rosalind Jacobs, I would not have had the time to polish the manuscript. To all of these people I owe a debt of thanks. And a very special thanks to Lisa Ruch, who went out of her way to track down the most puzzling scholarly problem in the book, the source of the mysterious Lonnie Mack quotation that begins Chapter 8, and to Paul Oorts, who helped unravel the mysteries of crabbed Renaissance Latin. To Stuart McDougal and Caroline Eckhardt goes, as always, my gratitude for their sound advice and unwavering support.

Thanks are also due to the editors of journals who have given me permission to reproduce my own earlier material. The embryo of Chapter 4 was first published in the *Rackham Journal of the Arts and Humanities* 2 (1980): 47–71. An earlier version of Chapter 5 appeared in *The International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 2, no. 5 (1989): 159–82, published by Deborah Charles Publications, and is reprinted here with permission. For the Dylan material in Chapter 6, the Speech Communication Association

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has kindly allowed me to reuse parts of my article published in *Text and Performance Quarterly* 11 (1991): 18–34. Again, the dates of these articles show what a long-term project this was.

On the other end of the spectrum, I should apologize to my reader both for the somewhat artificial length of this book and for a certain confusion, both caused by my use of original languages; I believe very strongly in quoting all primary material in the original. To shorten the book somewhat and to make things easier on the reader, I have provided only English for all "secondary" material. I am not completely satisfied with this procedure, resting as it does on a generic distinction. Sure enough, the distinction is unstable; the line between primary and secondary was in many cases an arbitrary decision. Where not otherwise acknowledged, translations are my own.

1

Introduction: Why Genre?

"Ohne Absonderung findet keine Bildung statt, und Bildung ist das Wesen der Kunst. . . . Das Wesentlichste sind die bestimmten Zwecke, die Absonderung, wodurch allein das Kunstwerk Umriß erhält und in sich selbst vollendet wird. Die Phantasie des Dichters soll sich nicht in eine chaotische Überhauptpoesie ergießen, sondern jedes Werk soll der Form und der Gattung nach einen durchaus bestimmten Charakter haben.

(Without division, creation does not take place; and creation is the quintessence of art. . . . Of most importance are the definite purpose and the separation through which alone the work of art receives form and becomes complete in itself. The imagination of the poet should not spend itself in a chaotic generalization of poetry, but each work should have a thoroughly definite character according to form and genre.)

— Friedrich Schlegel, *Gespräch über die Poesie*

IN HIS *GESPRÄCH ÜBER DIE POESIE* ("Dialogue on Poetry"), the German romantic critic and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel allows a certain

Markus to defend the concept of literary genre and the legitimacy of its study against one Amalia, who feels that categorization in whatever form kills the spirit and the imagination: "Mich schaudert's immer, wenn ich ein Buch aufschlage, wo die Phantasie und ihre Werke rubrikenweise klassifiziert werden" ("I shudder whenever I open a book where the imagination and its works are classified under rubrics").[1] But this is after all a dialogue, a fragment. No one has the last word. And like the ghosts of Paolo and Francesca, whirled around by the noxious gases of critical discourse, the spirits of Markus and Amalia have haunted every debate on genre theory down to the present day; representing the two poles of necessity and freedom, they struggle for mastery in every work and in every act of reading.

Their dialogue is situated on the divide between ancient and modern approaches to genre. Like Markus, the ancients saw generic boundaries as necessary for poetic production. A good example is Horace, who wrote his *Ars poetica* in the form of a letter of advice to a literary family. Genre in Horace is a subtopic of *to prepon* or *decorum*, of the ability to find what is fitting:

Descriptas servare vices operumque colores
cur ego si nequeo ignoroque, poeta salutor?
Cur nescire pudens prave quam discere malo?
Versibus exponi tragicis res comica non vult;
indignatur item privatis ac prope socco
dignis carminibus narrari cena Thyestae.

(If in producing my work I cannot observe [and don't know] the required genres and styles, why am I hailed as "Poet?" Why prefer wanton ignorance to learning? Comic material resists presentation in tragic verse. Likewise the "Feast of Thyestes" resents poetry that is conversation and worthy almost of the comic sock.)[2]

This production-oriented view of genre continued through the Renaissance, during which "literary invention . . . was largely generic, and [the]

1. Friedrich Schlegel, "Gespräch über die Poesie," 304; translated by Ernst Behler and Roman Struč, under the title "Dialogue on Poetry," 76. The epigraph to this chapter is taken from Schlegel, "Gespräch," 305–6; Behler and Struč, trans., "Dialogue," 77. [Works of general theoretical interest in the field of genre studies are cited in full in the Bibliography—AUTHOR.]

2. Horace, "Epistula ad Pisones," lines 86–91; translated by Ross S. Kilpatrick, in *The Poetry of Criticism* (Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 1990), 74.

transfer of ancient values was largely in generic terms, accomplished by generic instruments and helps."[3]

Amalia, however, is a modern. She sees all attempts at defining genre as coming from *outside*. Later thinkers such as Ferdinand Brunetière constructed a phylogeny of genres, hoping to trace and classify the growth and hybridization of texts.[4] In reaction, the formalists of the early twentieth century became intent on isolating specific textual features that determine the genre of a work containing them. By contrast, the postwar theoretical discourses of structuralism and reader-response criticism declare that readers and their conventions assign genres to texts, which makes it impossible for adherents of these schools to speak of genre as any kind of permanent or transcendental construct. These four stages of generic criticism—genre as rules, genre as species, genre as patterns of textual features, and genre as reader conventions—correspond to the four positions in the great debate about the location of textual meaning: in authorial intention, in the work's historical or literary context, in the text itself, or in the reader.[5] But how does the law of genre operate today? Let us look at some examples.

I

The ideology of genre is all around us. On a recent research trip to the local supermarket I paused in front of the "Reading Center." There stood all the garishly multicolored books, hundreds of titles, in a handful of categories. There were of course the romances, with names like *Cajun Kiss*, *Tame the Fury*, *Sweet Savage Love*, *Sweet Texas Promise*, and so on. Like "sweet," the word or concept of fire appears quite often, as in *Forbidden Fires*, *Fires of Surrender*, *The Flame and the Flower*, and *Embers of the Heart*. Need I describe the covers? A half-naked man and a half-naked woman in some sort of embrace, with a castle or cypress tree or clipper ship or mountain range in the background, perhaps a sword covering the pudenda, everything in pastels and earth tones. The genre of modern romance can actually be subdivided, because the Harlequins are a bit different. Whereas

3. Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, 17.

4. The title of J. M. Manly's 1904 article, "Literary Form and the Origin of Species," is an almost absurd evocation of this approach. Manly applies evolutionary thought in a very direct way when he characterizes medieval drama as a "mutation" from another species of literature. See also Charles Letourneau's "Origins of Literary Forms," which relates the evolution of genres to the evolution of human societies.

5. As a supplement to this telescoped history of genre theory I recommend Heather Dubrow's *Genre* and Klaus Hempfer's *Gattungstheorie: Information und Synthese*.

the romances just described are basically for married or older women trying to escape humdrum reality, Harlequins target younger women trying to learn where they can locate their desires within that reality. Younger, more fully clothed men and women, who are not always embracing, grace these covers. They are depicted in undeniably middle-class, unexotic surroundings—golf courses, shopping malls—and under titles that do not evoke passion as much as they attempt to invoke rules of conduct: *A Matter of Principle, Jester's Girl, Scout's Honor, Capture the Rainbow,* each a proverb and guide to behavior.[6]

Many students of the modern popular romance insist that the genre reinforces patriarchy by showing women as living in order to be desired by men. Janice Radway took a different tack by actually asking women to explain why in fact they read romances and to identify features they like and don't like. She discovered a defining feature of the genre: The romance is *"compensatory literature.* It supplies [its female readers] with an important emotional release that is proscribed in daily life because the social role with which they identify themselves leaves little room for guiltless, self-interested pursuit of individual pleasure. Indeed, the search for emotional gratification was the one theme common to all of the women's observations about the function of romance reading."[7] In other words, the contemporary genre of romance may be a response to the fact that American women are not provided with nurturers the way men are. Men and children, emotionally pampered beings that they are, develop different desires, and hence they enjoy different genres.

Radway's genre analysis proceeds from this point. After noting the particular use-value that romance has for its readers, she identifies those romances which best provide that use-value and from them constructs an ideal plotline:

> Instead of attempting to assemble an "objective," "representative" sample of the romance, I have relied on [my interviewees'] tendencies to separate their books into the categories of the "good" and the "bad." I have therefore departed from the usual procedure of focusing attention on a particular publisher's line or on a narrative subgenre, because virtually all of the . . . women read more than

6. Nowadays even Harlequin is further reticulated into several different series, with "Temptation" and "Silhouette" offering more explicit sex and featuring women characters who work after marriage. For an analysis specifically of the Harlequins, see Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1982).

7. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature,* 95–96.

one kind of romance. . . . [A]n analysis of these twenty quintessentially romantic books would reveal the crucial generative matrix of the genre *as the readers understand it.*[8]

On its surface, Radway's final list of thirteen essential plot elements, moving from the destruction of the heroine's social identity through the development of the emotional ties between heroine and hero to the restoration of the heroine's identity, looks analogous to the results of generic analyses Vladimir Propp carried out on the fairy tale.[9] Propp, however, does not identify the use-value of the texts of his genre, whereas Radway's structural analysis of the genre of romance makes sense only when framed by the use-value that defines it.

To find and (in particular) to express the exact use-value of a genre is not always such an easy matter. Which (presumably) male needs are fulfilled in combat books, for example, with those predictable titles apparently designed to cause physical unease? *To Hell and Back, Helmet for My Pillow, The Old Corps* (the old corpse?). The titles of the romances are evocative, those of the Harlequins are proverbial, but these titles show that this genre is dedicated to Dostoyevsky's proposition that "Suffering is the sole cause of consciousness."[10] There is no nudity on these covers; in fact, there are no women at all, just soldiers and planes and guns. The colors are surprisingly subdued, lots of green, dark brown, black. Interestingly, a combat book's cover and title rarely reflect whether the work is fact or fiction. Romance must be fictional because history has not fulfilled the needs of women, but combat books can be either. War exists, whereas we must imagine love. However, these covers and titles do clearly differentiate between combat past and combat future. The covers of the future are bright red and yellow, the titles emphasize abstract action rather than personal experience: *Night Launch, Red Star, Hostile Fire, Black Sky.*

Westerns tend to be named after places or persons: *The Burning Hills, Milo Talon, Cimarron, The Texans, The Californios, Hanging Woman Creek.* Like romances, they nearly always depict humans, but unlike romances the number of people depicted can vary greatly, and the mode of depiction is always realistic rather than stylized. Like combat books, the western is a male-oriented genre, and one whose compensatory message is generally clear enough: it poses individualism as a primary and necessary attribute.

8. Ibid., 120.

9. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale.*

10. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground,* translated by Michael R. Katz (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 24.

A man acting alone can solve a collective problem, a *sententia* that noted scholar Henry A. Kissinger took from the western into his office as secretary of state. When Oriana Fallaci asked him about the image he was cultivating as a "shuttle diplomat," Kissinger replied, "Americans like the cowboy who leads the wagon train by riding ahead alone on his horse, the cowboy who rides all alone into the town, the village, with his horse and nothing else. Maybe even without a pistol, since he doesn't shoot. He acts, that's all, by being in the right place at the right time. In short, a Western."[11] It is fascinating to watch Dr. Kissinger betray his German origins with the solecism of "village," which of course does not exist in the American West. His slip hints that perhaps his relative newness to American culture allowed him to grasp both the ideological core and the use-value of the western more quickly than most of us.

To name a place and depict the people who inhabit it is to conjure up a visible, imaginable, and hence attainable utopia, a new race, a sphere in which individual action can have a meaning—in other words, American market capitalism. So at least concludes Will Wright in his study *Six-Guns and Society*.[12] Wright argues that westerns essentially reflect, through their narrative sequence, the structure of American free-market capitalism. Like Radway, he supplies a Proppian sequence of sixteen "events" whose ordering is invariable, even if not all elements are present in every western. In the first complex of events, according to Wright, the hero enters a social group in which he is unknown, but to which he reveals that he has an exceptional ability. In the final complex, the hero saves that society, which then finally accepts him.[13] Wright goes on to link changes in the genre (for example, its disappearance from television) to the transition from free-market entrepreneurship to a "corporate," postindustrial capitalism that has de-emphasized the individual. Thus, if romances supply women with the understanding partner they lack in real life, westerns remove the unwanted partners whose presence brings about the male double-bind: "Be a hero, but don't rock the boat."

The covers of thrillers differ radically from any described so far in their use of a visual "alienation effect." Often photographed rather than painted as the other covers always are, they depict a few, apparently unrelated objects (a doll, a knife, and a drop of blood, for example). Here photographic realism combines with compositional stylization to produce a fetishistic image appropriate for the worship of violence. The covers of thrillers are visual zeugmas—a nail through a hand, a hammer beside a statue of Buddha, drops of blood on a map. These are also the only covers that dare to place their objects on the diagonal, thus further disorienting the viewer. Their titles are similarly opaque, metaphorical, and suggestive (*Size*, *Dark Room*, *Hard Candy*) rather than deictic as in the westerns or evocative as in the romances. All these features reflect the nature of this genre's plots, which ask the reader to put the pieces together. The disorientation at the heart of this genre provides a kind of "alienation effect" and an alternative to the familiar patterns of behavior. Apparently, this disorientation is a use-value, which makes thrillers the roller coasters and funhouses of reading.

So far, I have described a particular generic system within the American culture industry. I have hinted at both how these genres carefully differentiate themselves from their neighbors in terms of their titles, their covers, and how they are to be used by their readers. I have defined and subdivided the genres according to what I call their use-values. I propose, accordingly, that generic differences are grounded in the "use-value" of a discourse rather than in its content, formal features, or its rules of production. I have chosen to begin with popular literature for several reasons, one of which being that my colleagues are more likely to hear me out when I discuss these works than if I were to make similar statements about Shakespeare's plays, for example. The reason for that, however, is even more significant, and brings us back to Schlegel and the conflict between Markus and Amalia. It is, if I am correct, that most readers of this book concur that popular culture is indeed "genre-driven," that the sorts of formal similarities and differences I have been describing here are not artifacts of my critical fantasy—though the details of my analysis may be debated—but deliberate creations of an industry (not of "individuals," to concede Amalia's point) according to preconceived formulas that have created well-defined markets for exploitation; hence the emphasis on the cover art, so crucial at the point of sale of these books in the context I have described.[14]

Still, my subjective treatment of how these texts seek to seduce their

11. Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 41; cited in J. Fred MacDonald, *Who Shot the Sheriff? The Rise and Fall of the Television Western* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 3. MacDonald labels Kissinger's idea "heroic activism."

12. Will Wright, *Six-Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

13. Ibid., 142–43.

14. Ross Chambers has developed the idea of "narrative seduction" and links it explicitly to the increasing commodification of literature. The promise of encountering an identifiable genre would be one such means of seduction. See his *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

readers may seem to have precious little to do with "Literature" (books that get taught). Indeed, the academic reaction against the marketability of genre is typified by formulations such as this one by Fredric Jameson:

> With the elimination of an institutionalized social status for the cultural producer and the opening of the work of art itself to commodification, the older generic specifications are transformed into a brand-name system against which any authentic artistic expression must necessarily struggle. The older generic categories do not, for all that, die out, but persist in the half-life of the subliterary genres of mass culture, transformed into the drugstore and airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, best-sellers, and popular biographies, where they await the resurrection of their immemorial, archetypal resonance at the hands of a [Northrop] Frye or a[n Ernst] Bloch.[15]

Though one wonders about the logic of making "bestseller" a generic category, Jameson has created, with his usual magisterial compression, a little fable of a Golden Age, in which artistic genius and the adherence to generic rules of production harmoniously coincided, and of a subsequent Fall, in which true creativity, exiled from a genre system that both creates and limits its readers' appetites (Amalia's shudder) rather than writers' invention (Markus's defense), takes up its lodging *outside* or *between* genres. In other words, a literary work's adherence to generic rules becomes inversely proportional to its aesthetic quality. The problem, as with Marxist criticism's great shibboleth, the ubiquitous "rise of the bourgeoisie," is one of specifying just when and where this Fall took place. But one need not be a Marxist or believe in the difference between "true" and "popular" cultures to explain genre away. In their own ways, Benedetto Croce, Jacques Derrida, Adena Rosmarin, and Tzvetan Todorov all denigrate genre as an aporia, a critical phantasm, or an imposition on litera-ture.[16] One could make a little anthology of declarations of "resistance to genre," such as the following by R. K. Hack: "The doctrine of literary forms has always turned our eyes from . . . reality, has caused us to rest content with a futile label."[17] "Literature with a Capital L" is now

15. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, 107.

16. For the works of these theorists, see the Bibliography. In Chapter 8 I discuss their ideas at length. For now I only wish to emphasize that they write *against* the possibility of genre as something real and inherent in texts.

17. R. K. Hack, "The Doctrine of the Literary Forms," 64. How odd that the subject of Hack's article is Horace's *Ars poetica*, in which Horace argues that the generic production of literature is ineluctable.

consistently characterized by "generic instability," that is, by its ability to confound our generic expectations—including those for "Literature with a Capital L."

The effect that many identify as postmodern is produced by defeating the generic expectations of the reader. One example, and a parable of this process, is Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," which can be read as an antidote against any belief in generic stability. Borges's story masquerades as a report on the narrator's gradual discovery of a centuries-old conspiracy to create an artificial world through the production of, among other items, a fictional encyclopedia. Clearly, the use-value of an encyclopedia, the applicability of its contents to the reader's world-at-hand, should be annihilated by its assignment to the realm of fiction. But there is a twist; at the end of the story, the narrator reports that Tlönian discourse is remaking the world, that is, turning the tradi-tional "true discourses" into fictional ones, encyclopedias into novels:

> El contacto y el hábito de Tlön han desintegrado este mundo. . . . Ya ha penetrado en las escuelas el (conjetural) «idioma primitivo» de Tlön; ya la enseñanza de su historia armoniosa (y llena de episodios conmovedores) ha obliterado a la que presidió mi niñez; ya en las memorias un pasado ficticio ocupa el sitio de otro, del que nada sabemos con certidumbre—ni siquiera que es falso—. Han sido reformadas la numismática, la farmacología y la arqueo-logía. Entiendo que la biología y las matemáticas aguardan tam-bién su avatar.

> (The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world. . . . Already the schools have been invaded by the conjectural "primitive language" of Tlön; already the teaching of its harmoni-ous history [filled with moving episodes] has wiped out the one which governed in my childhood; already a fictitious past occupies in our memories the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty—not even that it is false. Numismatics, pharmacology and archaeology have been reformed. I understand that biology and mathematics also await their avatars.)[18]

18. J. L. Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Ficciones* (Madrid and Buenos Aires: Alianza & Emece, 1971), 35–36; translated by James E. Irby, under the title "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 18. Further citations in text.

Like the Tlönists with their encyclopedia, Borges the narrator also sets up a dialectic between fact and fiction. His text opens not with the third-person preterite verb so common to fictional narration, but rather with the first-person present and a long, dry, bibliographic rambling of the sort one expects to find not in a short story but in that other brief genre at which Borges excelled, the *nota* (a cross between an essay and a critical article):

> Debo a la conjunción de un espejo y de una enciclopedia el descubrimiento de Uqbar. El espejo inquietaba el fondo de un corredor en una quinta de la calle Gaona, en Ramos Mejía; la enciclopedia falazmente se llama *The Anglo-American Cyclopædia* (Nueva York, 1917) y es una reimpresión literal, pero también morosa de la *Encyclopædia Britannica* de 1902. (13)

> (I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia. The mirror troubled the depths of a corridor in a country house on Gaona Street in Ramos Mejía; the encyclopedia is fallaciously called The Anglo-American Cyclopædia [New York, 1917] and is a literal but delinquent reprint of the Encyclopædia Britannica of 1902. [3])

Two sentences later Borges provides another false lead that this is a *nota* by mentioning the real person Alfredo Bioy Casares, while at the same time revealing—in a veiled fashion—the very genesis of his "novel":

> Bioy Casares había cenado conmigo esa noche y nos demoró una vasta polémica sobre la ejecución de una novela en primera persona, cuyo narrador omitiera o desfigurara los hechos e incurriera en diversas contradicciones, que permitieran a unos pocos lectores—a muy pocos lectores—la adivinación de una realidad atroz o banal. (13)

> (Bioy Casares had had dinner with me that evening and we became lengthily engaged in a vast polemic concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers—very few readers—to perceive an atrocious or banal reality. [3])

The first-person narrative here—a marker of another genre entirely—along with the overlap in subject matter, allows us to suspect that this *nota*

is really the novel. Indeed, the contradictions start here, for in what sense can a novelist write down *hechos* (facts)—much less omit them!—and how can contradiction lead to a deeper view of (alternately atrocious or banal) reality? Borges, then, is the master Tlönista; like the encyclopedia of Tlön, the text "Tlön, Uqbar, and Orbis Tertius" is a "reference" work that reveals itself to be a fiction that in turn creates its own facts: among them, the fact of generic instability.

Generic instability is so prevalent a feature of the postmodern that Ralph Cohen sees fit to ask the question, "Do Postmodern Genres Exist?" (I propose, obliquely in the form of a fiction in Chapter 7, that theory itself is *the* postmodern genre.) However, this and the other Borgesian games of generic hide-and-seek with which contemporary literature abounds are not unique to postmodernism. In Chapter 3 I examine how the readily definable *ars dictaminis* or letter-writing manual—originally a sort of reference work or textbook—has repeatedly been turned into a work of fiction in its thousand-year history. Furthermore, postmodernism's dissolution of the boundaries between certain genres has created not an *Überhauptpoesie*, but rather a new genre: critical theory, an interdisciplinary discourse that never contents itself with a single defined object, but finds its use-value in the practice of social criticism, taking up the same position at the center of moral debate that Homer had for the Greeks, or which the novel came to have for the eighteenth century. Because theory has taken over roughly the same use-value that the novel once had, I am able in Chapter 4 to compare eighteenth-century novelist Samuel Richardson with twentieth-century theorist Roland Barthes as critics of legal discourse. Perhaps the generic instability of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*, discussed in Chapter 2, derives from the fact that it is one of the first works in this theoretical line, and not quite sure of what to do with itself. But even theory, seemingly all-powerful and protean as it is, can become unstable and collapse back into the form of fiction. This is what happens in Walter Höllerer's long poem *Die Elephantenuhr* and Umberto Eco's detective novel *Il nome della rosa*, a history of and a practical guide to semiotics which alludes to everyone from Borges to Conan Doyle.

In moving from the supermarket to Borges we seem to have reversed course entirely, and to be moving away from the seduction of generic certainty into the chaos of generic fluidity. But it is really our perspective that has changed, from being "outside" the system (as potential buyers) to being "inside" Borges's text (as actual readers). Though the system appears to us to function differently in the two cases, its effects are equally powerful in both. And although many critics might respond to the prolif-

eration of such unclassifiable works by proclaiming the attenuation or futility of generic classification, I perversely insist on seeing Borges's calling attention to his text's generic instability as merely the negative image of my supermarket display. Both phenomena confront us with choice: the supermarket with that of which text will best fulfill our needs; the "literary" text with that of what exactly to do with it or how to read it. Genre is just as much present in the latter case as in the former. The force of postmodernism depends profoundly on there being readers sufficiently familiar with the system of genre to appreciate the deliberate confounding of that system. Thus, my undergraduate students consistently find "Tlön" unreadable and uninteresting because they are unfamiliar with the various features and use-values of the genres that collide in it. The story has no point for them—and no power. No genre, no power. But as Adena Rosmarin has asked, whence derives this "power of genre"?

II

Why genre? If philosophers can ask the question, "Why is there *something*, instead of *nothing?*" then this book can ask, "Why are there (always) genres and not just *language* (or music, or pictures)?" One popular response to this question has been to ground generic distinctions in logical necessity: Northrop Frye, for example, distinguishes genres on the basis of their "radical of presentation," of the link established between narrator and spectator or reader.[19] Käthe Hamburger and Emil Staiger, however, distinguish genres by their orientation toward past, present, or future, that is, by the different ideas of time they embody.[20] This basic disagreement over where to locate the markers of generic difference certainly weakens the claim that genre is an essential feature of literature. An alternative approach would be pragmatic: we simply do not know what to do with texts without the "user's guide" that genre provides. Artificial-intelligence expert Douglas Hofstadter has remarked that all messages are really composed of three "layers." These are (1) the message itself, (2) a message about how to decode the message, and (3) a message that tells us "This is a message."[21] Now the statement "this is a message" can be taken both as

an act of generic classification and as a statement about the purpose a particular object should serve. Thus, one may read Hofstadter's analysis as an extension, beyond purely linguistic sign systems, of E. D. Hirsch's dictum: "All understanding of verbal meaning is necessarily genre-bound."[22] In looking at genre from the point of view of information theory, Jan Tryznadlowski has similarly described genres as "various types of programmes. . . . The programme is goal-directed. Whereas individual and synthesized instructions within a literary work are a literal code for the information contained in the work, the programme, outlined by the directives and criteria of the given literary genre, is the central directional information with considerable interpretive values." Furthermore, those values adhere not to the abstract and the private, but to the "artistic and ideological sphere of operation of a given literary work."[23] Faced with the question of just how an authentic legal text, when reproduced verbatim in Pushkin's novel *Dubrovsky*, can lose its legal character and gain a literary one, Jurij Lotman is forced to conclude: "A change in the function of a text gives it a new semantics and new syntax. Thus, in the example [of Pushkin's novel], the construction of a document according to the formal laws of a legal text is perceived as construction according to the laws of artistic composition. . . . The social function of a text determines its typological classification."[24] If the text's *mode d'emploi* is not somehow marked, reading—in the sense of that word which transcends merely translating black marks on white paper into sounds—becomes impossible.

So far I have talked about such markers as garish cover art, titles, and even the ambience of presentation—certain genres, however, cannot be sold in the supermarket. But as a counterpart to my supermarket experience, I could cite my participation in an informal reading group where I saw learned philosophers vexed at the impossibility of getting a handle on Ernst Bloch's three-volume utopian essay, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*). Why couldn't they? Because Bloch's style, subject matter, and tone change so drastically—one chapter being an intensely private memoir and the next blatant political invective, with some philosophy in between— that his book does not fit into any particular textual category. To count as philosophy, at least for other philosophers, a text must be (literally, Socratically) questionable, and Bloch's book is too personal and slippery to be interrogated. Philosophical analysis of a text can only begin once the

19. Northrop Frye, "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres," 243–337.

20. See Käthe Hamburger, *Die Logik der Dichtung,* and Emil Staiger, *Grundbegriffe der Poetik,* 5th ed. (Zurich: Atlantis, 1961).

21. Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach,* 2d ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 166–67.

22. E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation,* 76.

23. Jan Tryznadlowski, "Information Theory and Literary Genres," 44–45.

24. Jurij M. Lotman, "Problems in the Typology of Texts," 120. I consider the appearance of legal language within literature (and vice versa) in Chapter 4.

text has been generically classified as philosophy. Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and a number of other philosophers infringe on this law of genre by interrogating literary texts as though they belonged to the genre of philosophy. Predictably, others have come to insist that the texts of Heidegger and Derrida cannot be philosophy since they interrogate texts that are not philosophy, and so on. Our group's evaluation of Bloch's ideas had to be postponed until we could determine how to "handle" his writing, a determination that seemed to depend on what I call Bloch's "style." (This particular hermeneutic circle became a vicious one, ending in our decision to postpone the reading of Bloch indefinitely.) In "Exkurs zur Einebnung des Gattungsunterschiedes zwischen Philosophie und Literatur" (Digression on the leveling of the generic difference between philosophy and literature), Jürgen Habermas argues for differentiating the genres of philosophy and literature on the basis of their different use-values, namely *Problemlösung* (problem solving) and *Welterschließung* (revelation of the world).[25] Habermas's response to the attempts of Derrida and others to treat all forms of discourse as subject to the same methods of interpretation is in the end circular. He maintains that there is a distinction between philosophy and literature beyond their shared rhetorical and figural strategies, but he does not explain how we can make this distinction. He treats "problem solving" and "revelation of the world" as transcendental essences of texts which remain invisible—and yet understandable—to their readers. Nevertheless, like Habermas, I began to see genre as a set of "handles" on texts, and to realize that a text's genre is its *use-value*.[26] Genre gives us not understanding in the abstract and passive sense but use in the pragmatic and active sense. Use-value is what Radway and Wright and Habermas feel perfectly free to talk about, but which has been virtually absent from genre theory per se. And since the use-values that Radway and Kissinger and Wright and Habermas find lying at the heart of the romance, the western, and philosophy are social rather than private

(reading as a hidden, imaginary form of social action), genre theory in their works inevitably becomes a form of ideology.

The ideological nature of genre explains not only its necessity but also its instability. Ross Chambers has demonstrated that in order to function, an ideology cannot be identical with itself, a phenomenon he calls ideological split:

> An ideology is not a doctrine to be accepted or not accepted but a discursive proposition that positions subjects in relations of power (power being itself a differential phenomenon, existing only through being unevenly distributed). Ideology necessarily produces these subjects relationally, and it is in the difference between them that the potential for ideological split resides, these subjects being differently positioned regarding the system that produces them. They "perceive" it, "understand" it, from different angles, so to speak, and in differing perspectives.[27]

Chambers's view of ideology as a positioning of subjects is derived from the work of the French Marxist Louis Althusser, who in turn was influenced by the structuralist views of society in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan. While maintaining the received Marxist notion of ideology, which opposes "ideology" to "knowledge,"[28] Althusser locates the workings of ideology in the realm of the unconscious and makes it a pragmatic matter, the possibility of carrying on lived relations between people:

> Ideology is a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world. . . . In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an *"imaginary," lived*

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25. Jürgen Habermas, "Exkurs zur Einebnung des Gattungsunterschiedes zwischen Philosophie und Literatur."

26. This idea can, of course, readily be identified with pragmatism or neopragmatism. On pragmatism's relation to literary theory, see Anthony J. Cascardi, "The Genealogy of Pragmatism," *Philosophy and Literature* 10 (October 1986): 295–302; Ludwig Grünberg, "La Littérature et la tentation d'une 'culture postphilosophique,'" *Cahiers Roumains d'Études Littéraires* 1 (1987): 35–47; and Rosmarin, *Power of Genre*. Paul Hernadi's definition of pragmatic genre theory is the differentiation of genres by the varying effects they have on readers' minds. My approach could almost be described as the reverse of this. See his *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification*, 37–53.

27. Ross Chambers, "Irony and the Canon," *Profession* 90 (1990): 19. Terry Eagleton posits the non-self-identity of ideology in a more overtly political way: "A dominant ideology has continually to negotiate with the ideologies of its subordinates, and this essential open-endedness will prevent it from achieving any kind of pure self-identity. . . . A successful ruling ideology . . . must engage significantly with genuine wants, needs, and desires; but this is also its Achilles heel, forcing it to recognize an 'other' to itself and inscribing this otherness as a potentially disruptive force within its own forms." *Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1991), 45.

28. For a good brief discussion of the development of the concept of ideology and of its "classic" Marxist formulation, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford, 1983), 153–56.

relation. Ideology . . . is the expression of the relation between men and their "world," that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.[29]

Though Althusser rejects the notion of ideology as a belief system open to choice (his rejection is echoed in the first sentence of the quotation from Chambers), he nevertheless still identifies ideology as false, as can be seen from his use of the term "imaginary" as contrasted to "describing a reality." Rather than contrast imagination to reality, contemporary cultural critics tend to contrast the imaginary order against the symbolic and to identify ideology with the eccentric subject created by their correlation—reality being that which is unavailable to either realm. The imaginary operates on a metaphysics of wholeness, on the illusory identification of the subject with a unified body, whereas the symbolic implies culture's creation of subjects as products of its discursive systems.[30] Thus, for John Frow, who draws heavily on Michel Foucault's concept of "discursive practices," Althusser's "lived relation" of ideology has become a discursive relation, "the production and the conditions of production of categories and entities

29. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Random House, 1970), 233–34.

30. This terminology is drawn from Jacques Lacan's theory of the constitution of the subject. One possible source (among many) for approaching the topic of "ideological split" in Lacan would be the following passages from the *Discours de Rome*: "The subject goes a long way beyond what is experienced 'subjectively' by the individual, exactly as far as the Truth he is able to attain. . . . [T]his Truth of his history is not all of it contained in his script, and yet the place is marked there by the painful shocks he feels from knowing only his own lines, and not simply there, but also in pages whose disorder gives him little by way of comfort. . . . The Symbolic function [thus] presents itself as a double movement within the subject: man makes an object of his action, but only in order to restore to this action in due time its place as a grounding. In this equivocation, operating at every instant, lies the whole process of a function in which action and knowledge alternate." *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, translated by Jonathan Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 26–27, 48. Lacan goes on to relate two examples of the workings of the Symbolic: the abstract use of number (to add together two discrete collections), and a worker participating in a strike because he considers himself a member of the "proletariat." Lacan's concept of psychic disturbances as *products* of the very structures that create subjects is a good example of the dialectic between systems and noise which grounds my idea of generic instability.

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within the field of discourse," including the category of the subject on which ideology is supposed to act.[31]

To this conception of ideology Chambers adds two additional nuances. One, derived from the Foucauldian view of power, is that ideology, which creates power by repositioning subjects, must then necessarily appear differently to those different subjects. At this point, a term that Marx had made the instrument of falsity shatters into a controlled perspectivism—ideology, like interpretation, varies infinitely but not randomly according to the perspective of those who participate in it. Chambers's second twist involves naming this perspectivist element of a totalizing system "noise." The concept of "noise," adapted from communication theory by social and cultural theorists,[32] tells us that categories and entities can only be developed against a background of non-entities and non-categories; systems, in other words, can function only by means of the non-systemic they necessarily produce. Thus, the non-systemic is simultaneously inside and outside the system. Chambers then applies this concept of "noise" directly to sites of literary conflict such as canonicity: "As the mediation that produces power, then, the system of ideology necessarily produces 'noise,' a degree of play without which it would not be a system and consequently could not function to produce power. Canonicity is the site of such noise, a place of play within the system."[33] Now, beside the fact that they are both acts of sorting, canonicity and genre are also related in the sense that the recognition of an artifact as belonging to a certain genre can automatically exclude it from even potential canonizing—as is the case with rock music videos, for example, at least for the present. To put it another way, the act of canonizing is one of the potential use-values associated with certain genres. I contend that, aside from canonicity, whose institutional power is quite obvious, genre is also a site of such noise, the cusp between different use-values of texts and between discursive entity and non-entity. Hence, not only are genre systems ideological, but their cusps provide a most advantageous place from which to observe the workings of ideology in literature.

31. John Frow, "Discourse and Power," in *Ideological Representation and Power in Social Relations*, ed. Mike Gane (New York: Routledge, 1989), 207.

32. See, for example, Michel Serres, *Le Parasite* (Paris: Grasset, 1980); translated by Lawrence R. Schehr (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); and Jacques Attali, *Bruits* (Paris: PUF, 1981); translated by Brian Massumi, under the title *Noise* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

33. Chambers, "Irony and the Canon," 19.

The conception of ideology one finds in Chambers and Frow solves old problems and creates new ones. For literary studies, this revised conception resolves the question of literature's relation to ideology. It was clear to even the most hard-line sociopolitical critic that literature is almost never simply an embodiment of ideology (the "system" in Chambers's description), that it is also equally its negation (the "noise" in that system). Literary texts take up a differential position to ideology, shaking up its "ideologemes," so to speak.[34] We are now saying that these "-emes" are only differences, and that literature can be considered fully ideological, because ideology is never fully identical with itself anyway.

The greatest problem associated with this way of talking about ideology is that it quickly forces us to *stop* talking about it, since we have difficulty describing something that is not a set of beliefs to be accepted or denied. To "know" ideology is no longer to know the summary of a number of ideas. Ideology is no longer something that can be represented or paraphrased. Instead, it becomes something like the magnetic field that arranges a chaotic mass of iron filings into intriguing, ordered curves on a piece of paper. Ideology itself is usually invisible; it is noticeable and perhaps existent only in its interactions with the material world (which includes thought). Ideology is the magnetic force that simultaneously holds a society together by allowing it to communicate with itself in shorthand and pushes society apart by conflicting with people's realities. It is only in the deformations and contradictions of writing and thinking that we can recognize ideology; genre is one of those observable deformations, a pattern in the iron filings of cultural products that reveals the force of ideology.

In particular, what makes genre ideological is our practice of speaking of it as a "thing" rather than as the expression of a relationship between user and a text, a practice similar to that identified by Marx as "commodity fetishism." As Lacanian Marxist Slavoj Žižek explains, "When we are victims of commodity fetishism it appears as if the concrete content of a commodity (its use-value) is an expression of its abstract universality (its exchange-value)—the abstract Universal, the Value, appears as a real

Substance which successively incarnates itself in a series of concrete objects."[35] Schemes identifying different genres with different universal values have been erected in most historical periods; perhaps the most elaborate and explicit are those of the French neoclassical period for painting (genre painting was ranked above portraiture, which was ranked above still-life) and literature (tragedy ranks above satire, as Boileau points out). My treatment of genre as use-value is thus an attempt at penetrating one veil of an aesthetic ideology that continues to posit genre as universal.

As a form of ideology, genre is also never fully identical with itself, nor are texts fully identical with their genres. Furthermore, if genre is a form of ideology, then the struggle against or the deviations from genre are ideological struggles. Jameson locates literature outside the constraints of genre; I locate it in those texts where the battle is most intense, where the generic classification of a text determines its meaning(s) and exposes its ideology.

III

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is just such a text. Not only does it seem to evade generic classification, it also discusses and theorizes its own generic instability. I read *Moby-Dick* the way I read Borges's short story, as metafiction, looking for connections between what happens in the story and what the story tells us about itself. The political message in Borges remains on a rather abstract level, but Ishmael gives us plenty of the lived experience, which is, according to Althusser, the basis of ideology. Among other things, Ishmael gives us a particularly dramatic depiction of the

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34. The idea of literature's relating given ideologemes in novel and unexpected ways is advanced in Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel M. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship,* translated by Albert J. Wehrle (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 16–30. Terry Eagleton has succinctly stated the dilemma of situating literature in relation to ideology in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 16–19. Eagleton cites Althusser as a way out of the dilemma, in that literature reports experience (the lived relation) in such a way that readers can take up a critical position toward it.

35. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 31. In Marx's writings, use-value is related to the material reality of commodities: "A commodity, such as iron, corn, or a diamond, is therefore, so far as it is a material thing, a use-value, something useful," whereas exchange-value "appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value, i.e., an exchange-value that is inseparably connected with, inherent in commodities, seems a contradiction in terms." Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One,* in *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 303, 304. However, it should be noted first of all that though language and discourse are material, it is difficult to treat them fully as commodities and in particular to differentiate clearly between their use-value and their exchange-value. Second, my adoption of the term "use-value" owes as much to twentieth-century language theory (e.g., Saussure, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, and Halliday) as it does to Marxist thought. I develop the linguistic side of use-value in Chapter 8.

workings of ideology in the transformation of a whale hunt begun for economic gain into a personal religious quest, and in the analogous anthropomorphizing of an animal into a malicious adversary.

The ideological transformation of the *Pequod*'s crew is carried out by Ahab literally before the reader's eyes: the title of the relevant chapter, "The Quarter Deck: Enter Ahab: Then all," is that of a scene in a play. The captain's first act of suasive magic is to offer a gold doubloon for the first masthead who raises the white whale: " 'Look ye! d'ye see this Spanish ounce of gold?' — holding up a broad bright coin to the sun — 'it is a sixteen dollar piece, men, — a doubloon. D'ye see it? . . . Whosoever of ye raises me that same white whale, he shall have this gold ounce, my boys!' "[36] Ahab's repeated invocations from various perspectives of the bounty's value — it is Spanish, it is a doubloon, it is or was worth sixteen dollars, it is an ounce of gold — emphasize its "Quito glow," its exotic antiquity, its belonging to another time and economic system. The doubloon's primitiveness seems to determine its value and its suasiveness. Sailors and readers are made to notice how the doubloon contrasts strongly with the normal system of paying whalers: in its form; in its extraordinary materiality and *visibility*; and in its singular and unitary source in Ahab, the captain of the ship, rather than in the ship's owners or sailors, who normally divide the profits of the voyage. For it had been pointed out much earlier, in chapter 16 when Ishmael first signed on board the *Pequod*, that a whaling ship is a kind of joint-stock company. The capitalist nature of whaling is rendered here unambiguously: "People in Nantucket invest their money in whaling vessels, the same way that you do yours in approved state stocks bringing in good interest" (73). The sailors and harpooners perform all their work and risk life and limb for shares of the net profits of the voyage, called lays. The concept of the lay is emphasized twice, once in chapter 16, in which Ishmael, expecting to be given the 275th lay (that is, one out of every 275 cents of the net profits) is shocked when Bildad offers him the 777th, and again in chapter 18, in which Queequeg, after showing his prowess with the harpoon, is given the unusually high 90th lay.

The contrast between Ishmael's share of the profits and Queequeg's serves to explain and justify the "joint-stock" nature of the whaling ship, aboard which there are no differences in *kind*, only differences in skill and experience. The *Pequod* is thus the translation into economic terms of the

Lockean/American political philosophy that all men are created equal, and that the cause for existing inequalities lies in the variations in individual ability and desire. Ishmael himself makes the connection between the economic order and that of lived relations, telling us that "the community of interest prevailing among a company, all of whom, high or low, depend for their profits, not upon fixed wages, but upon their common luck, together with their common vigilance, intrepidity, and hard work . . . tend to beget a less rigorous discipline [in whalers] than in merchantmen generally" (147). In contrast, the present offer of bounty from Ahab tends to make him a master hiring his vassals directly, thus creating an entirely different economic relation from that which should obtain for the voyage in general. This different, archaic relationship between Ahab and his crew had been alluded to most clearly in chapter 34, "The Dinner-Table," in which feudal-monarchical references to Ahab abound: his is a "sultan's step" (149); he is the "Grand Turk" (150); he enjoys over his messmates a "social czarship" (150); and his meals are compared with the German kaiser's "Coronation banquet at Frankfort" (151). The clearest example of the lived relations corresponding to the doubloon is revealed later, when Fedallah and his crew emerge from belowdecks to man Ahab's boat (although present through the entire voyage, they are first mentioned only in chapter 48). Whereas the crew remain ideologically split between the whaling system they are used to and Ahab's new order, Fedallah and his four companions are loyal only to Ahab, speak only to Ahab, and remain hidden from the crew except at the lowerings for whales, particularly for Moby-Dick. What *their* compensation will be we never find out, but clearly they are motivated by Ahab's direct bounty rather than by the profits of the voyage.

But for now, by nailing the gold doubloon to the mast, Ahab has transformed the (relatively) egalitarian, capitalist shipboard into a feudal hierarchy, in a covenant to be reinforced by the sacrament of the drinking ceremony in which he assigns the role of "knights" to his harpooneers, whose harpoons are now described as lances, and that of "cupbearer" (the medieval *Mundschenk*) to Pip. Whereas all others seem ready to act in Ahab's drama, only Starbuck attempts to break the spell and bring Ahab back to the present. He begins his attack at the other end of the production cycle, at the level of the economic object: the whale itself. Ahab has had to abolish the whale as an economic resource in order to transform the shipboard society. There is a tendency, in reading *Moby-Dick*, to focus on Ahab's relation to the whale and perceive all other relationships as deriving from that one. However, one could equally see the whale as the reification

36. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, or *The Whale* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 161–62. Further citations in text.

of and justification for Ahab's real objective, the transformation of the social relations aboard the *Pequod*. Ahab has anthropomorphized and mythologized the white whale, invested him with a mind capable of malice. Only Starbuck points out the falsity of this. Moby-Dick has, after all, acted merely out of instinct: " 'Vengeance on a dumb brute!' cried Starbuck, 'that simply smote thee from blindest instinct! Madness!' " (163–64). And with that piece of zoological common sense comes also a reminder of the true economic relations under which the crew had supposed they were voyaging: " 'I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market" (163).

But Ahab persists. Starbuck's protest against the economic absurdity of the quest is silenced by Ahab's drama—a defeat read by one critic as "the defeat of American democracy."[37] Rather than respond directly to the logic of Starbuck's arguments, Ahab continues to use literature as his weapon, and in particular to metaphorize the relation between them. There are repeated references to extralinguistic signs taken from medicine, theater, and physics. Starbuck first falls prey to the metaphor of a passed contagion: "Something shot from my dilated nostrils, he has inhaled it in his lungs. Starbuck now is mine" (164). Then the ceremony of the crossed lances, by inserting the actors into Ahab's medieval drama, invests them with an energy, metaphorized here as electricity:

> "Advance, ye mates! Cross your lances full before me. Well done!
> Let me touch the axis." So saying, with extended arm, he grasped
> the three level, radiating lances at their crossed centre; while so
> doing, suddenly and nervously twitched them; meanwhile, glanc-
> ing intently from Starbuck to Stubb; from Stubb to Flask. It
> seemed as though, by some nameless, interior volition, he would
> fain have shocked into them the same fiery emotion accumulated
> within the Leyden jar of his own magnetic life. (165)

Ahab has not offered his crew a set of beliefs to be accepted or rejected; rather he has given them new roles to play, a new imaginary lived relationship with each other, with their captain, and with the whale. It is

the sensuous form of these relations and of the gold coin which is ideological. The scene connects social relations ("joint-stock" versus feudal), productive activity (profitable versus unprofitable killing of animals), and ecology (man's relation to the physical and animal world), yet Ahab can win his game only if no one present at the scene can fully grasp the interrelations among these three areas. A change in any of these three realms necessitates an analogous shifting in the others. Ahab uses a fourth domain of culture and language, altering the crew's position vis-à-vis the other three realms through his act of theater, through his rhetorical prowess, through his knowledge, in short, of literature.

Ahab's use of ritual drama to indoctrinate the crew parallels Ishmael's turning to dramatic form in order to relate the indoctrination. Just as Ahab changes the nature of the *Pequod*'s mission from profit-making venture to mythic monster-killing quest, so too at this point Ishmael changes the genre of *Moby-Dick* into ritual drama. This is necessary, as Robert Milder points out, because the novelistic genre cannot be used to involve its reader in a quest that goes beyond the phenomenal realm: "Novels may have . . . mythic elements, but these usually take the form of archetypal patterns enacted by the characters with reference to their fictional world, not rituals that involve the audience in a symbolic action. This communal function of myth has traditionally been served by the drama."[38] Or, as John Miles Foley has pointed out, "From point of view and characterization to the illusion of sequence and the power of dénouement, the novel *Moby-Dick*—to the extent that it is encoded with the reading signals familiar to us from experiencing other novels—directs its own reformulation, oversees its own creation as a work of art."[39] In other words, we witness in *Moby-Dick* a narrator using certain generic markers in order to forge a novel from a variegated patchwork of different genres: "Ishmael is the self-ironizing writer seeking, and finally achieving, realization through self-effacement in the work of art; following him in the process, we see the poetry arise from its (cetological) materials, and the discontinuities acquire the meaning of imaginative gestures within the context of a work in progress."[40] Ishmael's constant reformulation of his narrative requires not just the patience but also the complicity of the

37. Wai-chee Dimock, *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 122. Although she does not treat the question of genre at length, Dimock's argument, like my own, concerns the ideology of authorship: "Textual governance, I believe, cannot be divorced from the social governance of antebellum America" (7).

38. Robert Milder, "Moby-Dick: The Rationale of Narrative Form," in *Approaches to Teaching Melville's Moby-Dick*, ed. Martin Bickman (New York: Modern Language Association, 1985), 43.

39. John Miles Foley, "The Price of Narrative Fiction: Genre, Myth, and Meaning in *Moby-Dick* and the *Odyssey*," *Thought* 59 (December 1984): 437.

40. Glauco Cambon, "Ishmael and the Problem of Formal Discontinuities in *Moby-Dick*," *MLN* 76 (June 1961): 523.

reader—a complicity not always forthcoming, as most of us who have taught the book to undergraduates can confirm. And genre provides the link between the reformulation of the book and the reformulation of the reader.

This double dramatization (Ahab's and Ishmael's) in a central scene of *Moby-Dick* depicts ideology at work. If Ahab transforms the whale and the crew, it is Ishmael who constantly transforms *Moby-Dick* from one genre into another. Ishmael forces on the readers of *Moby-Dick* a contract remarkably similar to the one that Ahab forces on his crew; his readers must agree to follow Ishmael through the bewildering tangle of the many genres his narrative will assume. There are similarities between Ahab and Ishmael on precisely the level of lived relationships. For example, the joint-stock company against which Ahab rebels is mentioned in chapter 26, the aptly titled "Knights and Squires." There, in language reminiscent of Hamlet's meditation on the splendor and misery of man, Ishmael contrasts the nobility of the individual with his degradation within organizations of anonymity (*société anonyme*, the French term for corporation): "Men may seem detestable as joint-stock companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be; men may have mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignominious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes" (117). *Moby-Dick* becomes by turns "sermon; short story; occasional, scientific, political, and moral essay; satire; dictionary; encyclopedia; drama; dramatic monologue; manual; travelogue; character; tall tale; and prophecy."[41] In giving this list Nina Baym does not mention epic; and yet surely there is some truth to John Foley's claim that the use-value of *Moby-Dick* corresponds closely to that of the traditional epic.[42] Moreover, perhaps drama can be further differentiated into Ahabian tragedy and Ishmaelian comedy, as William H. Shurr suggests.[43] Edward Ahearn's list of genres in *Moby-Dick* corresponds to none of those already listed; like Baym, however, he includes nonliterary genres. According to Ahearn, *Moby-Dick*, "as representative of the Schle-

gelian total romantic art form . . . include[s] at least: first person narrative, proto-Conradian framing, pictorial art, philosophy-theology, science, history, lyric, song, myth, etymology, legal affidavit, sermon, melodrama, and dream."[44]

Even these extended lists are not complete. The genre of bibliography provides for a metafictional reading of Melville's book. Ishmael invites such a reading plainly enough in the remarkable "Cetology" chapter, in which he spends pages engaged in quasi-scientific discourse classifying whales as types of printed books ("folio," "octavo," and "duodecimo"). Ishmael's catachresis in the following passage, which begins with a pun on the word "volume," compares whales to books and thus turns cetology into bibliography. Both sciences, like generic classification, are acts of sorting: "And if you descend into the bowels of the various leviathans, why there you will not find distinctions a fiftieth part as available to the systematizer as those external ones already enumerated. What then remains? Nothing but to take hold of the whales bodily, in their entire liberal volume, and boldly sort them that way. And this is the Bibliographical system here adopted."[45] The sorting Ishmael carries out is itself a kind of generic classification as much in the etymological as in the literary-metaphorical sense of the word. That is, Ishmael identifies the *gens* or clan of each whale according to its physical differentia.

Several critics have argued that the cetological material in *Moby-Dick* represents Melville's *aesthetics of heterogeneity*, itself a corollary of a world fraught with "epistemological fragmentation and disarray."[46] If, as Howard P. Vincent has argued, the " 'Cetology' is a parody of the efforts of limited men to pigeonhole the phenomena of Nature,"[47] it is equally a parody of the efforts of limited men to pigeonhole the phenomena of writing, an implicit question of "why genre?" In using metaphors of "book" and "bibliography," Ishmael plays with his readers' generic expectations the way Ahab plays with his crew's perception of the "real" purpose of their voyage. For example, Ishmael refers to his encyclopedic description of whales as a "bibliography" rather than a "zoology." We may describe the catachresis of "bibliography" for "zoology" as a point of dehiscence between types of writing, as a point where genres collide. Ishmael's

41. Nina Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," *PMLA* 94 (October 1979): 918.

42. "In performing for the rapidly evolving American consciousness what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* did for pan-Hellenic Greece or what the Gilgamesh epitomized for the ancient Sumerians or even what Elias Lonnrot intended the *Kalevala* to do for Finland, the novel *Moby-Dick* serves American literary history as an epic." Foley, "Price of Narrative Fiction," 436. Note the generic contradiction of the main clause.

43. William H. Shurr, "*Moby-Dick* as Tragedy and Comedy," in Bickman, ed., *Approaches*, 32–49. As Shurr points out, Ishmael gives a (non-Aristotelian) theory of tragedy in chapter 47.

44. Edward J. Ahearn, "A Mutual, Joint-Stock World," in *Marx and Modern Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 191–92.

45. Ibid., 140.

46. Robert M. Greenberg, "Cetology: Center of Multiplicity and Discord in *Moby-Dick*," *ESQ*, n.s., 27, no. 1 (1981): 9, 11.

47. Howard P. Vincent, *The Trying-Out of "Moby-Dick"* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949), 141.

exasperation with the inadequacy of his bibliographic system itself becomes the subject for representation. It is, like Ahab's quest for Moby-Dick, an attempt to create an essence that explains what simply *is*.

As has been pointed out more than once, the search for Moby-Dick is an allegory of reading. Thus we come to see, in Edgar A. Dryden's words, that "surrounding and structuring Ishmael's encyclopedic treatment of whaling is the metaphor of the whale as a book." Dryden's formulation, along with the dialectical struggle invoked by the title of his book, *Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth*, together show how much *Moby-Dick* depends for its meaning not on its genre, but upon its generic instability.[48] *Moby-Dick* rests on—or takes flight from—the foundations laid by Melville's previous attempts at fiction, which John Samson has argued to be transformations or parodies of established genres, particularly of an American genre he calls the "narrative of facts."[49] Samson argues that Melville wrote what he calls antifactual narratives, where the *anti* indicates an important parodistic relationship to what is being written against. In converting these narratives into "antinarratives," Melville was combating the dominant ideology, which invested such narratives with ideological content concerning the superiority of the white race, the truth of Christianity, the effectiveness of Western science, and the like. As Samson puts it:

> The white culture's generic-ideological security—the self-assured sense that the historical tale has been told and understood—can be maintained only if its narratives accept unquestioningly the generic claim to factuality; to move beyond that point and examine the ideological assumptions—as Melville does—is to break down that claim. . . . Melville calls attention to the unstated generic, ideological, and narratological premises and thus writes a deflationary but corrective antihistory.[50]

There are several complicating factors that Samson disregards in this analysis of the ideology of genre. First, he has had to "invent" a genre for Melville to write against. Although Samson specifies a "genre *then* commonly called narrative of facts" (emphasis added), he unfortunately gives no citations from nineteenth-century sources to show that this term was in

48. Edgar A. Dryden, *Melville's Thematics of Form: The Great Art of Telling the Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 84.
49. John Samson, *White Lies: Melville's Narratives of Facts*, 2.
50. Ibid., 14–15.

use then. It would seem that he has identified a group of texts according to their use-value, and then given them a name.

Second, Samson goes on to treat this genre, the "narrative of facts"—not to mention "white culture" itself—as somehow homogeneous, as more "self-assured" than it really was—particularly if it had no name and no set of prescriptive rules (the earliest kind of genre "theory"). He thus depicts genres in general as more stable and coercive than they really are. Of course, certain genres—legal discourse (see Chapter 5, "What Is Legal Discourse Made Of?"), some kinds of philosophical writing—suppress their heterogeneity and their ultimate dependence upon other genres. It seems more accurate to say that Melville discovered the heterogeneity that was already *in* the "narrative of facts" to begin with. For example, Baym concludes that "because of its continual references to so many familiar literary genres both fictional and nonfictional, *Moby-Dick* manages to be interpretable even while submitting itself to no single genre."[51] Note that Baym implicitly assumes that only genre makes works interpretable. Our relation to the book before us changes with its generic transformations, the way the crew's relationship to Moby-Dick is changed through their altered relationship to Ahab. But what if all literature achieves its meaning the way *Moby-Dick* does? What if all literature makes itself interpretable by referring to what it is not, by cordoning itself off from the contamination of other genres, to carve out a space for itself in the inhospitable universe of discourse? What if "every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging"?[52] I contend that a text's generic status is rarely what it seems to be, that it is always already unstable, and thus that *Moby-Dick* is merely an extreme and extremely self-conscious example of the positioning and marginalization that every work takes toward its place "within" a generic system.

IV

Without denying Jameson's historicist account of the appearance of generic differentiation within today's commodified mass-cultural production, I argue that this particular visibility is a material difference that

51. Baym, "Melville's Quarrel with Fiction," 918.
52. Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 65.