

Kinds of Literature

*An Introduction to the
Theory of Genres and Modes*

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Preface

For quite some time now, it has been taken for granted that the old order of historical kinds has irrevocably gone. If we are to have genres, they must be arrived at *de novo* rather than *ab ovo*. And in the main, critics have preferred to talk about genres—or “modes”—in a very broad, un-historical way. Such theory is sometimes interesting. But it seldom seems to make for better reading of literature. And since it deals with a very small repertoire of modes, it has tended to narrow the literary canon.

This book springs from the conviction that it is time to enlarge the critical repertoire: to recover a sense of the variety of literary forms. It inquires whether genre in the traditional sense may not still have a place in literature. How do genres function? How are they formed? What is the relation of “fixed genre” to mode? My aim has not been to build systems of genres (there are all too many of those already), but to discuss problems and issues that arise when literary groupings are considered in terms of genre. In particular, I have tried to follow out some of the implications of treating genres not as permanent classes but as families subject to change. I have tried always to keep diachronic considerations in mind. Not that literature cannot sometimes transcend external history. But to do so it must accept its own history.

The book will seem too audacious to some, to others pedestrian. With few exceptions, for example, it deals specifically with English literature. I am aware of the comparatists’ objections to genre studies on a national basis, and agree with them. But I have had to weigh against this the great differences between the orders of genres in different literatures. Some kinds, indeed, occur exclusively in one, without equivalent elsewhere. Many are international, however, and the decision to concentrate on a single literature was primarily a choice of scale. But although I have focused on English literature and the ideas that bear on it, I have intro-

duced other literatures where it seemed helpful to do so. Considering the relevant sources, models, analogues, formative traditions, and theoretical influences inevitably involves a genre critic in some comparative work. Allowing for such involvements, we may think that English literature would not be a disablingly inadequate sample to take, if one knew how to take it. The generic nature of literature may be such that one extensive literature may stand as an exemplar of literature itself. If I am thought wrong in this, the book may be mentally retitled *Kinds of English Literature*. In any event, this is not a history of criticism. If it were, it would have to find far more space for Continental theorists: for Brunetière and Lukács, for Russian formalists, for Hans Robert Jauss, perhaps even for French structuralists.

As many have noticed, discussions of genre easily become chimerical. This is partly at least because of the paucity of examples of practicable length. I have tried, therefore, to illustrate as much as possible, if only from short forms. Such examples are not, I hope, atypical: others from longer kinds could have been given. Many of the examples come from the Renaissance and the eighteenth century. But the disproportion may be allowed, since in those periods genre criticism was especially energetic and illuminating.

In dealing with so many different periods in a book of this character, some compromise in treatment of orthography was unavoidable. Normally, the spelling has been modernized but not the punctuation. Occasionally, however, original spelling has been retained where it is significant; then the whole quotation is treated in the same way.

Earlier versions of parts of Chapters 5 and 6 were read as lectures, particularly a Churchill lecture at Bristol University and a David Nichol Smith Seminar at the Humanities Research Centre, Canberra—opportunities for which I am grateful. Chapter 12 appeared in a somewhat different form in *New Literary History* 11 (1979); I wish to thank the editor and publisher for permission to reprint parts of it here. Acknowledgments are due to Martin Brian and O'Keeffe, Édouard Champion, Yale University Press, the National Council of Teachers of English, and Gerald Duckworth for permission to reprint the epigraph and the diagrams on pages 240, 244, 245, and 247, respectively.

In forming the ideas and writing the book, I incurred more debts than can be acknowledged. Most of my colleagues and many of my students at Oxford, Edinburgh, and elsewhere contributed. But I particularly wish to thank E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Ralph Cohen, and Wallace Robson for their

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In a more practical sense, completion of the book would not have been possible without periods of study leave at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University, Canberra. There and at Edinburgh, parts of the manuscript were typed by Betty Horton, Sandy Lafferty, Julie Barton, Pearl Moyseyenko, Sheila Strathdee, and Jill Strobbridge with much skill and care. Special thanks are due to Peter McIntyre, who prepared the index. The debt to my wife, who read proof and tolerated the vexations of authorship, belongs to a large genre that can only be mentioned here.

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A.F.

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1. Literature as a Genre

*The bewildered foreigner can only say:
"But if the Diary is all you assert of it,
It must be literature, or, if it is not literature,
It cannot be all you assert of it."*

HUGH MACDIARMID

To the question "What is literary theory a theory of?" no simple answer can be returned. Indeed, there is no permanent answer at all, and perhaps not even a temporary one satisfying to everyone. Some will say that literary theory deals with the criticism of literature, or directly with literature. But literature cannot be counted the material of a critical science in the way that machines form the material of mechanical engineering, or puddings of a branch of domestic science. There are gods in literature's machines, who are said to metamorphose and multiply beyond knowing. That is, criticism treats a distinctive sort of experimental evidence: the results of reading. The *materia critica* should not be thought of as a group of objects. It is literature subjectively encountered, individually and in part variously constructed, interpreted, and valued, within the institutions of societies that change. We can reach objective conclusions about it; but our best chance of doing so is to allow for its variety and its variation.

Even with this limitation, literary theorists are now the fortunate possessors of a wealth of criticism dealing with a wide variety of literature. Is, then, a general theory of literature at last possible? We may think that to have explanatory power, theories must explain specific problems.¹ Of these, contemporary literary theory has succeeded in identifying several. There is no single question fundamental to literary theory.² The old and new problems—validity of interpretation, value of literature, taxonomy of kinds, genetics of invention, responsibility of writers, reality of the heterocosm—all these and others call for attention. This book treats one particular problem: the function of genre in literature.

Limits of Literature

Some are perplexed that literature should have an uncertain extent. But this should not be surprising. Produced by diverse societies, variously

conceived and valued at different times, and never known except in small part, literature inevitably elicits disparate ideas of itself. For a man who reads only modern novels, or who thinks history to be fact (or bunk), literature is going to differ from Gibbon's literature, or Vinaver's. Nevertheless, one response to this flux has been to define "literature" as the class of works that are, or have been, generally accepted as literary. In the brahminical version of this notion, literature is set as a unique canon, to which new members occasionally gain admittance.

Attractively simple as this idea may seem, it has provoked disagreements about which works are canonical, without leading to much theoretical construction. Moreover, the monumentality it stresses easily recalls that of a cemetery, so that it may have exacerbated hostility to the very idea of literature. The sensitive Rivière (himself a defender of literature) could feel positively grateful for the onslaughts of Dada and of the surrealists.³ As for the structuralist Jacques Ehrmann, he exults over "the death of literature": "What is literary is not one text to the exclusion of another, but the texts that the reader decides to qualify as such . . . A certain conception of 'literature'—the one that makes of certain signs an aristocracy of discourse . . . loses all validity, all foundation, on losing its privileges. Thus 'literature,' a dumping ground for fine feelings, a museum of 'belles lettres,' has had its day."⁴ The expression "aristocracy of discourse" reflects a common view that the idea of literature is elitist in a bad sense. And this would almost be justified, if literature were an immutable institution. A literary museum that could only be extended might well call for the destructive attentions of a terrorist-critic, just as

literature
that gouty excrement of human intellect
accumulating slowly and everlastingly
depositing, like guano on the Peruvian shore⁵

—as Robert Bridges described it—might need Ehrmann's and Beaujour's "stirring up shit." But in fact, literary traditions and literary change are far too complex to be contained by any merely incremental concept. It would certainly be foolish to provoke Clio by regarding literature as a single class of works. No sooner are literature's sacred cows branded with the iron of definition than Apollo wants a new sacrifice, perhaps of goats.

There are also logical difficulties in asserting literature to be a class, as later chapters will try to show. One feels uneasy, Beardsley remarks, about the phrase "poor literature"—which indicates an honorific element in the term. But, he continues, literature is also connected with the con-

cept of genres, since any work that belongs to a genre belongs in some sense to literature. And here is a difficulty. For we freely speak of *poems* as bad, and "if . . . every poem is a literary work, then 'literary work,' it would seem, is not honorific."⁶ Although the reasoning could be closer, Beardsley is right to oppose the argument (of Colin Lyas and others) that literature is a purely normative term. From their argument, moreover, he interestingly notes in passing, "the alternative conclusion could be drawn that literature is not after all simply the class of literary works—since one of these terms is normative, the other not." This "escape," which Beardsley rejects without examination, seems an avenue worth exploring. When one considers the various senses of *literature*—"good writing," "edifying writing," "memorable writing," "great writing," "whatever is written," and so forth—and the various implied contrasts—"not subliterate," "not writing that tries and fails to be great," and so on—it is hard to think that the term refers to a single class.

Literature should not be regarded as a class at all, but as an aggregate. It is not what literary works have in common, but constitutes, rather, the cultural object of which they are parts. And by no means the only parts: we are not to think of works as like bricks forming a wall. Some of the literary object is highly structured, yet it is also flexible (as F. W. Bateson was fond of saying). Now it expands from the *Dunciad* into classical influences or epic conventions; now it contracts to "Maecotis sleeps" or the choice of "skulking" as an epithet for Truth. It also varies in a disconcertingly protean fashion, from time to time, place to place, reader to reader. It constitutes different things for different individuals and nations, and even different social groups or educational cadres.

To parts of this mass of writing (and oral literature), many groupings in various ways partly correspond, such as:

1. works currently considered literature
2. works formerly canonical
3. canonical passages
4. literary oeuvres
5. genres, subgenres, and similar groupings
6. works surviving in human memory
7. literary conventions, devices, motifs, and so forth
8. great classics
9. literary traditions
10. literary diction
11. the words that have occurred in literature.

Even if some of these groupings could be regarded as classes, this is

plainly not true of all. Again, some of the groupings intersect or are included within another. But we can see intuitively that a single class including all of them would be an impossibility. To a large extent, they exist independently. A nonliterary word such as "phenylalanine" or "penstock" may occasionally occur in a literary work, without abrogating group 1 or 10. Technical manuals with many words not belonging to group 10 are still unlikely to belong to 1—or, indeed, to form any part of the literary aggregate. Each class, it seems, has its own validity, its own appropriate applications. In evaluation the aggregate is normally thought of as works (group 1 or 2) or *oeuvres* (group 4). When a brief passage is discussed, however, it may be referred to some other class, such as 3, 7, 9, or 10. An essay by Montaigne will not always be primarily considered in relation to the symmetrically ordered *Essais*; an Elizabethan sonnet "sequence" can legitimately be treated as a collection of love lyrics, a long poem in quatorzains, or an embodiment of Petrarchism.

This is not to say that such groupings have equal explanatory power, or that it makes no difference which we favor. If we make a habit of considering the aggregate in terms of literary diction (group 10), we are likely to opt for a "language concept of literature."⁷ Determining literature's extent then resolves itself into distinguishing (or not) between literary and nonliterary discourse. But if we think mainly of works (groups 1, 2, and the like), we shall probably adopt a broader art concept taking other elements besides language into account; or a concept based on fiction; or a value concept. It is mainly in works, not in words, that literature embodies values.

It cannot have been to deny this, surely, that Northrop Frye made his famous affirmation, "Literature is not a piled aggregate of 'works,' but an order of words."⁸ Still, the dictum is not a very happy one. When we read literature, what we read are groups of works, or works, or parts of works: not words. True, critics may be much more than readers. But what they study comes into existence for them through readings of works. Most of these works have, to be sure, a rhetorical order, an order of words. But some have a sublexical order of sounds (metrical or other), and others—such as Ian Hamilton Finlay's concrete poems, or Ernest Vincent Wright's lipogrammatic novel without *e*'s—have an order of letters. In still other works, notably in probable report novels, the words may be so indifferent, so little organized in a literary sense, that they could be extensively replaced without disordering or changing the work. In *Act without Words*, words are absent altogether. Yet an idea of litera-

ture that excluded Beckett's play would carry its own minimalism to deficiency. (Nor could the missing discourse be supplied merely by invoking the notion of side-text.)⁹ Many such cases become problematic, if we identify literature, as the structuralists do, with its discourse. It is better to allow that literary order need not inhere primarily in words. Discourse is an order of words, but literature is an order of works.

Those who think of literature purely as language or "discourse" face a dilemma. They are obliged to exclude novels from literature (if literary discourse is distinctive), or else (if it is not) to deny literature's existence as a distinct entity. For a realistic novelist may choose to put little or no effort into selecting or forming his language, but concentrate instead on forming the imitated life. In certain documentary genres, indeed, the words may be the writer's only in a very weak sense. Considered merely as discourse, without reference to any integrated work, literature is not always distinguishable from other writing. Understandably, then, those loyal to modern fiction have preferred to resolve the dilemma by the bold course of assassinating literature. Thus, criticism's recent concentration on prose fiction is indirectly linked with rejections of the concept of literature.

Similar problems arise with individual literary genres. Their extent, too, is problematic; their existence, likewise, has the complexity of historical development. And we find the same contemporary impulse to deny their validity. This is no coincidence. Indeed, the so-called central concept of literature practically identifies—or confuses—the literary aggregate with the class of genres.¹⁰

According to the central conception, "literature" refers to a certain group of genres, whose exemplars are therefore by definition literary, at least in aspiration. These central genres comprise the poetic kinds, the dramatic, and some of the prose kinds. The canon has varied a good deal, but has always included satire, for example, and fictional narrative. Round this nucleus spreads a looser plasma of neighboring forms: essay, biography, dialogue, history, and others. They are, so to say, literature *in potentia*. By criteria that seem to vary from kind to kind, a history, perhaps, or a philosophical work will come to be singled out as belonging to literature. This is without prejudice to the remaining, nonliterary, histories, which may enjoy a high reputation in their own field. Farther still from the nucleus lie those technical specialized kinds in which it is hard to imagine a literary work occurring. Modish talk about cut up *textes* cannot conceal the fact that uncut plumber's manuals, telephone direc-

ories, or treatises on Boolean algebra are never regarded as literary works—not even as worthless attempts at literature. Some great works that are undeniably part of our literature stand outside the nuclear genres and constitute partial anomalies. But the central conception has obvious intuitive force.

Literature as Fiction

The conception has commonly been developed by presupposing fixed historical kinds at the center, and by asking what these have in common. A plausible answer is "fiction." It should not be thought, however, an easy answer. Aristotle's theory that fiction is a characteristic of literature was for centuries lost sight of, while literary studies were the province of grammarians. Only after a long, painful course of difficult thought and sharp controversy was the idea that fiction differs from falsehood as well as from truth arrived at. Not until Sidney do we reach a full defense of poesy's ideal truth, and even then it is couched in enigmas—as that the literary artist "nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth."¹¹ More recently, fiction has often been regarded as a defining characteristic of literature. Bennison Gray makes it the sole basis. And Tzvetan Todorov—although, to be sure, he sees fiction as "one of the properties of literature rather than its definition"¹²—hammers the idea out so finely as to extend it to nonfiction: a true story can be viewed "‘as if’ it were literature." But it may turn out that fiction is not so distinct a concept, or not so related to literature, as to settle its definition very firmly.

Attempts have been made to distinguish precisely between fiction and nonfiction by applying Austin's theory of speech acts. This distinguishes between the locutionary act (utterance), the propositional act (including reference and predication), the illocutionary act (asserting, promising, and so forth with respect to the proposition), and the perlocutionary effect upon the recipient. The speech act theorists separate fiction and nonfiction not at the locutionary level (by grammatical rules) but at the propositional and subsequent levels. The distinction is supposed to reside: (1) in fiction's suspension of the "propositional-act and the illocutionary-act rules of non-fiction," such as its restriction of reference to real existents; and (2) in fiction's obligation to pretend to perform a real propositional and illocutionary act—or to report that someone else performed it.¹³ Literary discourse, they say, has mimetic force alone.

This line of argument is not without taxonomic attractions. It seems

at first to achieve a clean division between an extended literature—in which, for example, propositions are asserted—and a central literature, which only imitates their assertion. Expository prose has included some great literature: no fit reader would deny the profound literary value of Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, say. But he would not wish, either, to question its real practical value as art history—any more than he would question the value of Pater's art criticism. Or again: suppose that an essay, on the borderline, has gone beyond purporting to imitate the speech of someone arguing persuasively and has actually set the argument out and engaged in real persuasion. Then it will gain, perhaps, real propositional, assertive illocutionary and perlocutionary value, but it will lose the status of central literature.

However, these attempts to apply speech act theory do not take us far. This is partly because of the limitations of the theory itself, which uses a rather simplistic model of speech. (The different acts are not really independent.) But in part—and this is what we need to notice—the reason is that the fictional genres resist definition. Distinction 1 looks solid. But it is only a permissive rule. Nothing obliges the writer of fiction to dispense with reference. Trollope may set *The Warden* in Barsetshire, but Dickens sets *Oliver Twist* in London. As for distinction 2, it fails to apply to all cases. Many works in the central genres contain propositions really asserted by the authors. As the example of Whitman would be enough to show, didactic statements *in propria persona* find a not inconsiderable place even in poetry. In former ages, indeed, the didactic function of literature was so central that Beardsley's "difficult examples" made up a large part of the aggregate. *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, *The Faerie Queen*: all have extensive passages meant to inform or persuade in good earnest.¹⁴ And even after we have allowed for the distinction between writing and use (intention and uptake, creation and practical application), the real illocutionary force of certain literary expressions of love, public poetry, and the like remains uncanceled. To relegate works with this practical bearing to extended literature would deprive the central genres of all but their least serious or least engaged representatives. Again, genres such as epithalamium and epitaph have social functions of another kind. As occasional or epigraphic, their exemplars form parts of ceremonies or monuments and share their actual force. An Elizabethan wedding was made more complete as a social event by its spousal song. Third, and conversely, mimesis is by no means confined to the central genres. Many sorts of discourse have a fictive element. Todorov instances

myths, and case histories that include patients' "memories"; and one might add liturgies, with their many poetic passages. Yet the larger liturgical sections (at any rate the Marriage Service) beyond question qualify as perlocutionary and even performative. It seems that central literature is not so distinct after all.

Perhaps in response to these difficulties, some have exchanged the idea of literary genres for the weaker notion of literary discourse. Todorov, who denies to literature any structural basis, goes so far as to speculate that "each type of discourse usually referred to as literary has non-literary relatives which resemble it more than do other types of literary discourse."¹⁵ There is a truth in this idea, which derives from the Russian formalists Tynjanov and Shklovskij, and to which we shall return. We may agree that, for example, certain lyric kinds have affinities with prayer. And certain prose narrative kinds could be related to history or biography, certain subgenres of satire to the real-life hoax.¹⁶ But such affinities do not obtain at the level of literary organization, so much as at the level of discourse. Any two neighboring or contrasting literary types (relations discussed in Chapter 13) have a far closer mutual relation in terms of genre than either has with a nonliterary type—even one from which it draws its formal material. In any event, to talk of types as Todorov does is in effect to concede that literature has a structural basis, if not the one traditionally recognized. Theories based on a terminology of "texts" and "discourse" offer at best merely rhetorical solutions. Any texts whatsoever can be treated as literary discourse, but not all can be treated as literary works.

The Changing Paideia

A different challenge to the idea of central genres has arisen from controversies about the educational canon. E. D. Hirsch delivers it most strongly: "literature" in its modern sense is a comparatively recent aberration, Victorian in origin; the earlier absence of a single term reflected the concept's lack of unitary force; and the concept itself is based on historically local assumptions about the privileged character of aesthetic criteria. Although Hirsch is obviously innocent of any Frankish rage for disorder, or wish to assassinate literature, he would like to persuade us to abandon the nineteenth-century (and New Critical) concentration on aesthetic aspects and to recognize the extraliterary, nonintrinsic bases of value. In practice this means that we should emphasize moral or instrumental

values once again, desegregating the central genres and welcoming the "pedagogical expansion of literature."¹⁷ There can be no question about the seriousness of these issues, nor about the need to view them in broad perspective. And we may have a good deal of sympathy with Hirsch's immediate aims. But an even longer historical view might not discover that literature has developed quite as he supposes.

For one thing, the recency of "literature"¹⁸ does not prove the absence of a unitary term for the central genres earlier. They were referred to in the Renaissance as "poesy." This term was not at all equivalent to "poetry" in the modern sense that contrasts with "prose": "It is not rhyming and versing that maketh Poesy: one may be a poet without versing." Thus, Sidney frequently refers to prose writers (Plato, Xenophon, Heliodorus, Sannazaro, More) as writers of poesy, and similarly to prose works of various kinds that are characterized by fiction or imagination or "feigning" (the *Cyropedia*, "an absolute heroical poem"; *Amadis de Gaule*, "which God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesy").¹⁹ It was a common position: Sidney shared it, for example, with Minturno.²⁰ Indeed, several of the systematic literary theories of the Renaissance, such as Scaliger's, discuss fictional prose under the head of *poesia*. The altered nomenclature that Hirsch notes cannot have signaled the first emergence of the unitary concept. Perhaps the nineteenth-century change rather indicates a reaction to the temporarily overextended concept that underlay Augustan literature, with its extreme georgic or didactic emphasis.

The extent of literature—that is, of poesy—was controversial in the Renaissance, too, however. Patrizi, Scaliger (with certain reservations), and many others took an inclusive view: literature extended to a whole *paideia* or curriculum of learning. Minturno held that philosophers such as Empedocles and Lucretius wrote poesy. On the other side, rigidly Aristotelian-Horatian theorists so defined the genres as to seal them off from extended literature.²¹ It was a debate not unlike our own. Except that the different, and shifting, relations of Renaissance prose and verse kinds, the different views of didacticism, the different values: all these differences meant that the boundaries of literature were not then the same as those that critics of the present century dispute.

The recent phase of the controversy has taken a distinctly ideological form. This does not always receive acknowledgment in the United States when the expansion of "literature" is accepted as a "natural" return to a "more venerable, undifferentiated usage under which 'literature' covers everything worth preserving in written form, whether or not it has artis-

tic merit."²² In practice, expanded literature is far from everything worth preserving in written form (which would presumably include, for example, registers of births). Nor on the other hand does it seem in the main to add many works worth preserving for very long. Little of "the best that is known and thought in the world" comes into university courses on Women in Literature that was not already within literature's unexpanded limits. One should not expect it to. The point of thematic curricula is not to enlarge literature, but to restructure it and so challenge its values. This may be justified. The intrinsic criticism of the nineteenth century neglected ethical questions to which our own century has rightly reverted. The new *paideia* thus finds its *raison d'être* partly in correcting earlier formalism, partly in accommodating militant minorities. Our purpose here cannot be to adjust claims, or judge whether "the Arnoldian notion of culture" (as something above politics and attainable by all) serves as "an instrument for the maintenance of American class structure."²³ But we need to notice that the extent of literature varies with cultural setting.

In Britain, for example, literature is not expanding in quite the same way. But then, the British *paideia* has always extended to moral and other nonliterary writing of a sort little studied in English courses in the United States during the earlier decades of this century. In several European countries, indeed, accession to the demand that literary studies should be politically relevant has narrowed rather than enlarged literature's limits. Far from including "everything worth preserving," it has confined literature to the last century or so, until European commentators have begun to speak of a flight from the past.²⁴ They also notice a lowering of aesthetic standards, which is not always justified by the other values of the writing now promoted. Our age has a great appetite for studies of writing that is hardly worth studying.²⁵ Thrillers, detective stories, science fiction, advertisements, pop poetry, pornography: these and other kinds of *Trivalliteratur* are accorded a weighty treatment that nevertheless avoids, somehow, questions of value. In fact, some critics openly express their greater interest in the typical than in the valuable. All this is not to deny a place to sociological and political studies of low culture. But to pass these off as literary criticism endangers the very cause by which they are inspired. Shall we in the name of antielitism deprive the people of their legitimate inheritance? Is their literature to be less than the best? If we are to replace the term "literature" by "letters," it would seem that we must reintroduce the old distinction between "letters" and "humane letters."

The Mutability of Literature

Such variations in *paideia* mask a greater difficulty in the concept of literature: namely, the instability of its generic structure. The genres counted central in one historical period are not necessarily the same as those central in another. This represents a deeper challenge to the unitary concept. Even those who feel sure about the present extent of literature must concede that it was thought something else last century, and something else again the century before. Under various names, literature has held its ground for a very long time, but the ground has changed a good deal. It seems that we must either accept an impoverished Higher Common Factor, a canonical "great tradition" common to all periods but comprising very few authors besides Eliot's single classic, Virgil, or else reject the concept of literature as void of permanent content.

To questions of canon we shall return in Chapter 12. Here we need only distinguish two sorts of generic mutability. One is the continual process whereby change in the population of an individual genre gradually alters its character. Epic was not quite the same after Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* and by no means the same after *Paradise Lost*. From time to time, however, a second sort of farther-reaching alteration disturbs the interrelations of several whole genres. Thus, the familiar essay counted as a central genre in the nineteenth century, as did the closely related sketch form. But now Beardsley can say (wrongly, but not unintelligibly) that works of the genre represented by *Aes Triplex* are "not literary works."²⁶ The sermon, the "character," the scientific treatise, and the history (to mention obvious instances) have changed not only their own parameters but their relations to neighboring genres. Genres are thus doubly lacking in stability.

However, ambiguity of literary status is confined to a few genres, for the most part—especially letters and travel books, and nontechnical essays, histories, biographies, and philosophical and scientific treatises. These debatable lands have been thoughtfully surveyed by Graham Hough, who notes two ways in which nonfiction can "participate in the nature of literature." Its linguistic organization may give satisfaction independently, beyond the requirements of any practical purpose. Pater, Ruskin, and Gibbon, although sometimes read for information, themselves had mixed intentions and from the first gave aesthetic pleasure too. Alternatively the original purpose may have become obsolete. Browne's botany and Burton's medicine being no longer valuable (let us suppose) in a practical or scientific way, we are free to recategorize and to enjoy