Genre, Interpretation and Evaluation

Catharine Abell

Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (2015) 115:1, pp 25-40.

Abstract

The genre to which an artwork belongs affects how it is to be interpreted and evaluated. An account of genre and of the criteria for genre membership should explain these interpretative and evaluative effects. Contrary to conceptions of genres as categories distinguished by the features of the works that belong to them, I argue that these effects are to be explained by conceiving of genres as categories distinguished by certain of the purposes that the works belonging to them are intended to serve.

Introduction

My aim in this paper is to provide an account of genre that helps us to understand why membership of certain categories affects the interpretation and evaluation of artworks. I begin by describing the interpretative and evaluative effects of category membership that I want the account to explain. From these, I then identify some desiderata for an account of genre that seeks to explain these effects. To these, I then add some further constraints, based on considerations about the scope, structure, development and criteria for membership of the categories at issue. I then assess one suggested explanation of the interpretative and evaluative effects at issue and argue that it is inadequate. Finally, I propose an alternative account of genre and argue that it meets the criteria that I have identified.

I The interpretative and evaluative effects of genre membership

The term "genre" is used in a wide variety of ways. Art critics use it to refer to categories of artworks, such as film *noir*, the Western, science fiction, horror, still life, or history painting. Linguists and rhetoricians use it to refer to categories of text: for example, history, biography, nonfiction, newspaper editorial, street hoarding, monograph, shopping list and research article; or categories of discourse: for example, tutorial, doctoral defense, apology, video-conference, eulogy and courtroom speech (Miller 1984; Askehave and Swales 2001). It is not clear that all these categories share anything interesting in common. Even as used by critics, the term may pick out categories that appear to classify works on the basis of such diverse features as setting (Western, road movie), content (romance), medium (musical), effects (comedy, horror), tone (*noir*), budget (blockbuster) or origins (Elizabethan drama). Some critics therefore deny that there is any set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being a genre that experts and audiences alike would endorse (Bordwell 1989, p. 147).

In this paper, I will restrict my focus to categories of artworks membership of which can affect the way in which a work is interpreted and evaluated. For present purposes, let us restrict the application of the term "genre" to such categories. My aim is to provide accounts of what a genre is and of the criteria for genre membership that are able, jointly, to explain the effects of genre membership on the interpretation and evaluation of artworks. The resultant accounts are to be evaluated, not according to how well they conform to

everyday use of the term "genre", but according to how well they explain the interpretative and evaluative effects at issue. The account should be consistent with common usage of the term "genre" only to the extent that it picks out categories that have such effects.

A work's membership of a genre can affect its interpretation in at least three ways. Firstly, it can affect which of its features are deemed representationally relevant and which are not. For example, in a film, actors may sing some of their lines. Whether or not we take the characters they play to be singing depends on the genre to which the film belongs. We are more likely to do so if the film is a melodrama than if it is a musical. Similarly, we are more likely to take the spatial relations between those areas of a portrait that represent its subject's facial features to be representationally relevant if it is a work of realistic portraiture than if it is a cubist work.

Secondly, a work's genre can affect how we interpret its representationally relevant features. A given phrase may require either literal or metaphorical interpretation, depending on the genre of the work in which it occurs. For example, "she gave up her heart quite willingly" is much more likely to license a literal interpretation if it occurs in a work of science fiction than if it occurs in a romance.

Thirdly, genre membership may influence what we take a work to *implicitly* represent. Works do not explicitly represent all aspects of their content. Some must instead be inferred on the basis of what they explicitly represent. From a novel that describes a withered, wise looking old man with a long beard and a staff it may be appropriate to infer that the man is a wizard even if the novel does not explicitly represent him as such. However, we are more likely to make this inference if the novel belongs to the fantasy genre than if it is a work of gritty realism. Similarly, the slightest anomaly in a realist novel may lead us draw inferences about its cause, while we may take at face value all kinds of unusual things (talking animals, women living in shoes), when they are represented in fairytales or nursery rhymes.

A work's genre also influences the value we ascribe to it. This is partly because it influences how we interpret it. The interpretation that results from ascribing a work to one genre may be aesthetically better than that which results from ascribing it to a different genre. However, genre membership affects evaluation even when we hold its interpretation fixed. We may take a work that elicits continual laughter to be good in virtue of doing so if it is a comedy, but to be bad in virtue of doing so if it is a tragedy or a horror. Likewise, an inconsistency in a work's content is likely to be deemed a flaw if the work is a melodrama, but not if it is a work of fantasy. We also evaluate works as members of a genre: a film may be better or worse as a horror, and our evaluation of it as such need not mirror our overall aesthetic evaluation of the work. Finally, we sometimes evaluate genres themselves, as when one says that tragedy is better than melodrama, or that horror is emotionally overstimulating.

Because the interpretative effects described above concern representational content, my focus here is restricted to representational art and, more specifically, to works of narrative art, to which the notion of implicit content is most clearly applicable. While genre membership affects the appreciation of non-representational and non-narrative art works, for present purposes I will leave open the question of whether or not the account I propose can be extended so as to explain this fact.

II Constraints on accounts of genre and genre membership

In addition to explaining the interpretative and evaluative effects just described, an adequate philosophical account of genre should accommodate several further features of genres and genre membership. Firstly, which features are characteristic of the works in a given genre can differ according to their date of production. In this sense, genres have *histories*. For example, the features of early horror films differ markedly from those of more recent examples of the genre: while early horror films featured madmen, evil doctors and vampires, horror films of the 1990s were more likely to be concerned with psychopathic killers, and contemporary horrors are more likely to feature global germ warfare.

Secondly, genres can cross media. For example, in addition to horror films, there are horror novels and horror comics. Similarly, there are musical films and musical theatre, and there are *noir* films, *noir* stories, and *noir* short stories. Not every genre will have members in every medium, but many genres have members in more than one.

Thirdly, a single work may belong to more than one genre. The relation between works and genres may be one to many. A film may be a musical, and also a comedy. A novel may be a horror, and also a work of science fiction.

Some works are not multi-genre, but belong to a single, hybrid genre. For example, a work may be a space Western without being either a space opera or a Western. It may not quality as a Western, because it is set in space rather than the Wild West, and it may not qualify as a space opera, because it lacks space opera's characteristic melodramatic themes.

Finally, some genres are subgenres of others. Such genres bear hierarchical relations to one another. There are numerous subgenres of crime drama, including the police procedural, *noir*, the courtroom drama, and the detective drama. These subgenres may themselves have subgenres (such as the hardboiled detective drama). Nevertheless, there is not an indefinite hierarchy of genres. While it is possible to pick out arbitrarily fine-grained categories of art works, not every such category will have the interpretative and evaluative effects of a genre. Thus, while the hardboiled detective film featuring Humphrey Bogart is a subcategory of the hardboiled detective drama, it is unlikely that membership of every one of these categories is of independent interpretative or evaluative significance.

III Genres as categories determined by features

We want an account of the nature of genres and of the requirements for genre membership to explain the interpretative and evaluative effects outlined in section one and to be consistent with the features of genres and genre membership outlined in section two. It is intuitively appealing to individuate genres according to the features that works in those genres possess. Gregory Currie claims that genres are (categories determined by) sets of features or properties that works can have (Currie 2004, p. 47). He holds that any set of features a work can have determines a genre. Consequently, on his view, there is an infinite number of genres. However, he claims, genre membership is not simply a matter of a work possessing the features constitutive of a given genre. Rather, he argues, a work belongs to a genre to the extent that it possesses enough of the features that characterise a genre to create an expectation among the members of the community in which it was produced that it will possess the others (Currie 2004, p. 49). Thus, while there is an indefinite number of genres, the number of genres with members is much more limited, because not every genre is such that a work's possessing some of its constitutive features will create the expectation among members of the relevant community that it will possess the others.

Currie claims that a work's genre membership affects how we interpret it because these expectations enable *genre-based implicatures* (Currie 2004, p. 45-6). For example, a novel that describes an old, bearded, wise-looking man with a staff may, in virtue of possessing some of the features of the fantasy genre and thereby generating in audiences the expectation that it will possess the rest, generate the genre-based implicature that the man is a wizard. This implicature will be generated unless it is explicitly cancelled (e.g. by the novel representing the man as merely homeless).

Currie construes evaluations of works as members of a genre to be a matter of their value relative to other members of that genre and takes evaluations of genres themselves to depend on evaluations of their individual members (Currie 2004, p.58). He thus construes the interpretative and evaluative role of genre as resulting from contingent facts about its members: facts about which actual works belong to a genre, and facts about which features of those works generate what expectations. On this view, genre classifications are purely *descriptive*: to classify a work as belonging to a genre is to just to indicate what features and causal history it has, and has no normative implications regarding what features or influences it should have.

Currie's explanation of the interpretative effects of genre membership is at best incomplete. It is not clear exactly how audience expectations generate genre-based implicatures and what distinguishes those expectations that do so from those that do not. Not all the expectations that accompany genre membership affect how we interpret works. For example, we expect romances to end happily. This expectation may be met, or it may be explicitly violated. Alternatively, it may be neither met nor violated, as when a novel ends before it is evident whether or not the romance it represents will end happily. In the latter case, although our expectation has not been violated, we do not take it to be part of the novel's narrative content that the romance ends happily. Rather, we take it to be

unclear whether or not it does so. Currie needs an explanation of why some expectations generate implicatures and others do not.

On this characterization, genres cannot change. However, Currie provides an alternative, trans-temporal notion of genre able to accommodate genre change, according to which genres characterised by distinct sets of features may count as distinct parts of the same transtemporal genre due to the relations of causal influence that obtain between them (Currie 2004, p.59-60). However, this means of accommodating genre change seems incompatible with the fact that the works in a genre can be causally influenced by works belonging to distinct categories: for example, film *noir* is influenced by German expressionism, but expressionist films do not therefore belong to the same genre as *noir* films.

Moreover, Currie has difficulty accommodating the fact that the features characteristic of a genre vary according to medium. Expressive lighting is characteristic of *noir* films but not *noir* stories, whereas first person narration is characteristic of *noir* stories, but not *noir* films. He might claim that the features characteristic of a genre are to be specified at a level of abstraction sufficient to encompass works in different media. For example, a characterization of *noir* that appeals to a bleak emotional tone, rather than to expressive lighting techniques, may encompass both *noir* novels and *noir* films. However, the more abstract a specification one provides of the features characteristic of a genre, the less likely those features are to distinguish one genre from another. A bleak emotional tone is as much a feature of tragedy as it is of *noir*. Moreover, these more abstract characterisations are in danger of taking for granted some of what we want an account of genre to explain. The same lighting techniques that help to achieve the bleak emotional tone of *noir* films have a quite different effect when used in horror movies, in which they are used to elicit fear. Rather than taking for granted these differences in effect, an account of genre should help to explain why the same features differ in their effects according to the genres of the works in which they are employed.

For these reasons, Currie's descriptive, features-based account of genre should be rejected. Nevertheless, certain combinations of features are closely associated with specific genres. It is therefore reasonable to assume that an adequate account of genre should explain the salience of a work's features to its genre classification.

IV Genres and purposes

Different genres have different purposes. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to identify the purposes of specific genres, we can illustrate this using *prima facie* plausible hypotheses about the purposes that individual genres serve. It seems that the purpose of comedy is to amuse an audience, the purpose of horror is to frighten an audience, while that of mystery is to create suspense as to whodunit. In each of these examples, the purpose of the genre at issue is to elicit a certain effect in an audience. But this is not the case for every genre. Some genres have purposes that are to be characterised by appeal to aspects of content, rather than to effects on an audience. For example, the purpose of science fiction is arguably to describe logically coherent alternative worlds. So

long as we understand the notion of a purpose sufficiently broadly, it seems plausible that every genre has a characteristic purpose. I therefore propose the following:

> **GENRE**: A genre is a category of works determined by the purpose for which they are produced and appreciated, where the means by which they pursue that purpose rely at least partly on producers' and audiences' common knowledge that the works are produced and to be appreciated for that purpose.
>
> **GENRE MEMBERSHIP**: A work belongs to a given genre iff it was produced with the intention that it perform the purpose characteristic of that genre by certain means; and these means are such that, if they were to enable the work to perform the purpose at issue, they would do so partly in virtue its producer's and audience's common knowledge that it is produced and to be appreciated for that purpose.

The proposed account places no constraints on how the common knowledge of purpose required for genre membership is to be acquired. A work's purpose may be indicated by features of the work itself. For example, a novel's narrator may say "Let me tell you how I solved the mystery of who killed him." Alternatively, knowledge of its purpose may be derived from features external to the work itself, such as what section of a bookshop a work is found in or how a film is advertised.

An artist who produces a work is likely to do so with the aim that it serve a variety of different purposes. For example, he may intend it to impress an influential critic; help to pay the rent; and to distract him from his marital woes. But none of these purposes relies for its achievement on the audience of his work grasping the purpose at issue (it may even undermine his work's capacity to impress the critic if she suspects that this is his aim).

By contrast, works are able to achieve some of the purposes with which they are produced at least partly because their makers and audiences have common knowledge of those purposes. By "common knowledge" I mean, not just that makers and audiences alike are aware of the purposes at issue, but also that the makers are aware that the audiences are aware of them, and *vice versa.* Comedies achieve their purpose of amusing their audiences at least partly because audiences know that their producers are playing for laughs and will thus treat with levity aspects of the work they might otherwise not have done, and because producers know that audiences will do this, and can thus exploit the comic potential of subjects, situations or actions that might otherwise seem tragic, or mundane, or offensive. This is not to say that a work can never serve the purpose of amusing an audience in the absence of such common knowledge. Many comedies would still amuse if such common knowledge of purpose were lacking, and many non-comedic works are intentionally amusing, although audiences do not take this to be among their purposes. What's important is that comedies would be less amusing in the absence of common knowledge that they aim to

amuse, and that funny non-comedic works are non-comedic precisely because their funniness does not rely on common knowledge of their aim of amusing.[1]

Not every work that belongs to a given genre need actually serve the purpose characteristic of that genre. There are unfunny comedies and unmysterious mysteries. Genre membership requires only that the means by which a work is intended to perform the purpose characteristic of a given genre happens to be such that, if it were successful, it would be so at least partly because the work's producer and audience have common knowledge of the purpose to which it aspires. The means employed may not actually serve the intended purpose. For example, a writer may write a story that incorporates jokes that he intends to be so bad that the audience is amused by their badness. Even if his story fails altogether to amuse, it is nonetheless a comedy because the means by which he intends the story to amuse would have succeeded in doing so, if they had succeeded, partly because he and the audience have common knowledge that the work was intended to amuse.

What genre or genres a work belongs to affects how it is interpreted in much the same way as, in ordinary conversational contexts, appeal to Gricean principles of conversational cooperation enable us to identify speaker's meaning, as opposed to sentence meaning (Grice 1975). The common knowledge of Gricean principles on which interlocutors rely in order to conduct a conversation constitutes common knowledge of the conversation's purpose. Just as common knowledge of a conversation's purpose aids conversational communication, so too common knowledge of a work's purpose aids artistic communication.

According to Sperber and Wilson, the purpose of a conversation is the exchange of *relevant* information (Sperber and Wilson 1986). When audiences interpret a speaker's conversational contribution, on this view, they cast around for the most relevant interpretation of what is said, ignoring interpretations that fail to meet their expectations of relevance. Analogously, knowledge of a work's genre helps to determine how its various features are construed. These features are attributed whatever significance enables them to best contribute to the work's performance of the purpose characteristic of its genre. For example, murder mysteries typically represent murders as taking place in contexts in which there is a limited number of possible suspects: on moving trains, isolated islands, country houses, or crowded rooms. This is necessary for them to achieve the aim of creating suspense as to whodunit, since audiences will not wonder who the

[1] On my account, therefore, there cannot be genres governed by a purpose an audience's awareness of which would prevent the work from achieving it. Works of propaganda seem to be governed by such a purpose: if their target audiences knew they were propaganda, they would be less likely to inspire the intended attitudes in them. Propaganda is therefore not a genre, on my account. This is consistent with the fact that classifying a work as propaganda lacks interpretative effects of the kind described above. Knowing that a work is propaganda may affect how convincing one finds its message, but it does not affect what one takes its message to be.

culprit is if it could have been anyone at all. Consider a murder mystery in which the lights go off at a party, someone screams, and is discovered to have been murdered when the lights come on again. If the audience knows it is a murder mystery, they will not wonder how the murderer managed to locate the right victim in pitch darkness or how, if it was not pitch dark, there could be no eyewitnesses, even though, in murder mysteries, the slightest anomaly is often of potential narrative significance. Instead, they are likely to construe this infelicitous aspect of plotting as a way of delimiting the range of possible culprits, and not grant it any further narrative significance.[2]

Similarly, those features that are deemed narratively significant will be interpreted so as best to contribute to the work's performance of the purpose characteristic of its genre. When it appears in a romance, the sentence "She gave up her heart quite willingly" is likely to be interpreted metaphorically, so as to mean that she fell in love quite willingly, because, on that interpretation, it better serves the purpose characteristic of the romance genre (to explore the theme of romantic love) than it does on a literal interpretation. By contrast, when it appears in a work of science fiction, the same sentence is likely to be interpreted literally because, on that interpretation, it better serves the purpose characteristic of science fiction (to describe logically coherent alternative worlds) than it does on a metaphorical interpretation.

Just as interpreting a conversational contribution so that it best serves the purpose of the conversation can generate conversational implicatures, so too interpreting a work's various features so that they best serve the purpose characteristic of its genre can generate genre-based implicatures. In a fantasy, a work which describes a man as old and wise-looking, with a long beard and a staff may generate the implicature that he is a wizard and has certain magical powers because this interpretation best serves the purpose characteristic of fantasy (to explore themes of magic and the supernatural). If the same description were to occur in a work of gritty realism, it would be unlikely to generate the same implicature since that interpretation would serve the purpose characteristic of gritty realism (to tell things how they really are) badly.

One may have common knowledge of the purpose a work is intended to serve without knowing that the means by which it seeks to perform that purpose qualify it for membership of a certain genre. Knowledge of what genre a work belongs to may carry interpretative effects over and above those that may accompany common knowledge of purpose. For example, the horror film *Scream* achieves comedic effects by deliberately exploiting entrenched conventions of

---

[2] Membership of other types of categories can have similar interpretative effects. For example, attributing a work to the category of low budget films makes us less likely to take details of continuity and costume to be representationally relevant than we might otherwise be. In this case, however, the interpretative effect results from the fact that a low budget limits filmmakers' intentional control over such aspects of content. The interpretative effects of genre membership described above cannot be similarly explained.

the horror genre. These higher-level interpretative effects are accessible only to audiences who know, not just that the film aims to elicit fear, but know the horror genre and that the film itself belongs to the horror genre.

This is an intentionalist account of genre to the extent that genre determining purposes must be purposes that a work's producer intends it to perform. However, it does not follow from this that the interpretative or evaluative effects of a work's membership of a genre need themselves be intended by its producer. A novelist may intentionally produce a work with the aim that it describe a logically coherent alternative world and, partly as a result, succeed in producing a work of fantasy. If the novel describes an old, bearded man with a long beard and a staff, audiences may infer that he is a wizard, partly in virtue of the common knowledge of purpose they share with the novelist, and may be justified in doing so even if the novelist did not intend to represent a wizard.

A work's genre membership affects its evaluation because we evaluate works according to how well they perform the purposes for which they are produced, and genres categorise works according to certain of their purposes, namely those on common knowledge of which works rely for their performance. In addition to evaluating works according to how aesthetically or cognitively valuable or how entertaining they are, we also evaluate them according to how well they serve the purpose characteristic of the genre(s) to which they belong. Thus, we might judge a work good, construed as belonging to one genre, but bad, construed as belonging to another because it performs the purpose characteristic of the first genre well, but that characteristic of the second badly. Whereas, on Currie's account, genre classifications are descriptive, on this view they are *normative*: to say what genre a work belongs to is to indicate what purpose it should serve and thus to suggest that it should employ whatever means available would best enable it to serve that purpose. On this account, evaluations of genres themselves are not evaluations of their individual members but rather evaluations of their characteristic purposes. We may not deem eliciting fear to be a worthwhile purpose and may negatively evaluate the horror genre in consequence.

Although my account of genre does not appeal to features of works in its explanation of what genres are, it can nevertheless explain why works in particular genres tend to have features of certain kinds. The purpose characteristic of a genre will often be such that it can only be performed by works with features of certain types. A work cannot be a murder mystery unless it features a murder, and arguably cannot be a Western unless it is set in the wild west.[3] However, as the difficulty of identifying features that are necessary and

[3] That works in some genres necessarily have certain features does not show that these genres are individuated by their features, rather than the purposes they serve. A Western might necessarily be set in the Wild West, but works other than Westerns share this setting. What makes some works with this setting Westerns is the purpose to which their setting makes a (perhaps necessary) contribution. Unlike other films that just happen to be set in the Wild West, therefore, the fact that a western is set in the wild west satisfies a normative constraint on its features that stems from its characteristic purpose.

sufficient for membership of any particular genre demonstrates, not all of the features typical of works in a given genre are features that works must have in order to perform the purpose characteristic of that genre. Some such features are typical because they comprise a *conventional* means of helping to realise the purpose characteristic of a given genre.[4] For example, murder mysteries are typically, but not necessarily, set in isolated locations such as country houses, because such settings comprise a conventional means of restricting the range of possible suspects. Pejorative notions of genres as categories of inferior works arguably result from erroneously taking the conventional means by which many works in a genre achieve its characteristic purpose to be essential to genre membership.

A genre may change over time, in the sense that the features typical of those works in the genre produced at one time differ from the features typical of the works in the genre produced at another time. Genre change results from changes to the conventional means that works in a given genre adopt to help serve the purpose characteristic of that genre. These conventions may change for a variety of different reasons. Firstly, the efficacy of some of the means by which a work performs a purpose may be undermined by the conventionalization of that technique. For example, while it may help to promote suspense as to who committed a murder for the culprit to be the least likely candidate, the conventionalization of this technique will ultimately result in readers automatically suspecting him or her, thus undermining the suspense. Similarly, while ominous shadows cast against a wall may help to elicit fear in the audience of a horror film, the conventionalization of this technique for inducing fear is likely to lessen its capacity to do so. Consequently, if murder mysteries are to continue to create suspense, and horrors films to elicit fear, new means of doing so must be found.

The conventions of a genre may also change due to external factors. For example, changes in technology may make available new ways of achieving the purpose characteristic of a genre, leading to the abandonment of old conventions for doing so. Likewise, social norms may change, imposing different constraints on the means by which works in a genre may perform its characteristic purpose. The US Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 prohibited the depiction of "lustful kissing" and sex. As a consequence, *noir* films "depicted sexual intercourse through symbolism and ellipsis" (Naremore 1998, p. 99). The most prominent convention for doing this was to represent characters smoking. When the Code was abandoned in 1968, however, such films could represent sex literally and directly.

A genre may cross media because works in different media may be capable of serving the purpose characteristic of that genre. Because both films and novels are capable of representing logically coherent alternative worlds, there are

---

[4] For present purposes, we can understand a convention, following David Lewis, as a widely-adopted solution to a recurrent coordination problem (Lewis 1969). The coordination problems at hand are problems of producing works that meet the requirements for a given purpose.

science fiction films and science fiction novels. There is no science fiction music, because works of music are not capable of serving this purpose. While works in different media may all be capable of achieving the characteristic aim of a given genre, different media provide different resources for performing a purpose, with the result that works in different media employ different means to perform the purpose characteristic of a particular genre.

A work may belong to more than one genre because it may be produced and appreciated for more than one purpose, and pursue each by means that rely for their achievement at least partly on producers' and audiences' common knowledge that the work is produced and to be appreciated for those purposes. For example, a film might be a horror romance because it aims both to elicit fear and to explore themes of romantic love partly in virtue of such means. To the extent that these purposes are incompatible, the film is unlikely to be evaluated as good both *qua* horror and *qua* romance, but that need not preclude it from belonging to both genres.

A work may belong to a hybrid genre when, rather than being produced and appreciated for two independent purposes, the purpose characteristic of one genre modifies the purpose characteristic of another. For example, a space Western is not a Western, but rather a work that explores themes analogous to those of a Western, namely moral conduct in the absence of institutional social order, but is set in outer space instead of the wild west. The concern with moral conduct in the absence of institutional social order modifies the space opera's melodramatic purpose, while the space setting modifies the Western's characteristic setting.

The hierarchical relations between genres are to be explained as a consequence of hierarchical relations between purposes. One purpose may be a determinate of another, determinable purpose. For example, the purpose of exploring the dramatic potential of criminal activity stands in the determinable relation to the more determinate purpose of exploring the dramatic potential of the way in which the police discover the culprit of criminal activity. Thus, the police procedural is a subgenre of crime drama.

Conclusion

The distinctions between genres are not clear cut, and it may sometimes be unclear whether a work belongs to two independent genres, to a hybrid genre, or to a subgenre. This lack of clarity is mirrored in a lack of clarity in the distinctions between some purposes. The question of whether a romantic comedy is both a romance and a comedy, or belongs to a hybrid genre, or is a subgenre of either romance or comedy is to be answered by theories of the relevant individual genres. It has not been the aim of this paper to define individual genres. Rather, its aim has been to provide general accounts of genre and of genre membership that explain the interpretative and evaluative effects of genre membership and can cast light on how the task of defining the individual genres is to be approached. It is to be approached by identifying their characteristic purposes, not by cataloguing the features shared by their

members. Accounts of the characteristic purpose of romantic comedy, of comedy and of the romance will tell us in what relations these genres stand.[5]

Catharine Abell
The School of Social Sciences,
The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester, M16 8FH

References

Askehave, Inger and John M. Swales 2001: 'Genre Identification and Communicative Purpose: A Problem and a Solution'. *Applied Linguistics*, 22 (2), pp. 195-212.
Bordwell, David 1989: *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Currie, Gregory 2004: *Arts and Minds*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Grice, H. P. 1975: 'Logic and Conversation', *Syntax and Semantics* 3, pp. 41-58.
Lewis, David 1969: *Convention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Miller, Carolyn R. 1984: 'Genre as Social Action'. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, pp.151-167.
Naremore, James 1998: *More than Night: Film Noir and its Contexts*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson 1986: *Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.

[5] Many thanks to Greg Currie for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. The paper has benefited from feedback from audiences who heard earlier versions of this paper, at the meeting of the Aristotelian Society on 20th October 2014, at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Glasgow in November 2014, and at the Auburn University Film Conference in February 2014.