POETS & WRITERS

## GENRE AS A LIMITLESS ENTITY

By Olivia Brooks

In the literary world, differences between a timeless and trendful story come down to controversial opinions about genres. A genre can be identified as a rhetorical device, but in the book industry, its main origin is a consumer based mentality; a marketing tool to divide stories into groups or sectors that make it easier for readers to find what they wish to read.

With this idea in mind, over time, the concept and development of genres in literature served both as an invitation and rejecting mechanism for readers. This is because of the ideology that casting a book into a specific genre "pigeonholes" the story, whereas others believe genres provide insightful, strategic logic behind reading.

Even in saying so, genre is a limitless entity.

Genres began with broad categories, such as poetry, prose, and drama, as William Allan from Oxford's Very Short Introductions examines. Genres now have subgenres, such as the basic twelve categories a novel can fall under, but more than that as the literary industry grows, there are branches and branches of specified subgenres for every type of story possible.

These twelve categories, as dove into in John Truby's The Anatomy of Genre, include horror, action, myth, memoir, science fiction, crime, comedy, western, gangster, fantasy, detective and thriller, and the love story.
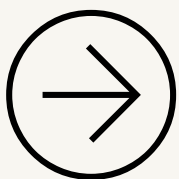
→ AS ALLAN FURTHER WENT ON TO EXPLAIN, "GENRE IS NOT A RIGID MOULD WHICH WORKS MUST FIT INTO, BUT A GROUP OF TEXTS THAT SHARE CERTAIN SIMILARITIES."

In novel writing or filmmaking, when there is a new publication from a debut author, the best way to gain momentum is with comp titles, titles in which are already published that readers can identify with. Given these (usually two) titles that are relevant to today's industry, the reader or viewer can then depict whether the aesthetic or familiarity of those well known stories will lead them to be interested in this new story.

Circling back to genres, stories are just old stories told in new ways. To put traditional tropes and cliches into a ringer of new twists and adaptations. Genres come "with certain built-in codes, values, and expectations," Allan identifies. With these similarities and familiarities in mind, genre helps new works reach vast audience ranges that it otherwise would not.

In saying so, however, readers can learn to love and appreciate a genre that interests them and never dabble into another. If a reader reads for the source of entertainment, then sticking within the confines of a single genre can be seen as a comfort and fallback, but it can help their literacy skills naturally grow while also reading for leisure in genres they know they will enjoy.

On the flip side, each genre integrates its own style. Every individual author, writer, and poet has their own style. But, as Bryan Ye with the Writing Cooperative explored, "the most impactful benefit of reading from different genres is that you expose yourself to different writing styles."

Each genre comes with its own conventions, and using these styles on a personal level to grow in one's own writing is a special element of exploring the different realms of storytelling, writer or not.

"The problem is that genre is inherently confusing and complex. But history confuses things, too. The distinction between literary fiction and genre fiction is neither contemporary nor ageless.. It's the product of modernism, and it beats the stamp of a unique time in literary history." As New Yorker writer Joshua Rothman distinguishes differences in the genre debate, proper genre systems are ones that fit reality. They illuminate groups and traditions that we are naturally immersed in.

Genre is unlimited in the sense that it provides insight to who we are as people and helps define why we are the way we are, how we think, and provides gateway access to our learning processes. By bringing resources together for a conversation on this limitless entity, John Truby, author of The Anatomy of Genre, further instills that as humans, we need stories. It's how we learn, by reading them. We use stories as models to solve issues in life. Stories express philosophies of life based on three major components, all of which change in style depending on the genre and conventions used; characters, plot, and emotion. So, using these proper genre systems that help define our reality, people can use genres to depict what area of life they want to dive deeper into. Through storytelling.

As Truby says, "Seeing the world through the prism of story marks a revolutionary change in how we look at the world, and it's the reverse of what we've been taught." If it were not for genre strategies and the diversity they bring to the roundtable of stories, our viewpoints on the world would be confined to a single box of right versus wrong. Just as stories are the reverse of what we've been taught, it is important to think of genres the same way, in that they are a limitless entity.