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Modern Lyric Poems: From Poetic Genre to Cognitive Category

Abstract
Literary genres are important concepts for literary scholars and students of literature alike. Yet differences in opinion are common when defining which literary genre a given text fits best. However, my study here takes a step back from that spot to see how critics and other academics can conceptualize a literary genre in the first place. My case study is the modern lyric poem, a well-known literary genre in poetics. The results, never before published, include replies to an informal survey carried out at an international cognitive poetics conference at Osnabrück University in Germany. I begin by discussing handbook definitions and examples named. Then I compare them to results obtained from participants at the academic conference. Results sometimes overlap, aligning with criteria published in handbooks, although there are variations. I consider various reasons why participants might have selected certain examples of the genre, before ending with some suggestions of topics for future research on cognition in poetics.

lyric poems; modern genres; cognitive poetics; categorization theory; cognitive science

We could hardly survive without our ability to categorize things. This is true even in literary studies, where arguments over definitions are common. To what genre does a work of literature belong? Does it mix genres? How have critics categorized it or described it? These are questions literary scholars often deal with. In this article, I discuss instances of categorization in handbook definitions of the modern lyric poem as a genre, as well as results from an informal survey about the genre. The informal survey was carried out at the first Cognition and Poetics Conference at Osnabrück University in Germany. One of my aims was to find out what examples people had in mind when asked to quickly name just one, assuming that these examples might possibly reflect people's prototypes of the genre.

As the cognitive linguist John Taylor explains, in prototype theory "a category is understood, primarily, in terms of its good examples. Entities are associated with the category to the extent that they resemble the good examples... Moreover, prototype categories have an internal structure, in that some entities count as more central members than others" (Taylor 2001: 8955). Categories thus have central and marginal members, as some examples seem to us to be better examples than others. Taylor also reports that all prototype categories reveal "fuzziness of category boundaries (a question of category membership), and degree of representativity within a category (a question of category structure)" (2001: 8955). One case often mentioned in the cognitive science literature is the BIRD category, with prototypes like robins and sparrows, and marginal members like ostriches or penguins (Ungerer and Schmid 2006: 24–27).

In academic disciplines where non-literary texts comprise corpora, features of genres are commonly studied to make implicit knowledge about them more explicit, as is the case in scientific communication (Swales 1990), and also in genre research about blogs (Maryl et al 2016), punk cabaret music (Mach 2020), letters (Całek 2021), and radio documentaries (Sygizman 2021). Categorization is also widely studied in cognitive science (Glushko et al. 2008). But as the scholar Michael Sinding (2010) has argued, in literary studies:

> Today, genre categories and genre thinking are regarded sceptically and suspiciously. Genre criticism is viewed as pigeonholing and border policing, opposed to creative transgression and intermixing. We hear that genres cannot be defined; that genre concepts give only a broad and vague perspective on the text; that texts have no pure genre, or undermine their generic forms;

> that genre is unimportant or even illusory — just formal features coincidentally shared by texts more fully defined by content, representational strategies, or ideological forces. But categories of literary works are no less real than categories of other things. (Sinding 2010: 107)

Sinding's point is that literary genres are understood in the same way we understand other categories. Indeed, he made a persuasive case for turning to cognitive science to find answers to intractable questions about genres in literary studies.

While readers of this journal are no doubt familiar with the research of Eleanor Rosch and others when it comes to categorization, for his readership Sinding explained categories as follows:

> There is a 'basic level' of categories that is central in category systems. Categories like 'bird' and 'chair' are learned, recognized and remembered earlier and more easily than more specific 'lower' level categories like 'goldfinch' and 'barstool,' or more general 'higher' level categories like 'mammal' and 'furniture.' They are also more widespread cross-culturally. We develop subordinate and superordinate categories from there as needed. This [superordinate level] is the highest level at which we have common images of concepts and common motor programs for interacting with them. (Sinding 2010: 109)

Here Sinding explains concepts such as prototypes and family resemblance, which are well-known in psychology, as well as concepts such as superordinate, basic, and subordinate levels, which are well-established in cognitive linguistics (Ungerer and Schmid 2006). Because these ideas were less well-known in literary studies when Sinding was writing, he may have felt that some questions about literary genres were being answered unsatisfactorily, if at all. He thus encouraged literary scholars not only to think about genres in new ways, but also to understand why modern masterpieces like *Ulysses* by James Joyce sometimes mixed genres (Sinding 2005). It was within this context of thinking about literary genres in new ways that my own study took place at Osnabrück University. In what follows, I discuss how the modern lyric poem genre has been formally defined; the results from my informal survey; potential reasons for the participants' choices in the context of categorization research; and ideas for future studies.

Defining the Genre

The lyric poem has been a major genre of poetry for centuries. This is why many scholars have discussed the genre in literary handbooks. To define lyric poetry, some literary scholars discuss four things: the genre's history, its stylistic features, poetic subject matter, and examples. For instance, in *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary History*, J.A. Cuddon explains that although the genre's roots stretch back to Ancient Egypt, it became well-known in Ancient Greece as "a song to be sung to the accompaniment of a lyre" (1992: 515). Starting with examples in Ancient Greek, Latin and Hebrew, Cuddon traces the genre's development through Medieval Europe before explaining how the genre has fared in Spanish, French, Italian, German, and English since 1800 (1992: 515–516). In *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Margaret Drabble also mentions the genre's origins in Ancient Greece and Rome, followed by its development in Europe, through the Medieval and Early Modern periods (1985: 596). Yet she notes that in England during the 1600s and 1700s, "the link between poetry and music was gradually broken" (Drabble 1985: 596). In *A Glossary*

of Literary Terms, M.H. Abrams also writes that the Ancient Greeks understood that lyric "signified a song rendered to the accompaniment of a lyre" (1999: 146). In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Chris Baldick says that "In ancient Greece, a lyric was a song for accompaniment on the lyre, and could be a choral lyric sung by a group (see *chorus*)" (1990: 125). Baldick likewise refers to the genre's development "since the 19th century in the West," locating it firmly in a teleological literary history. In short, scholars like these have noted that the genre has a very long, cross-cultural history, and also that it has evolved over time.

Regarding specific traits of lyric poems, many literary scholars discuss their length and varying forms. According to Cuddon, "a lyric is usually fairly short, not often longer than fifty or sixty lines, and often only between a dozen and thirty lines" (1992: 514–515). For her part, Drabble notes that lyric poems have become "short poems" in the past few centuries (1985: 596). Just as Abrams mentioned the fact that a lyric poem is a "fairly short poem" (1999: 146), Baldick also says that a lyric poem can be "any fairly short poem [...] composed in almost any metre" (1990: 125–126). In *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Anne Cluysenaar writes that a lyric poem is "usually short" (2006: 133). While Cuddon offers a range of lines in his definition (from 12 to 60 lines), Drabble, Baldick, Abrams, and Cluysenaar just say that lyric poems are "short" or "fairly short" — without being more specific. As for the human need for taxonomies, while drama, poetry, and fiction are three main genres of literature, to explain what lyric poetry is, scholars often contrast it to narrative poetry, epic poetry, and dramatic verse (Baldick 1990: 125–126; Cuddon 1992: 515; Abrams 1999: 146). That is, they partly define the genre by saying what it is *not*. Furthermore, they subdivide the lyric genre into subtypes such as "sonnet, ode, elegy, haiku and the more personal kinds of hymn" (Baldick 1990: 126). Like Baldick, Abrams also mentions the sonnet and the hymn, as well as public and private poems, and "the long elegy and meditative ode" (1999: 146). In her definition, Drabble refers to "hymns and bawdy drinking songs," too (1985: 596). Notable features of the genre thus seem to include its short length and the various forms it inhabits.

As for poetic subject matter, Cuddon explains that a modern lyric poem "usually expresses the feelings and thoughts of a single speaker (not necessarily the poet himself) in a personal and subjective fashion" (Cuddon 1991: 514–515). Likewise, Baldick says that lyric poets are often "expressing the personal mood, feeling, or meditation of a single speaker (who may sometimes be an invented character, not the poet)" (Baldick 1990: 125). For Abrams, we often see in lyric poems "the utterance by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought, and feeling. Many lyric speakers are represented as musing in solitude [...] Although the lyric is uttered in the first person, the 'I' in the poem need not be the poet who wrote it" (Abrams 1999: 146). For his part, Baldick adds that there are lyric poems "on almost every subject, although the most usual emotions represented are those of love and grief" (Baldick 1990: 126). As we can see here, having a first-person persona ('I') talk about life in a short poem are further attributes of the genre.

Finally, examples are useful when defining a literary genre. Although Baldick names no poets or poems in his definition, Cluysenaar names two: Richard Weber of Ireland and Thomas Wyatt's "Fforget not yet" (Cluysenaar 2006: 133). Meanwhile, Drabble mentions Pindar, Sappho, Horace, Catullus, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rilke, Yeats and T.S. Eliot in her definition (Drabble 1985: 596). The entry by Cuddon is longer than the others studied here, possibly because his book is not only about literary terminology but also literary history. Therefore, he

seems to have more room to offer more examples. For instance, in his definition, he names 20 poets in the Ancient World at first, ranging from Pindar to Virgil; four anonymous authors of Old English lyrics; six authors of Medieval Latin lyrics, ranging from Abelard to Prudentius; eight authors from the 1200s and 1300s, ranging from Chaucer to Petrarch; and then 19 English authors ranging from Sidney to Vaughan up to the 1600s (1992: 515–516). As for poets in the 1700s, Cuddon mentions four, including Thomas Gray and William Collins, before turning his attention to 19 Romantic poets from across Europe, ranging from Robert Burns to Pushkin, with 9 in Britain, 5 in Germany, 4 in France, and one each in Italy, Spain, and Russia (1992: 517). For the mid-19th century period, Cuddon mentions 9 British, one American, and 4 French poets, ranging from Tennyson to Rimbaud (1992: 515–516). Finally, for the late 19th and 20th centuries, he names 22 poets who wrote in English, Spanish, German, French or Italian, ranging from Yeats to Quasimodo (Cuddon 19921: 517). To end his definition, Cuddon reprints in full John Clare's "The Secret," a 12-line poem from 19th-century England (1992: 518). In short, to define the genre, Cuddon includes not only the names of over 100 poets, but also a complete example of the genre. He goes into more detail than his colleagues, yet still makes the same generic-to-specific rhetorical move as his colleagues.

Amongst the literary scholars discussed here, Abrams not only names poets, but also many specific poems (Abrams 1999: 146–147). Table 1 below contains the examples he names explicitly in his definition, with "POV" meaning the speaker's narrative point of view in the poem.

Poet	Poem	Year	Lines	POV
Shakespeare	Sonnet 1: From fairest creatures we desire increase	1609	14	1st
Ben Jonson	Drink to me only with thine eyes	1616	16	1st
Ben Jonson	To the Memory of...William Shakespeare	1623	80	1st
Milton	L'Allegro	1631	152	1st
Milton	II Penseroso	1631	176	1st
Milton	When I consider how my light is spent	1652	14	1st
Andrew Marvell	To His Coy Mistress	1681	46	1st
Robert Burns	O my love's like a red, red rose	1796	16	1st
Coleridge	Frost at Midnight	1798	74	1st
Wordsworth	Ode: Intimations of Immortality	1807	203	1st
Shelley	To Night	1824	35	1st
Elizabeth Barrett Browning	How do I love thee? Let me count the ways	1850	14	1st
Emily Dickinson	Wild Nights, Wild Nights	1861	12	1st
Christina Rossetti	No, thank you, John	1862	32	1st
Walt Whitman	O Captain, My Captain	1865	24	1st
Matthew Arnold	Dover Beach	1867	37	1st
Yeats	Sailing to Byzantium	1928	32	1st

Table 1. Specific examples from Abrams (1999: 146–147); Compiled by the author

While Abrams referred to the first 17 of Shakespeare's sonnets as a whole, I list just the first one here as an example of that set. The poems in Table 1 have an average length of just over 57 lines, with a median length of 32 lines, a point I will return to later. Along with brevity, being written from the point of view (POV) of a first-person speaker or persona is another key feature of the genre. In sum, handbook definition authors like Abrams move from the generic to the specific when naming specific examples of the genre. As we will see next, others can make the same mental leap from the generic to the specific when asked about this genre.

Results

While research on categorization often involves concrete objects or images of them, abstract entities like literary genres can also be studied, as the work of Michael Sinding shows (2005, 2010), or words and lexicology, as the work of Dirk Geeraerts shows (2006). For instance, Geeraerts explained the difference between onomasiological and semasiological questions in lexicology. In a semasiological task, for example, we could show people clothes or images of them, and then ask them which ones they would call a *vest* (Geeraerts 2006: 167–168). However, in an onomasiological task, rather than show subjects images as prompts, we would ask them to explain what they use the word *vest* to designate (Geeraerts 2006: 167–168). Presumably, articles of clothing are categories whose most salient attributes are those named by most people when asked to list them. This is akin to the generic-to-specific rhetorical move seen in the definitions discussed in part 2. Authors of handbook definitions define terms such as *lyric* or *lyric poem* by naming examples. That is one reason why my informal study aimed to answer a similar onomasiological question about the *modern lyric poem*.

My results come from an informal exercise at Osnabrück University during the first international Cognition and Poetics Conference (Hamilton, 2013). During my conference presentation, I explained the features of the genre spelled out in part 2, noting its long history as well as its formal and thematic features. However, unlike the handbook authors such as Abrams (Table 1), I refrained from naming poets and/or poems to define the genre because I wanted to avoid directly influencing the participants I aimed to elicit information from. This is in keeping with what is known about the "availability heuristic" (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973), where subjects may select items from memory simply due to their ease of availability, a potential form of priming which could bias results.

At the end of my 20-minute presentation, I asked the audience the following question: *Which modern lyric poem do you think is the best example of the genre*? I then gave participants a few minutes to jot down their replies quietly on small pieces of paper. I then collected them before the question-and-answer session began. Participants were neither paid nor rewarded for their participation, yet 24 of them replied voluntarily to my question. The results are in Table 2 below, listed by date of composition or publication.

Poet	Poem	Year	Language	Lines	POV
Coleridge	Rime of the Ancient Mariner	1798	English	626	3rd
Wordsworth	I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	1807	English	24	1st
Wordsworth	I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	1807	English	24	1st
Keats	Ode to a Nightingale	1820	English	80	1st

Poet	Poem	Year	Language	Lines	POV
Poe	The Raven	1845	English	108	1st
Baudelaire	Les Chats	1857	French	14	3rd
Rilke	Blaue Hortensie	1906	German	14	3rd
Wallace Stevens	Domination of Black	1916	English	36	1st
Eliot	The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock	1917	English	131	1st
Eliot	The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock	1917	English	131	1st
Yeats	The Swans at Coole	1917	English	30	1st
Dylan Thomas	Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night	1952	English	19	1st
Dylan Thomas	Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night	1952	English	19	1st
ee cummings	l(a	1958	English	9	3rd
Ted Hughes	Wind	1962	English	24	1st
ee cummings	Me up at does	1963	English	8	1st
Odysséas Elytis	The Monogram	1972	Greek	177	1st
Adrienne Rich	Diving into the Wreck	1973	English	94	1st
Louise Gluck	Gretel in Darkness	1975	English	24	1st
Ciaran Carson	Belfast Confetti	1987	English	9	1st
Lorand Gaspar	La Maison Près de la Mer	1993	French	29	1st

Table 2. Examples of the genre (data from this study); Compiled by the author

Table 2 lists 21 rather than 24 replies because three answers had to be excluded. One person named *Salammbô*, the 1862 French novel by Gustave Flaubert, rather than a poem of his. Another named Sylvia Plath, the American writer (1932–1963), but no poem of hers. A third person named *The Matryrology*, a 1972 book of poems that is 240 pages long, written by the Canadian poet bpNichol (1944–1988), rather than just one of his poems instead. Meanwhile, 17 examples provided were English poems, but two poets were French (Baudelaire and Lorand Gaspar), one was German (Rilke), and one was Greek (Odysséas Elytis, winner of the 1979 Nobel Prize for Literature). These findings confirm the cross-cultural reality of this genre and suggest that participants from diverse cultural backgrounds with knowledge of non-Anglophone poets also took part in the informal survey.

Arguably, the main outlier in Table 2 is "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Coleridge's poem is very long, and it contains embedded narratives, rather than being delivered simply in the first-person. If we remove that outlier, as well as three duplicates in Table 2, 17 poems remain. Those 17 have lengths that range from 8 to 177 lines, with an average length of roughly 49 lines, and a median length of 24 lines. This is in the range of 12 to 60 lines provided by Cuddon (1992: 514–515), but a little shorter than the values seen in Table 1, where the average length was just over 57 lines, and the median length was 32 lines. One reason for this slight difference could be that 16 of the 17 poems named by Abrams (Table 1) were written before 1900, perhaps because of his expertise in 18th- and 19th-century British literature. In contrast, only 5 of the 17 poems listed once in Table 2 were written before 1900. As I had mentioned in my conference

presentation, for many literary scholars, 'modern' means 'late 19th century/early 20th century.' For her part, Cluysenaar explains that:

> British poetry has on the whole developed in the direction Walter Pater suggested (favourable to lyricism) rather than in that which Matthew Arnold suggested (favourable to the long poem). Life seen as a sequence of intensely felt moments, rather than a structure of interrelated and assessed experiences, tends to encourage the use of the first person, vivid images and 'local life' at the expense of architectonics, anecdotal narrative and intellectual abstraction. (Cluysenaar 2006: 133)

Ironically, just as Marjorie Perloff (1982) once titled a famous study of hers, "Pound/Stevens: Whose Era?," a history of modern English poetry — if Cluysenaar is right — might likewise be titled "Pater/Arnold: Whose Era?". After all, Table 1 also includes a short poem by Arnold: "Dover Beach" (1867; 37 lines long). That said, like Drabble, Cuddon and Baldick before her, Cluysenaar also mentions first-person perspective in lyric poems, a key feature of the genre. Table 2 has only 4 poems that are not told from a first-person point of view, thus most poems in Table 2 share features of the genre described in part 2: they are short, they tend to have first-person personae, and they are mainly from the 20th century.

As for the range and variety seen in Table 2, this is yet another trait of categorization. For example, while the median length of poems listed in Table 1 was 32 lines, the median length of poems listed in Table 2 was 24 lines. This implies that a poem like Shelley's "To Night" (35 lines long) from Table 1, or Wordsworth's poem about daffodils called "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (24 lines long) in Table 2, are better examples of the genre than outliers such as Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" (at 626 lines long). What is more, specific subtypes of lyric poems listed in Tables 1 and 2 are revealing. In Table 1, three examples are sonnets by Milton, Browning, and Shakespeare. In Table 2, the examples by Baudelaire and Rilke are sonnets, while the Dylan Thomas example is a villanelle, and "l(a" by ee cummings is a concrete poem of just four words: "loneliness, a leaf falls." Simply put, categories like *modern lyric poem* contain a range of examples, but the genre's borders are fuzzy, as these results suggest.

Discussion

After reading Table 2, it is fair to ask: why did respondents pick those specific poems? I did not ask participants this question, so I can only speculate here, yet several reasons might explain their choices. The first potential reason is that the examples mainly fit the criteria discussed in part 2 and in my conference presentation (short, modern, 1st-person POV poems). Yet their content can be complex and varied. Drabble argues that while lyric poems were "expressive of a poet's thoughts or feelings" up to and including the Romantic period, since the late 19th century or early 20th century it has become common to see examples where "the poet seems to struggle to express for his own satisfaction psychic experiences whose nature he at times only half understands" (1985: 596). Cluysenaar adds that lyric poems before 1900 were "often constructed on a single mood. But the twentieth-century lyric is frequently more complex, allowing for contrastive themes and for changes, even ambivalences, of attitude, though remaining in an emotional rather than intellectual mode" (2006: 133). Cluysenaar would thus probably recognize many poems in Table 2 as fitting the patterns she reports, despite the risk of confirmation bias.

A second potential reason may be familiarity. Apart from the Canadian poet bpNichol (1944–1988), and the Northern Irish poet Ciaran Carson (1948–2019), all the English-language poets listed in Table 2 are well-known. Their works are taught in schools and included in famous anthologies such as *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, the 6th edition of which was published in 2018 and contains 2,384 pages. What is more, three poets named in Table 2 (Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Yeats) also appeared in Table 1, while at least three others named in Table 2 (Baudelaire, Rilke, and T.S. Eliot) were also named in the definitions by Drabble (1985: 596) and Cuddon (1991: 514–518). Thus, there is some overlap. Interestingly, the example cited from Baudelaire — "Les Chats" — sparked a famous, drawn-out argument in contemporary literary criticism in France (Delcroix and Geerts 1980; Plottel 1983), which may be one reason why it is well-known now in academic circles. As further evidence of familiarity, six poems in Table 2 are also in an anthology called *The Nation's Favourite Poems* (BBC, 1996). In 1995, in honor of National Poetry Day in the UK, the BBC TV program *The Bookworm* asked viewers to vote for their favorite poem, and the top 100 were then published in the 1996 anthology. The six poems in Table 2 also found in the BBC's anthology were ranked as follows: Wordsworth's so-called 'Daffodils' (i.e., "I wandered lonely as a cloud") was 5th; Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" was 9th; Eliot's "Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" was 26th; Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was 29th; Thomas' "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night" was 35th; and Poe's "The Raven" was 91st (BBC 1996: 3–4). In sum, just as the scholars discussed in part 2 referred to many well-known poets or poems in their definitions, many of my participants also selected poems by well-known poets.

A third potential reason might involve my prompt. I wanted participants to name their prototype for the genre known as the *modern lyric poem*. As I said earlier, in English literary studies, 'modern' often refers to works written between the late 19th and early 20th centuries (roughly 1875 to 1925). While Abrams (Table 1) only named one poem written after 1900, 13 of the 17 poems listed once in Table 2 were written after 1900. Of course, labels like *modern* can be troublesome in literary studies. For instance, the narratologist Brian Richardson has convincingly argued that literary history is misleading when critics label novels as *romance*, *expressionist*, *realist*, *modernist*, or *postmodern* by relying on historical dates as genre inclusion criteria rather than narrative style, technique, and theme (1997). Instead, when narrative style, technique and theme are taken into account, works from many different historical periods and cultures reveal common generic traits, as Sinding has also suggested (2010: 107). This thwarts teleological literary histories, but not critical approaches grounded in stylistics or narratology.

To continue, a fourth potential reason might have to do with the nature of categorization tasks. In their study of "categorization in the wild," by which they mean categorization in everyday life and at work, Glushko et al (2008) discuss three types of natural categorization: cultural, individual, and institutional. For instance, a literary genre is a cultural category. As Glushko et al claim, because "words for cultural categories exist in language [this] further ensures their acquisition [by children]. These and other sociocultural mechanisms ensure that tens of thousands of cultural concepts are transmitted from one generation to another" (2008: 131). This may apply to what I said earlier about schools, the literary canon, and famous poets. As Glushko et al also explain, "Mistakes during cultural categorization produce negative consequences that range from violated expectations to social disapproval"

(2008: 134). However, in my low-stakes informal study, any so-called 'mistakes' participants made had few if any consequences for them. When three of my participants did not name a poem, but something else instead, there was no price to pay for misunderstanding the task. Likewise, there were no real consequences for refusing to participate, and nothing to gain by trying to distort the study's outcome.

A fifth potential reason could involve issues in "individual categorization." Glushko et al say this process "occurs when someone creates an idiosyncratic classification system primarily for his or her own use, for example, when creating categories to organize... objects in a garage, CDs in a music collection, websites in the favorites list of a browser, etc. Often one creates an individual classification system with little input from others and doesn't share it" (Glushko et al 2008: 129). Glushko et al add that "Mistakes during individual categorization appear least significant, such as failing to find something in a personal collection" (2008: 134). While my respondents were not classifying poems for personal reasons, they made personal choices. Interestingly, separate people sometimes named the same poem, suggesting consensus. As Table 2 shows, that happened three times. But the duplicate entries in Table 2 might also suggest subjects shared answers, which might seem unusual yet inconsequential in a low-stakes task like mine.

A sixth potential reason could reflect aspects of "institutional categorization." In university departments, literary genres may be institutional categories. For instance, in an English department offering literary courses, genre by genre, the term *modern lyric poetry* becomes functional in light of the university's needs. As Glushko et al argue, "An institutional taxonomy increases the likelihood that an institution's agents will classify relevant entities the same way, such as when different libraries place books in the same categories and different doctors assign patients to the same diagnostic and insurance categories. Such standardization reduces transaction costs... and achieves many other useful outcomes" (2008: 130). What Glushko et al mean is that co-workers tend to categorize things in the same way, especially since "Mistakes during institutional categorization produce lowered quality, precision, production, marketing, distribution, etc." (Glushko et al 2008: 134). Academic consensus about the genre might explain some of the overlap in the different handbook definitions cited in part 2, as well as results in Table 2. After all, my informal survey took place at a university where academics were attending a conference run by an English department. Of course, any answer to the question that started this Discussion might include more reasons than the six I have discussed so far. There could be many more reasons why my participants selected the poems they did, so the reasons mentioned so far are merely a starting point. Much more data would be needed to answer the question conclusively.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show how the genre of the modern lyric poem has been defined and conceptualized. I have argued that the genre is a category constructed around prototypes, just as we construct categories of things such as furniture, pets, toys, and so on. These findings accord with those of Sinding (2010), but all studies have limitations, and this one is no exception.

For instance, the editions of the handbooks cited in part 2 are not always the most recent ones. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* that Drabble edited in 1985 was the 5th edition, although a 7th edition was published in 2009. The first edition of *The Concise*

Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms by Baldick from 1992 eventually became the 4th edition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* in 2008. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary History* that Cuddon edited in 1992 was the 3rd edition, although a 5th edition was published in 2015. The *Glossary of Literary Terms* edited by Abrams in 1999 was the 7th edition, although an 11th edition appeared in 2014. The only handbook I cited which has not apparently been updated is *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* from 2006, which was already in its 3rd edition then. All this is to say that it might be useful to compare written definitions of the same genre in the same handbooks over time. Changes might show us how definitions of terms evolve in the same publication, and which new examples (if any) scholars rely on to update their definitions. Seeing how this occurs in handbooks might help us better understand formal genre construction.

Another valid point was raised during my presentation in Osnabrück. The cognitive psychologist Ray Gibbs Jr. agreed that while categories are built around prototypes, they can also vary. If you live in a country without robins, you may be unlikely to name the robin as the prototype of your BIRD category when a psychologist asks you to do so in a laboratory. Something else instead may come to mind. But Gibbs also meant that if I gave the same task to the same participants many different times, I should expect different results. A famous proverb says that *Justice is what the judge ate for breakfast*. It means that decisions judges make might depend not on the inviolable law, but on how their day at work is going. On a different day, at a different time of the day, or in another context of cases, the same judge could rule differently on the same case (Kahneman 2011). Therefore, it would be normal to find variations within participants when repeating my informal survey task, although replacing old prototypes with new ones still reveals how they help us structure categories such as literary genres.

In the future, it might also be interesting to replicate a study like this one in several countries. This is because the genre that I studied here is a cross-cultural one. Table 2 suggests that English or American examples were salient for most participants, but looking at the modern lyric poems and poets that people might name most often in different countries, such as France or Greece, could reveal more prototypes people have for the genre. Indeed, the same kind of survey could be extended to different literary genres, too, such as one-act plays, Polish didactic poems (Markowska-Fulara 2019), poems set in autumn (Mikołajczak 2019), and so on.

These are just some of the ideas that could be explored in the future. Having said that, the results presented in this study aimed to show that expert literary scholars rely on examples when writing definitions of the lyric poem as a genre, just as participants seem to rely on prototypes to conceptualize the same literary genre when asked to so in an informal study. Although this article is not about a robust and rigorous social science experiment, the results presented here for the very first time nevertheless suggest how important prototypes are to our understanding of literary genres. Simply put, the generic is specific.[1]

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