In the *Rhetoric* the concept of genre is introduced in a celebrated passage—which we have already alluded to—in Book 1:

> ἔστι δὲ τῆς ῥητορικῆς εἴδη¹ τρία τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοσοῦτοι γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἀκροαταὶ τῶν λόγων ὑπάρχουσιν ὄντες. σύγκειται μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τριῶν ὁ λόγος, ἔκ τε τοῦ λέγοντος καὶ περὶ οὗ λέγει καὶ πρὸς ὅν, καὶ τὸ τέλος πρὸς τοῦτον ἔστιν, λέγω δὲ τὸν ἀκροατήν. ἀνάγκη δὲ τὸν ἀκροατὴν ἢ θεωρὸν εἶναι ἢ κριτήν, κριτὴν δὲ ἢ τῶν γεγενημένων ἢ τῶν μελλόντων. ἔστι δ’ ὁ μὲν περὶ τῶν μελλόντων κρίνων ὁ θεωρὸς, ὁ δὲ περὶ τῶν γεγενημένων ὁ θεωρός. ² ὡστ’ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἂν εἴη τρία γένη τῶν λόγων τῶν ῥητορικῶν, συμβουλευτικόν, δικανικόν, ἐπιδεικτικόν

The species of rhetoric are three in number; for such is also the number <of species> to which the hearers of speeches belong. A speech consists of three things: the speaker, the subject about which he speaks and someone to whom the speech is addressed, and the end of the speech relates to the last (I mean the hearer). Now it is necessary for the hearer to be either an observer or a judge, and <in the latter case> a judge of either past or future happenings. An assemblyman is an example of one judging about future happenings, a juror an example of one judging the past. An observer is concerned with the ability <of the speaker>. Thus, there would necessarily be three genres of rhetoric: deliberative, judicial, epideictic.³

Aristotle divides the persuasive process into three constituent elements: the speaker, the hearer and the subject of the speech.⁴ It is not the first time these three elements are mentioned in the *Rhetoric*: they were the grounds for distinguishing the πίστεις ἔντεχνοι (“technical proofs”) in ethos, pathos and logos.⁵ In this reformulation of the triad the hearer (ἀκροατής)

---

1 Εἴδη is the reading of the codices. Bekker (1859) reads his own conjecture γένη.

2 Kassel brackets ὁ δὲ περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ὁ θεωρός. See the discussion infra chap. 9.

3 Rh. 1358a36–b8 (T. 53).

4 The Aristotelic distinction prefigures the Kommunikationsmodell conceived by Bühler (1934). He distinguishes three functions of the speech: representation (Darstellung), presentation (Kundgabe) and appeal (Appell), according to whether the message is oriented respectively towards reality, the speaker or the hearer; on the affinity of Aristotle and Bühler’s Kommunikationsmodell, cf. Calboli (1969) 209 and Rapp (2002) 250.

5 Rh. 1356a1–4.
acquires a position of predominance, being identified as the “end” of rhetorical activity (καὶ τὸ τέλος πρὸς τοῦτον ἔστιν).\(^6\) It is in fact the hearer who provides the criterion for formulating a third triad, the *genres* of rhetoric: deliberative, judicial and epideictic. In giving prominence to the hearer, Aristotle emphasizes the act of reception, recognizing that rhetorical discourse implies a response and an addressee as an integral part of its operation.

There is no doubt that Aristotle based his division of rhetoric into three genres on empirical observation as well as on prior conceptualization:\(^7\) in concretely identifying the *κριτής* (judge) with the citizen in assembly (ἐκκλησιαστής) and with the juror in the law court (δικαστής), Aristotle reveals how his conceptual tripartition derives from the empirical observation of the contexts and conditions of Athenian oratorical practice in the 5th and 4th century. The novelty lies in the attempt to provide a theoretical justification of the number and nature of the genres and draw precise boundaries between them.\(^8\)

To justify the number of genres, the distinction is presented as the outcome of a deductive, dichotomic reasoning. In making a dual recourse to the term ἀνάγκη, Aristotle clearly emphasizes its exhaustive, rationally necessary character.\(^9\)

In order to draw precise boundaries between the genres he introduces specific parameters:\(^10\)

– the communicative function:

\[\text{συμβουλῆς δὲ τὸ μὲν προτροπή, τὸ δὲ ἀποτροπή· ἀεὶ γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἰδίᾳ συμβουλεύοντες καὶ οἱ κοινῇ δημηγοροῦντες τούτων θάτερον ποιοῦσιν. δίκης δὲ τὸ μὲν κατηγορία, τὸ δ’ ἀπολογία· τούτων γὰρ ἀπετερονοῦν ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τοὺς ἀμφισβητοῦντας. ἐπιδεικτικοῦ δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐπαινος τὸ δὲ ψώγος}\]

\(^6\) While in the distinction of the three means of persuasion the hearer is taken into consideration by virtue of his emotional situation, in this second triad he is considered in his function of observer/judge of the rhetorical *performance*, see Brunschwig (1994) 90.

\(^7\) The observation of reality is the basis of all classifications into genres, both those concerning natural world (e.g. genres of animals) and those concerning human “poietical” activities (e.g. genres of poetry).


\(^9\) Solmsen (1929) 211 argues that Aristotle was influenced here by the diaeretic method of Plato. Conversely, Buchheit (1960) 124 claims that the Stagyrite would have been critical of this method. Hellwig is more prudent (1975) 127. As we have said, (cf. supra n. 24), rather than rejecting the Platonic method, Aristotle perfected it.

\(^10\) 1358b8–29 (T. 53).