Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture – An Introduction

For his interpretations of early modern literature, the American scholar Stephen Greenblatt utilizes methods and theories originally developed in the field of anthropology. Such an approach has allowed him to furnish proof that fictional texts are capable of far more than merely "reflecting" the culture from which they emerge. Literary texts are rather a vital component of this very culture, capable of combining and positioning this culture's individual elements into new constellations and so offering us a reinterpretation of the culture itself, whether in the form of theatre plays, poetry or novels. Meanings assigned to the world are circulated through literary texts and thus form the condition of their possibility. Artworks originate in a specific culture and, simultaneously, restructure this culture. Stephen Greenblatt is one of those scholars who call for a "cultural poetics," a procedure that examines fictional texts with the same seriousness as their cultural history context.[1]

Using the idea of a "cultural poetics" as its platform, *Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture* scrutinizes the fascinating and diverse wanderings forms of artistic expression, in particular literature, have taken through different cultural fields, both within and outside a specific geographical region or historical époque. When considering changes and shifts leading to new, transformed forms of expression, it is undoubtedly instructive to keep in mind the close relationship that exists between cultural history and literary text. One focus of *Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture* is the transcultural interaction generated in the course of transforming or creating literary forms. Our intention is not to establish a taxonomy of genre that would be universally applicable. It is our view that such attempts are not particularly fruitful, leading us only further into the confusing and well-known aporia of the discussion on genre, a problematic accurately described by Peter Stolz.[2] Already in the 1970s Tzvetan Todorov pointed out in his central essay "The Origin of Genre" the main problem underlying the genre discussion: "One can always find a property common to two texts, and therefore put them together in one class. But is there any point in calling the result of such a union a 'genre'?[3]

Approaching the topic with a flexible genre concept and avoiding any superficial group classification of texts, the common focus of the essays collected in this volume is to explore the dimensions and potentiality which cultural encounters release in the field of genre transformation. Apart from the broader transcultural aspects, a further point of interest is to shed light on the transgeneric, intertextual and intermedial crossings and passages, transferences which question textually centered approaches in literary research. In order to clarify and illustrate our approach, we would first of all like to present an example taken from Arab performance and literature that illuminates the complexity inherent to processes of aesthetic transference.[4]

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1   Cf. Stephen Greenblatt (2000) *Was ist Literaturgeschichte?* Frankfurt/Main (Erbschaft unserer Zeit. Vorträge über den Wissensstand der Epoche vol. 9).

2   Cf. Peter Stolz (1990) „Der literarische Gattungsbegriff. Aporien einer literaturwissenschaftlichen Diskussion. Versuch eines Forschungsberichtes zum Problem der literarischen Gattungen" in *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 14, pp. 209-227.

3   Tzvetan Todorov (1976/77) "The Origin of Genres" in *New Literary History* 8, pp. 159-170:162.

4   Cf. Friederike Pannewick (2000) *Das Wagnis Tradition. Arabische Wege der Theatralität.* Wiesbaden

Transcultural interaction in the genre concept of Arabic theatre

The genre of Arab theatre is an illuminating example of the mechanisms operating in the adaptation and transformation of genres. In the mid-nineteenth century, Arab commercial travellers returning from Europe, fascinated by theatre performances, introduced this European genre, the bourgeois-Aristotelian drama, into the Arab art scene. On their own initiative, they organized, initially limited to the private sphere, theatre performances based on literary texts, following the example of European playwrights such as Molière, Goldoni, or Shakespeare. These early Arab pioneers used the new art form for propagating moderate national and liberal ideas in the context of the progressive movement of *al-nahda*. The fact that drama as a textual literary genre is of European origin contributed enormously to its popularity in progressive and Western-oriented sections of Arab society during this period. It was not until the 1920s and 1930s that an anti-European tendency gradually gained strength. Ever since this time, and with growing vigour during the second half of the 20th century, the genre of Arabic drama became the politically-engaged medium *per excellence*. In the course of greater dissociation from Europe, especially after the defeat by Israel in the 1967 war, this genre's European origin was increasingly perceived as a disturbing factor. Several artists and critics remembered local popular forms of theatrical performance in Arab culture like the story-teller, ritual portrayals or shadow theatre, forms which are not easily reconcilable with the European genre concept of literary drama. Authors of countless articles, books and manifestos about the "very essence of Arabic theatre" developed a new understanding of this genre, now conceived as "specifically Arabic" or "authentic". This new understanding of "Arabic theatre" was meant to break the rules of the European genre conception and to create an independent non-Western form of art.

However, just some decades before, namely at the beginning of the 20th century, a movement also arose in Europe that sought to distinguish itself from the bourgeois-Aristotelian genre concept and to develop a new understanding of drama that would reflect the social and political changes of the time. It is interesting to note that the most important avant-garde experiments in the field of dramatic art in Europe drew their inspiration from non-European theatrical forms, hoping to create a new kind of modern theatre. In their pursuit of realising their culturally revolutionary claims of closing the gap between art and real life and transposing art into life, these dramatic artists sought new modes of expression in popular culture, believed to be especially authentic in cultures outside Europe. Improvised slapstick acting, story-tellers and ritual performances became central elements in the European avant-garde theatre. This led to an interesting parallel movement of European and Arab artists, who, one could say, met half-way, each side searching for an authentic, emancipated form of theatre close to their audience.

The issue here is thus the transference of a genre from another culture into the Arab world. The next step consists in the modification of the transferred genre through the insertion of elements taken from the receiving cultural field – a process thus resulting in the emergence of an altered conception of this genre. At the same time, a modification of the genre concept is taking place in the sending culture – in Europe: there artists are referring

to elements from other cultures, in particular elements from a receiving culture, and are integrating these into the own genre concept. This example shows that the concept of a genre, wandering through different cultures, cannot be simply transferred without itself undergoing change, as if this journey would leave it untouched. Processes of transference produce not only modifications in the receiving culture; the transferred element itself will change on the way. The resulting new and modified form is neither a cultural misunderstanding nor a failed reading. Rather, it is a kind of "inventive syncretism," to use James Clifford's term[5].

Both the act of transferring a genre from "other" cultures as well as the subsequent reflection on and the new positioning of the self-understanding as how to give this genre a coherent shape are phenomena which can be observed in the utterances of most modern cultural communities.

The case of Arabic theatre and its relationship to European theatre clearly shows that genres cannot be conceived of as fixed entities nor be traced back to normative ideal types or mixed forms derived from them. The search for the "origins" of certain genres – if one confines oneself to literature in the proper sense – would probably produce no results. But if we transgress the framework of traditional philological studies and literary criticism, it becomes conceivable to view rituals and rites of passage as precursors of genre, namely as the core components in social drama. Performative and narrative genres of culture developed out of these early embryonic forms. In our context it is the dynamic and generative character of artistic forms that matters most. *Gan*, the Indo-Germanic root of the term genre, meaning "to generate" or "to beget" indicates this aspect.[6]

A concept of genre as a dynamic process

Taking into account a multitude of criteria, a polyvalent thematic classification of genres enables us to conceive of genres as open systems and not as fixed entities, comparable to spheres which partly touch one another, overlap or even include each other. This comparison makes it clear that it is impossible to strictly distinguish between genres.[7] Instead, their openness allows them to be extended, narrowed or relocated. The flexibility of art forms ensures their high degree of transformability.

The transformability of aesthetic genres as well as the universality of certain topics in world literature is the main focus of Yuriko Yamanaka's contribution. In her comparative study on the specula genre in European, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic-Persian literatures she remarks the "universality of the mirror topos in Oriental and Occidental literatures." Noting that the concept of the mirror "seems to be independent of intercultural influence", Yamanaka even wonders "whether the concept of 'genre' itself is something that is inher-

5   James Clifford (1988) *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art.* Cambridge, Mass., p. 22f.

6   Todorov e.g. sees the origin of genres in speech-acts such as praise, mourning and greetings. Cf. Marie-Laure Ryan (1981) "Introduction. On the Why, What and How of Generic Taxonomy," in *Poetics* 10, pp. 109-126.

7   Peter Wenzel (1998) „Gattungstheorie und Gattungspoetik" in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe.* Ed. by Ansgar Nünning. Stuttgart, Weimar, pp. 175-178: 177.

ently there, or is only an artificial border drawn by literary historians for the sake of schol-
arship." In this case, there is no direct transcultural transfer, and even the concept of
'genre' is put into question. On the other hand, consideration should be given to the fact
that literature devoted to similar purposes such as the reflection on kingship and the in-
struction of future rulers clusters around a set of common metaphors. In the light of this,
Yuriko Yamanaka's contribution impressively underlines the hypothesis about the exis-
tence of a universal human capacity to intuitively recognize genres.

In a similar vein, Ralf Elger questions the hypothesis of the break in the literary conven-
tions in the course of colonial and cultural encounters between the Arab East and Europe.
In his study he shows how the genre of travelogues in the eastern Mediterranean was em-
bedded in social and literary discourses and traces their narrative techniques, motifs and
thematic diversity. Elger succeeds in showing that in his famous travelogue *Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz
fī talkhīṣ Bārīz* (The refining of gold and the short description of Paris) Rifāʿa al-Ṭahṭāwī,
spiritual advisor to a student mission sent by the Egyptian ruler Muḥammad ʿAlī to study
European society, culture and technology, was able to relate his experiences of this alien
culture using the already existent conventions of the travelogue.

In the development of artistic genres, besides the competition with other genres, a key
role is played by the reciprocal relations to the environment, for instance to the conditions
of production, social functions and reader expectation. At the end of the 1960s, reception
aesthetics brought into the focus the study of the reader's role as a recipient of literary
works. According to this approach of a reader-response criticism, the historic-aesthetic
horizon of expectations held by the reader is paramount, for as a reference system it steers
and influences how the recipient reads the text. As formulated by Hans Robert Jauß, Wolf-
gang Iser and others, this reference system consists of the well-known norms determining
the respective genre and the relationships the text entertains to its literary environment,
also familiar to the reader, and to other texts. Here, the literary text is understood as a net-
work of appeal-structures directed towards the reader. In this way reception aesthetics re-
veals the limited possibilities of a static classification of genres.[8]

Similarly, the theories of Russian Formalism and ethnological research have also con-
tributed to the demise of the conception of genre as a classification model. Instead, recent
research has stressed how genre operates as a communication system that benefits both the
authors in their composing of texts as well as the readers and critics in their reading and
interpretation.[9] With specific text groups, the reader must be familiar with the "rules of

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8   Cf. Hans Robert Jauß (1970) *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*. Frankfurt/Main; Wolfgang Iser
      (1970) *Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa.*
      Konstanz; ibid. (1972) *Der implizite Leser. Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis
      Beckett.* München; Alastair Fowler (1982) *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres
      and Modes.* Oxford, pp. 256ff.

9   Cf. Dan Ben Amos (1969) "Analytical categories and ethnic genres" in *Genre* 2, pp. 275-301; Martin
      Goch (1992) *Der englische Universitätsroman nach 1945: "Welcome to Bradbury Lodge".* Trier
      (Horizonte Bd.10), pp. 15-16: „Nach dem Durchspielen produktionsästhetischer, werkimmanenter und
      schließlich rezeptionsästhetischer Ansätze und der Erkenntnis ihrer jeweiligen Grenzen herrscht
      mittlerweile Einigkeit darüber, daß die Literatur ein Phänomen der menschlichen Kommunikation ist
      und alle Bestandteile des elementaren Kommunikationsmodells - Sender /Autor) , Medium bzw. Code
      (literarische Sprache), Nachricht (literarischer Text) und Empfänger (Leser) gleichermaßen zu
      berücksichtigen sind. Denn Gattungen sind Konventionen innerhalb der Sprache der Literatur, d.h. für
      das Gelingen der literarischen Kommunikation grundlegende Elemente des Codes. Sie werden von

play" governing these texts if the literary communication is to succeed. Whether or not a certain text belongs to a certain genre can only be decided when referring to the genre awareness of its readers, which can hardly be determined in the face of the increasing complexity of texts.[10]

Keeping this difficulty of distinguishing between genres in mind, Martin Goch proposes a "participatory model of literary genres" based on Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblance" According to this model, a genre is characterized by a certain numbers of features, its repertoire. Those texts considered to belong to a genre all share, to a varying extent, the characteristics making up the repertoire.[11] The participatory model based on family resemblance is extremely useful when dealing with transcultural genre relations. Genre concepts inherent to a certain culture do not preclude encounters and intermingling with "foreign" forms. There is evidence that the individual possesses a universal genre capability that allows readers to easily perceive and understand originally foreign forms of expression.

Besides the epistemological aspect of artistic form, the question of its meaning is no less important. In the processes of literary communication, genres cannot be considered as meaningless or value neutral. Aesthetical, ideological or religious communities give preference to new developments in literary and artistic expression in order to distinguish themselves from previous or parallel existing communities. Forms of art lose their appeal and become replaced by new, more 'up-to-date' ones. Russian Formalism coined the notion of 'estrangement' or 'automatisation' and 'de-automatisation' of literary texts and forms[12] in order to conceptualize a process which accelerates the transformation of literature. Thus, new hierarchies and meanings arise in a literary system and these are also manifested in the realm of genres. The 'hegemonic social meta-commentary', as Clifford Geertz[13] termed it, is constantly being modified and competed against. Adherents of avant-garde literature search for new forms of literary expression so as to distinguish themselves from alleged traditionalists by rejecting their 'worn out' forms. In doing this, they elevate certain genre developments to be benchmarks of modernity.

Marion Eggert's essay about the origin of the Korean prose poem asserts the pattern of this development. She shows in her study – which presents interesting points of reference and comparison for the tradition of prose poetry in modern Arabic literature – how the prose poem enters the canon of modern Japanese, Chinese and Korean literature, which itself emerged as a derivative genre from a manifold translation movement. Marion Eggert points out that Korean readers conceived of the prose poem genre as a standard of modernity, while Korean critics and scholars emphasized its Korean roots and cultural 'authenticity'.

The juxtaposition of new artistic forms with progress and modernity characterizes the 20th century discourse on modern Arabic literature in a similar vein. In his study on the

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Autoren bei der Konstruktion ihrer Texte eingesetzt, finden ihren Niederschlag in denselben und leiten die Leser bei der Lektüre, d.h. bei der Rekonstruktion der Texte."

10   Cf. P. Kuon (1988) „Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer strukturellen Genrewissenschaft" in J. Albrecht et al. (Eds.), *Energeia und Ergon* vol. 3. Tübingen, pp. 237-252: 250.

11   „Partizipationsmodell literarischer Gattungen," C.F. Goch (1992), pp. 23-5.

12   Cf. Victor Shklovsky (1965) "Art as Technique" in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*. Lincoln, pp. 3-34.

13   Clifford Geertz (1974) *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays.* New York.

efforts of Arab authors who adhere to modern Islamist ideologies, Christian Szyska traces their contributions to the development of new genres in poetry, drama and other narrative forms.

Richard von Leeuwen shows in his contribution on the *Thousand and One Nights* and the formation of genres that European writers like Jacques Cazotte did not compose fantastic fairytales using the techniques of the Arabian Nights as a way of approaching Oriental culture. Rather, they were using this as an exotic detour, as a means to critically distance themselves from their own society: "The Orient is referred to not as a geographical, social reality, but rather as a caricature, providing stereotypes as touchstones to evaluate European society." The introduction of this new element into European literary discourse challenged established genre forms. Finally, the adaptation of the Arabian Nights paved the way for the emergence of the fantastic novel in 19th century Europe.

In his essay on Ezra Pound as "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our age" Frank Kraushaar discusses the stimulus exerted by this foreign culture on Pound's free rendering of Chinese poetry. Pound's example also shows how certain literary forms were preferred as a means for creating distance from previous or existing literary currents. In his interpretation Kraushaar shows that Pound's interest in classical Chinese poetry was not solely motivated by a mere philological inclination; rather, he considered this poetry to be a remote and strange source of poetic inspiration. Pound understood his creational act of translation as an attempt to save the language and its characters from the loss of their poetic potential. One facet of Ezra Pound's poetic rendering was the transference of the aesthetics of Chinese script into his own idiom. Herein he saw a way of extracting himself from the failings of modern thought and of locating new possibilities for overcoming the crisis of language that so plagued his generation.

The rejection of *a-priori* concepts of genre in favor of a dynamic and flexible concept of literary forms and the intercultural comprehensibility of literary expression presuppose however a flexible concept of culture. This is particularly important when processes of transcultural interaction are under consideration.

Culture in continuous flux

"Culture arises where there is more than one single possibility of interpretation, of comprehending, of reacting to a sign, a situation or a context."[14] Every society is characterized by a diversity of cultural patterns or cultures: on the one hand these are, like the identities of individuals, in a state of continuous flux, or to put it differently, in a continuous process of accumulation and mingling; on the other hand, we can observe a trend towards homogenization at work in societies as well as in individuals. In the course of this double movement within cultural systems certain elements are conceived as national, ethnical or religious 'culture'. This categorization serves, in a process of accumulation and mingling, to fix the 'crystallizations' which have emerged; these are then employed to define an individual or a group identity on the basis of an assumed

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14 Reinhold Görling (1997) *Heterotopia. Lektüren einer interkulturellen Literaturwissenschaft*. München, p. 33: „Kultur beginnt dort, wo es mehr als eine Möglichkeit der Interpretation, des Verstehens, der Reaktion auf ein Zeichen, eine Situation, einen Kontext gibt."

homogenous culture, race or ethnic group, distinct from an externalized 'Other'. Given this mechanism, assumed dichotomies such as the Self and the Foreign appear to be questionable strategies for drawing absolute distinctions. We want to question concepts of interculturality which propose an encounter or clash between two such essentialized entities. Approaches based on the Self and the 'cultural Other' in the field of 'xenology'[15] seek to understand intercultural contacts, which are quite often ethnic or religious confrontations. The assumption here is that two similarly monolithic blocks clash with one another, blocks whose boundaries are taken to be definitively fixed and whose essences are different, if not incompatible.

Culture however is, as Görling points out, a "concept covering the whole range of possibilities of signifying practices, including even those possibilities which are pushed to one side, repressed, neglected or only existent as a potentiality in a single culture." Therefore, the repressed aspects of a certain culture become apparent in another culture or in realms – such as love, adolescence and literature – where repressed aspects of a culture are still granted a place.[16]

Consequently, transcultural interaction does not necessarily presuppose cultures which oppose each other as monolithic blocks and intersect one another at certain points. If instead we take an open concept of culture, one sensitive to the dynamics of continuous flux, as our basis, it becomes immediately obvious that culture itself can first emerge from an interactive process. In our view, a concept of 'culture in continuous flux' is what makes transcultural interaction understandable and theoretically comprehensible in the first place. The 'global' condition has lead to a worldwide increase and acceleration of the circulation of capital, workforces and migration, an intensification that is accompanied by an increased exchange of 'mimetic' capital. This reinforces the cultural processes of accumulation and intermingling. However, these processes are not specific to the present age, as some of the contributions to this volume show.

Genres between local and global dimensions

From this background an open and flexible concept of culture demands that we qualify the use of "interculturality" and "transculturality" as heuristic notions. Whenever zones of cultural intensity come into contact with one another, the inevitably emerging circulation of mimetic capital and the exchange of signifying possibilities form new systems of intermingling, which in turn lead to the gestation of other formations and intensities. "Inter- or Transculturality" could thus be understood as a concept for the moment or the passage, one that seeks to grasp the moment of convergence or confluence. Precisely cultures imagined as static or stylized into autochthonous entities are nothing other than a reaction to and a reflection upon a convergence; thus, they themselves are components of a common cultural flow.

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15   E.g. Corinna Albrecht and Alois Wierlacher (Eds.) (1993) *Kulturthema Fremdheit. Leitbegriffe und Problemfelder kulturwissenschaftlicher Fremdheitsforschung*. München.

16   Cf. Görling, ibid. pp. 34 f.: Kultur ist ein "Begriff für die Gesamtheit der Möglichkeit signifizierender Praktiken, wozu auch die in einer einzelnen Kultur abge- und verdrängten, liegengebliebenen oder nur als Potentialität vorhandenen gehören."

But how can we adequately describe such Interculturality and its impact on literature terminologically and methodologically? Susanne Enderwitz, Stephan Guth and Andreas Pflitsch all address this tricky issue; they ask how Arabic and Turkish narrative genres such as the novel or the autobiography might be categorized in terms of global and local contexts. Andreas Pflitsch tackles how world literature opens up borders while simultaneously reinforcing the national identity of literatures (*global* vs. *local*), focusing on the problematic of contemporary Lebanese literature, which is not just shaped by Arabic, but also by French and, increasingly, English as literary languages. He scrutinizes traditional categories of national languages, including the changes a genre is subjected to when, together with the author, its language and form embark on a journey or go into permanent exile. Movements of this kind as well as the formation of hybrid cultures in diaspora communities or societies fragmented by civil war or revolutionary movements necessitate the "negotiation of multiple identities" – as Stephen Greenblatt once put it.

Stephan Guth explores the question of whether it is possible to divide genres into "universal" periods, taking the Middle Eastern novel of the 19th century as his example. In a rare approach to Middle Eastern comparative analysis, he juxtaposes phenomena in Western and Middle Eastern literatures and "view(s) them as belonging in the final instance to the same 'global' processes." Guth poses the question whether these different forms of expression are to be seen as determined by the local culture and undertakes an initial answer. Susanne Enderwitz approaches the global-local dynamic on the basis of the observation that the city of origin (but also of fate and inclination) serves as a focal point in the development of the genre of Arabic autobiography. As the city is the decisive instance in the formation of identity and individuality, such a focus undermines the traditional genre definition of autobiography. In the autobiographies analyzed the location turns into a hoard of remembrance and is imbued with subjective features. Places, especially cities, become the anchor for the self's polyphony. Can this phenomenon be understood as a comment on the current debate on the interdependence between (or even the dialectic of) globalization and localization?

Intermedial, transcultural and transgeneric crossings

The contact and confluence between cultures naturally leads to an encounter between literary texts, which, in the course of this encounter, form a common and heterogeneous universe of texts. Such contact changes the semantic charging of texts. Thus, within this constantly growing common textual universe, the result is a rupture, wherein authoritative canons break down while new ones emerge. This leads to a new positioning of individual texts and the development of new concepts of textuality in general.

In this respect, the encounter between medieval Hebrew and Arabic texts is an especially instructive field. Haviva Yishai deals in her contribution, "Hebrew Poetry in Light of Medieval Arabic Love Prose", with the dimensions of intertextuality as a cultural and textual bridge. Taking the theme of love betrayal as her example, Haviva Yishai asks whether it might be justified to assume a parallelism between similar themes which are dealt with in distinct genres in the respective different languages. This approach illuminates the dependence of the Hebrew love poem upon the general Arabic literary discourse: the motif of

betrayal in medieval Hebrew love poetry can only be fully understood against the back-drop of Arabic prose literature that deals with the same theme.

One often underestimated condition for the development of genres is its dependence on how artistic expression is mediated. For a long time, literary studies suffered from a self-imposed restriction on script; now, there is a conscious move to extend text-centered concepts like intertextuality to intermediality. The capacity for change and metamorphosis, released through the contact between and the conscious combination of very divergent forms of art, is not to be underestimated. One example worth recalling is the composer Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951), member of the famous "Viennese Circle." When developing his concept of atonal twelve-tone music, he was heavily inspired by the poetry of Richard Dehmel (1863-1920), whereby at the beginning of the 20th century he set his avant-garde poetry to music, only to then, once this modern music had found acceptance, to continue composing without any textual basis. If the artworks emerging from such intermedial play are historical texts, then later cultural practices may well have long expunged any awareness for this decisive intermedial origin. A careful retracing of these references enables us to reconstruct the original context and uncover the original semantic field in which the work arose.

The contribution of Matthias Radscheit tackles this demanding task. He investigates the extent to which the intermedial references of the Qurʾān actually relate to the highly developed Christian iconography of the 6th century and then re-contextualise its symbolism in the Qurʾānic theology. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi also devotes her attention to a case of intermediality. She investigates a novel from the 1990s by the contemporary Arab novelist ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, who at times enriches his literary texts with drawings. This novel's intermedial character is commented on in a preface written by the Syrian painter Marwān. She traces the intermedial interaction between text and image and investigates to what extent the author's drawings might enable him to express something that the written text cannot – the unconscious.

The twelve contributions collected in this volume deal with Arabic, Turkish and Persian as well as with Chinese, Korean and Japanese literatures. The authors investigate such divergent genres as travelogues, autobiographies, tales and specula, as well as poetry and novels and intermedial forms of text and image. Not just enormous geographical spaces are traversed, but so too temporal spaces. What is common to these manifold approaches is the refusal to definitively categorize the respective genres and regional literatures. Instead, it appears more meaningful and useful to analyze their changes and modifications and the ensuing shifts in semantic meanings. This is the main focus of *Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture*. Transcultural encounters bring the structure of literary and artistic forms into dynamic movement. The play with foreign elements and the flirtation with the Exotic renew and revitalize how one views and perceives one's own culture. The dissonances and contradictions which inevitably accompany this kind of bridge-building generate a creative tension that stimulates and guides reflection; releasing this tension modifies the systems of artistic forms.