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»Blending, Mixture, Hybridisation - Theoretical Approaches to Genre Blending«

- Poetik der Gattungsmischung / Poetics of Genre Blending. International Conference at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg im Breisgau, in cooperation with Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich. March 27 – March 29, 2014.

Organizers **Sylvia Brockstieger** (Freiburg) and **Cornelia Rémi** (München) opened the conference with a comprehensive overview of various theoretical approaches towards genre blending. They proposed a tentative terminological and methodological matrix for analyzing generically hybrid texts, starting from the general difficulties faced by genre theorists. The phenomena of genre blending and genre hybrids challenge the notion of distinct genres as supra-historical entities; rather than that, genres need to be treated as flexible categories shaped by the aesthetic and social needs of different agents in the literary field. A theory of genre blending and its historical development must therefore tackle a set of key questions, among them: Which aspects of a generic profile are attached to the hybrid ›third‹ – and how? Which criteria can we use to distinguish between different varieties or grades of blending – phenomena like intertextuality, intermediality, shifting ›modes of writing‹ (*Schreibweisen*), and genre hybridity?

Based on a framework provided by several theorists elaborating on questions of generic hybridity (Genette, Pfister, Seibel), Brockstieger and Rémi proposed a series of heuristic categories which allow for identifying such hybridity as well as account for the supposed processual character of genre blending in the interaction of its four communicative components: *text*, *author*, *reader*, and *context*. The extent of genre blending may be determined by analyzing the *text* itself. Focussing on the *author* reveals aspects of a specific genre consciousness, which might influence a generic design, while taking the *reader/recipient* into account aims at uncovering conventional patterns of reception as well as cognitive aspects of the reading process. Finally, the *context* encompasses pragmatic, social, institutional and literary background conditions. Consequently, a communication-oriented theory of genre blending cannot function without a deep understanding of the respective historical setting, a precept which proved to be essential in all presentations and discussions throughout the conference.

Accordingly, Rémi and Brockstieger illustrated and expanded on central features of this model. Rémi demonstrated the importance of conceptualizing the reader in order to grasp the historical significance of genre blending by examining Friedrich Spielhagen's interpretation of Vischer's *Auch Einer*, while Brockstieger referred to the Baroque tragicomedy *Cenodoxus* for pointing out how even a relatively established hybrid genre must be densely contextualized in order to determine its functions and achievements. In the case of *Cenodoxus*, its hybrid construction reflects the early modern perception of human life and, thus, caters to specific socio-cultural needs.

Based on models from the field of cognitive science (e. g. Fauconnier, Turner, Sinding), **Rüdiger Zymmer** (Wuppertal) offered a different theoretical approach by proposing to understand »Genre Blending as *Conceptual Blending*«. This approach perceives literary genres as stable mental meta-representations, so-called ›mental spaces‹. The term ›conceptual blending‹ refers to a cognitive operation which, by merging such *mental spaces*, results in a third, *blended space*, perceived as a mixture of genres. However, this purely cognition-based model does not

explain what motivates the genesis of *mental* and thus *blended spaces*. Zymner therefore presented some additional pragmatic considerations that might help to deal with this problem. He proposed to distinguish between socio-cultural norms of communication that shape our genre consciousness and their phonetic as well as graphemic representations. Moreover, he argued for applying the term *Gattungsmischung* (*genre blending*) only when the blending is communicated explicitly by the text as opposed to cases of generic vagueness or multi-generic texts. In that sense, strong genre blending occurs when the original generic terms remain visible within the ›new name‹ (e.g. tragicomedy), whereas weak genre blending is marked by adjectival modification of a conventional genre (e.g. lyric drama, epic poem).

In his talk »Genre-mixture in Rhetorics«, **Dietmar Till** (Tübingen) discussed the question of possible forms of genre blending in public speeches. Following a diachronic approach, Till first introduced the three Aristotelian genres (deliberative, judicial and epideictic speech) and their ›career‹ within ancient rhetorical theory. Using four examples from late antiquity up until present-day political discourse, he illustrated the astonishing continuity and normativity of said ancient genres. Consequently, genre blending occurs as a more or less marked, but in any case intentional contamination of two (or possibly more) genres. Ludwig Uhland, for instance, added a highly political subtext to an epideictic speech in honour of the newly elected Landtag of Tübingen by deliberately blending the two traditional genres. In the case of Marcel Reich-Ranicki's famed speech remembering the victims of National Socialism in 2012, Till demonstrated how the communicative context of a speech is crucial for its genre allocation. Thus, Reich-Ranicki's reading of a narrative autobiographic text was perceived as a commemorative speech by the audience.

Jan Stenger (Glasgow) posed the question to what extent the popular view of the late antiquity as a ›period of blending genres‹ (Charlet) is justified. In his talk »Genre Blending as Signature of an Era? Critical Reflections on the Literary Physiognomy of Late Antiquity«, Stenger discussed Herzog's assumption that a distinct aesthetic paradigm is effective in the literature of late antiquity – a paradigm that encompasses playing on traditional forms and partially forfeiting traditional genre rules. Nevertheless, numerous texts used to obey these rules continuously, an observation which prompted Stenger to advise against generalizing the albeit significant phenomenon emphasized by Herzog. Furthermore, he criticized Herzog's indistinct and also a-historical genre concept that inevitably leads to a less concise notion of genre blending, resulting from a supposed deviation from the classical norm. In contrast, Stenger argued for the supposed incommensurability of the era, when mimesis could not be regarded as a leading category any longer. Bible exegesis along with its new hermeneutic techniques presented an analytical approach towards literature and paved the path towards new modes of its perception. Stenger identified possible focal points of further research on genre blending in late antiquity. Amongst other things, he asked which aspects of a polyvalent text might then be able to take the place of the category ›genre‹.

Beate Langenbruch (Lyon) discussed »The Generic Laboratory of the French Middle Ages«, in the sense that producers and recipients of (French) medieval literature can be perceived as ›working‹ together in creating new literary forms while being exposed to various external cultural influences. Langenbruch demonstrated the co-presence of factual and fictional (Jean Bodel), of sacred and profane (Jean de Meung), of creation and reception, of different media and arts (text and picture, music, dance, game) and of different ›genres‹ (Jean Renart; Charles d'Orléans). In doing so, she underpinned the general medieval tendency towards hybridity and disorder, which derived from specific cultural and historical preconditions: With the French language having only recently emerged from Celtic, Romanic and Germanic influences, the linguistic material was far from being homogeneous. Moreover, strong genre consciousness, being linked to stable poetical rules, was also lacking. Although ancient genre concepts were

still prevalent in the sphere of the clergy, the face of vernacular literature was mainly shaped by the practical needs of its audience, i.e. by oral or performative contexts. The hybrids resulting from these conditions could either take on long ›generic‹ lives of their own or dissolve after not being ›needed‹ any more. The genre *miracle play* (»Mirakelspiel«) from the 14th century, for instance, merged sermon as well as theater and arose from the collective singing of the *Te Deum* by the audience and the preacher. After a short bloom it vanished into insignificance.

Michael Waltenberger (Frankfurt a. M.) talked about »Heterogeneity in Gautier's and Otte's *Eraclius*« and claimed that Otte's treatment of the subject matter is not to be read as a reflexion on genres, but as a manifestation of disorder: The intertextual reference to the French version of Gautier d'Arras evokes the ›generic domains‹ of legend and heroic life, but farcical traits and adolescence motives break down that generic frame as soon as it emerges. The result radicalizes the already ambiguous characteristics of Gauthier's text, an episodic work meant to be read less in a biographical, but rather in an eschatological way. While (early) modern phenomena of genre blending can assume poetological meaning, medieval ›blended‹ texts call for a historical reading to avoid misinterpretation. The textual traits which we perceive as ›blended‹, ›hybrid‹ or ›mixed‹ must have appeared less strange to Otte's contemporaries. Thus, medieval generic disorder is the result of vibrant literary production without institutions.

In his talk on »Hybridity as a Catalyst for the Development of the German Novel in the Late Middle Age«, **Stefan Seeber** (Freiburg) showed how theories from the field of cultural studies like Bachtin's concept of hybridity, the idea of the third space from translation theory, and Bhabha's staircase motive can be applied to medieval and early modern novels in order to conceptualize their hybrid genre status. With the middle ages lacking a strong generic consciousness in general, ›the novel‹ would respond to a multitude of influences and reinvent itself constantly, sanctioned only by its audiences. According to Seeber, ›genre blending‹ is an operation acted out by the reader who either combines heterogeneous elements in a third space himself (Johann's von Würzburg *Wilhelm von Österreich*) or reproduces the synthesis already performed in the text (*Magelone*). Seeber distinguished between *unintentional hybridity* (*unterlaufene Hybridität*) and *intentional-artificial hybridity* (*intentional-artifizielle Hybridität*), a distinction again produced by the reader.

Key-note speaker **Klaus Garber** (Osnabrück) gave an instructive overview of the long cultural history of the shepherd and the various forms of »Genre Blending in Pastoral Poetry«. The ancient figure of the shepherd proves to be a *wanderer between genres* throughout the history of occidental literature. He is characterized as a virtuous creature of nature and, apart from always speaking in verses, eludes attribution to a fixed genre. Garber traced the shepherd's generic transformation from his origin in Theokrit and his elaboration in Virgil over the differentiation of the motif in the Renaissance, its (political) reinterpretation in England and in Opitz's work up to Gessner's *Idyllen* in the 18th century. Approaching his subject from the perspective of the history of ideas, Garber proposed that genres die out when they do not correspond to the needs of their time, and thus new genres arise. The discussion raised the question if hybrid genres in general had a liability towards unfruitfulness.

On the second day, **Simon Zeisberg** (Berlin) reflected on the »Poetics of Genre Blending in the Exposition to Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*«. He discussed poetological concepts presented in the first chapter of the novel and emphasized the influence of contemporary theoretical discourses that gave rise to the meta-poetical architectural metaphors to which Grimmelshausen's text refers. *Simplicissimus* combines elements of the *genus grande* and of the *genus humile*; its chronological and homodiegetical organization associates *ordo naturalis*, while heterodiegetical elements allude on *ordo artificiosus*. By blending both tendencies, the novel complicates its own reception and evokes implicit criticism of the norms of the ›courteous

novel«. This blending technique is being reflected on especially in said first chapter of *Simplissimus (Spessarter Haushalt)*, by visualizing the text itself as either household (*oeconomia*) or a building. By juxtaposing palace and straw hut Grimmelshausen evokes two genres and creates a third space of hybridity, which requests new patterns of reception and implements a new empirical world view beyond *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificiosus*. Nevertheless, the generic distinction remains visible in the realm of hybridity and ultimately questions the conditions of narration.

Jörg Robert (Tübingen) was the first speaker to interpret the hybrid character of a text as psychological evidence regarding the author's voice. In his talk »Hybrid Petrarchism: Genre Blending in J.M.R. Lenz's Epic Poem *Petrarch – Ein Gedicht aus seinen Liedern gezogen* (1776)« he characterized Lenz's *Petrarch* as a hybrid uniting elements of Petrarch's poetry, Goethe's *Werther* and Wieland's irony, a combination which in Robert's opinion ultimately reflects Lenz's own unhappy love of Goethe's sister. Petrarch's unfulfilled love of Laura serves as an epigonal camouflage for Lenz's own misfortune here, while sentimental elements transform and modify the original plot of the love story decisively. Robert managed to show that Lenz challenges even the initial conception of his own text by weaving in elements of structural irony and establishing a critical distance between the narrator and his hero, heavily drawing on Wieland's comic epics and thus shifting from a mere *imitatio* of traditional poetic patterns to a break with such traditions. Robert interpreted this juggling with tradition and innovation as serving Lenz's »psychological hygiene« and providing a »therapy for enthusiasts«.

The following discussion focused on the question whether Robert had analyzed an actual case of genre blending or merely a mixture of writing styles – a question pointing back to the problem of how genres may constitute themselves from matters of both content and form. Robert defended his approach by emphasizing that poetry in fact used to define itself *only* based on particular styles of writing. This brought up fundamental issues of modelling genre blending: the combination of two genres A and B may result in a hybrid »AB« that still reveals its constituents or in a »C« that transforms those constituents into a new and potentially monstrous third. However, the problem of how to model poetical allusions outside an intertextual paradigm remained unsolved.

Olav Krämer (Freiburg) dedicated his talk to the field of didactic poetry, more specifically to »Didactic Odes and Lyric-Didactical Poems: Genre-Mixture in the Theory of Didactic Poetry and Its Practice between 1750 and 1850«. Starting from Christoph August Tiedge's *Urania* (1801) Krämer argued that didactic poetry around 1800 underwent a strong lyrification which can be related to Schiller's concept of idealisation. With this hypothesis Krämer objected to Hans-Wolf Jäger's explanation that the »lyrification of didactic poetry« (»Lyrisierung der Didaxe«) was based entirely on an increasing subjectivism and sentimentality. Krämer discussed how Tiedge in his *Urania* mixes idealism with the traditional philosophical contents of a didactic poem: On one hand the poem initially phrases the genre-typical doubts against the existence of a benevolent Deity, which are later appeased by the ideas of acting virtuously and maintaining the hope of faith. On the other hand the text documents the lyrification of didactic poetry by taking up elements of elegies and hymns. But, as Krämer rightfully pointed out, these elements were not supposed to mark subjectivity, since the expressed sensations and emotions were rather general. An absence of polemic utterances and a tendency towards uniform emotions rather reinforces idealization. According to Krämer this trend is representative of a general development of didactic poetry in this era: Prototypical standards of didactic poetry were reshaped inspired by contemporary trends of lyrical poetry. The ensuing discussion expanded on the idea that the development of literary genres might gain momentum through the influence of a qualifier which turns increasingly dominant.

Stefan Scherer (Karlsruhe) spoke about the »Gesamtkunstwerk between Drama, Poem and Novel: Experimental Genre Hybrids after 1800« and cast a spotlight on extreme examples of genre blending in the dramatic writings of Ludwig Tieck and Achim von Arnim: Tieck's *Kaiser Octavianus* (1804) and Arnim's *Ariel's Offenbarungen* (1804). Both represent the Romantic paradigm of a »progressive universal poetry« and must be located in the outmost threshold region of generic determinability. Scherer explained the rising interest in the potential of genre blends after the year 1800 as a countermovement to Weimar Classicism and its ideal of generic purity: In the case of Tieck's *Octavianus* this resulted in a »Sprachgesamtkunstwerk« combining the most diverse European traditions of genres, subject matter and styles; hence the sublime style of *genus grande* is combined with grotesque elements or prose with rhymed verse in different meters. Tieck employs effects which cause a musicalization and thus the poetization of all textual elements. Scherer therefore characterized *Octavianus* as a »verbal opera«, which implements the poetic program of Romanticism most impressively. While the different generic elements are still distinguishable in Tieck's drama, Arnim's *Ariel* forms a conglomeration of genres in which generic references keep varying in a kaleidoscopic way and are mirrored against each other so closely that a definite generic classification becomes impossible. While its paratexts mark *Ariel* as a novel, it also contains elements that might be attributed to the epic, tragedy or comedy, poetological reflections on the operatic character of the drama and much more. Arnim's text therefore forms a sort of »bricolage«, in which the generic indifference is carried to an utmost extreme which to a certain extent could be understood as surrealism *avant la lettre*. Scherer's final conclusion was that the genres taking part in such texts are assigned specific functions, even though their combination in such radically boundless texts as *Octavianus* and *Ariel* makes those texts almost unreadable.

Stefan Knödler (Tübingen) introduced the audience to another example of extreme genre blending in early Romanticism. In his analysis of Wilhelm von Schütz's drama *Lacrimas* (1803) as a »Dramatic Experiment and Anthology of Romantic Poetry« he demonstrated that the destruction of all sorts of generic obligations drove contemporary readers to their perceptual limits. However, *Lacrimas* can also be read as an example for the (albeit failed) approach to create new genres through an experimental assemblage of traditional generic elements. While early Romantics like the brothers Schlegel held Schütz in high esteem, his *Lacrimas* garnered devastating criticism from others, like Kotzebue, who called it a »crazy play«. This drama opposes established classicism by integrating disregarded elements (especially from medieval literature) into a highly innovative combination of form and content. Genre blending occurs particularly in Schütz's multi-faceted assimilation of various lyrical forms: dramatic verse, like iambic or trochaic tetrameter; epic verse, often hybrids of ottava and terza rima, and even completely self-contained poems. The originality of Schütz's achievement is most apparent in this latter case, e. g. when he fits entire sonnets into the dialogues between his characters. But then such passages also illustrate the questionable quality of his innovations, since such integrated poems are almost impossible to recognize even for a silent reader. Besides, the poetic forms which Schütz uses often are not clearly motivated by the contents of the play, which partly results in a mutual damage of plot and form.

Thomas Mohnike (Strasbourg) sketched some possible relations between generic and cultural identity in Mikael Niemi's novel *Popular Music from Vittula* (2000). In his presentation »Genre-sampling and Identity« Mohnike argued that the interest of Swedish readers in the culturally and topographically peripheral regions of their country depicted in this novel is rooted in an increasing awareness of multiculturalism in Sweden. By confronting different writing styles and continuously undermining conventional generic expectations, Niemi negotiates questions of identity on the level of narrative discourse. His novel is characterized by a boundless

joy of narration and a permanent change of writing styles that is best described as an example of narrative *genre-sampling*.

Frieder von Ammon (Munich) added an intermedial approach to the discussion and pleaded for a distinction between intra- and intermedial hybrids. His presentation »Mixing and Separating: Friedrich Hölderlin and Melodrama« examined Hölderlin's *Hero* (1788), a poetic monologue based on the Ovidian tale of Hero and Leander. Von Ammon argued that this lyric-dramatic poem reveals the tense emotionality of Hero's extreme situation in the form of a melodrama without music. While explicit stage directions mark the melodramatic character of the text, it differs from the established generic prototype of the melodrama by using verse instead of prose – this musicalization of poetic language replaces an actual musical accompaniment and can be interpreted as Hölderlin's statement in the contemporary debate on the legitimacy of decidedly intermedial genres. *Hero* takes this debate one step further by blending the intermedial melodrama with lyrical poetry: music turns into the purely verbal music of poetic verse here. From this point of view Hölderlin's genre blending can well be characterised as a focal point of his poetics.

Monika Schmitz-Emans (Bochum) examined »Catalogue Texts in Novels« and thus discussed an entirely different case of genre blending, which involves both fictional and factual elements and creates an underlying tension between visualization, representation and absence. She approached these problems from a narratological and aesthetic angle: While narrative fiction aims at achieving an illusion of sensual presence of their textual universes, typical catalogue texts emphasize the physical absence of the objects they represent by merely naming them. Since they invoke familiar objects, they appear highly authentic and reliable, yet simultaneously highlight the elusive character of the listed items. The novels that Schmitz-Emans analyzed take advantage of these characteristic ambiguities of catalogue texts: Max Aub uses a catalogue of pictures to represent the stations of a fictitious painter's fragmentary biography in his novel *Josep Torres Campalans*, while George Perecs *Un Cabinet d'amateur* employs a painting showing an art collection to expose how represented objects may elude their beholders. A third option can be observed in Alessandro Baricco's *Oceano Mare*: Here an artist's attempt at representing water by means of water illustrates the limits of representation and the transitions between being and non-being. In all these novels catalogue texts are used to reflect on transience and the passage of time, on disappearance and on the fundamental artistic desire to generate presence.

Moritz Baßler (Münster) concerned himself with the »Genesis of Genres in Pop Culture« and its social respectively cultural and historical contexts. He compared the emergence of genres in pop culture to the generation of labels under commercial market conditions. Baßler assumed that already since the 18th century, but even more so since the rise of modernism genre references in high culture are merely playful recollections. This differs considerably from their decisive function in popular culture in the second half of the 20th century, where the success of artistic products depends on their sales figures. Here paratextually marked genres serve as reliable labels that promise to satisfy the expectations of customers who are to spend money on the corresponding products. The according market mechanism is characterized by a shift from diachronic to synchronic reception, meaning that successful products are immediately demanded and consumed in high numbers and therefore commissioned and produced in serial forms. Under such market conditions producers and consumers alike contribute to stabilizing genres by balancing supply and demand. Nonetheless generic innovations remain possible, even though every product is required to correspond to existing expectations. Products can for example combine familiar generic patterns with unexpected elements thus gradually shift or expand the generic horizon.

Marion Gymnich (Bonn) spoke about »Genre Hybridity in the 21st-Century British Novel: Consolidation or Dynamization of the Genre Spectrum?« She suggested a scalable model that could support systematic and nuanced distinctions between different degrees of generic blending. Contemporary British novels offer rich material for developing such a model, because they show a clear tendency towards mixing different narrative genres. Gymnich emphasized that this tendency is based on a distinct awareness of genres, which is documented by a current revival of strictly genre-oriented writing styles. At one end of the scale are forms that merge genre attributes and completely blur the lines between them, while the other extreme would be texts in which distinct generic elements remain clearly recognizable, which e. g. allows a text to change from one genre to another between different paragraphs. In the case of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) for example the reader is challenged to synthesize a complex arrangement of time levels, settings and genres into an overriding unity, which requires a higher level of activity than novels which amalgamate their generic elements.

Klaus Birnstiel (Basel) concluded the conference program with thoughts about »Genre Blending in Rainald Goetz's Contemporary Writing Styles or Postmodernism as Early Romanticism«. Birnstiel argued that novels in general and the postmodern novel in particular can absorb a wide range of literary styles without changing their generic identity. To grasp the conditions of this blending process adequately, Birnstiel first characterized genres as accumulations of a specific knowledge on the side of the readers, and as expectations derived from that knowledge. Building on this model, genres can be described as mutually confining systems available to the author. For a closer analysis of the strategies and effects associated with this communication process Birnstiel chose selected writings by Rainald Goetz, who since the 1980s permanently keeps integrating new stylistic and medial elements into his texts (images, sounds, videos, and online content), but without ever leaving the territory of the novel. Since the novel can only be characterized as *the* hybrid genre *par excellence*, it would be rather misleading to analyze it in terms of genre blending: Its hybrid nature is fundamental to the core concept of the novel itself. Finally Birnstiel pondered about possible parallels between Goetz's aesthetic principles and some characteristic tendencies of Early Romanticism: Both show a particular affirmative pathos, tend to merge of different writing styles and genres, and are subject to intense self-reflection.

A highly fruitful final plenary discussion summarized the difficulties of finding a viable notion of genre and genre blending: The question if it was possible to constitute distinct genre profiles based on cognitive models remained just as controversial as the problem how to establish a diachronic profile of genre attributes and poetics. As the conference had demonstrated convincingly, heterogeneous combinations, blends and hybrids are the standard case rather than exceptions in literary history and therefore deserve nuanced, systematic and transparent methods of analysis. The conviction that such a profound analytical examination of historical documents must not relinquish a close reading of the texts and has to maintain an alert awareness of their historicity and historical functions remained beyond all dispute.

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