

Intercultural Aspects of Literature

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Following study attempts to provide an overview of German-language literature from the Goethe era to the present from an intercultural perspective. However, only a few works can be presented or analyzed in detail here, especially since only certain texts can prove useful from this perspective. An intercultural approach to literature, and thus an interculturally oriented literary studies, has only become possible in recent decades and is primarily related to texts from this period, whose emergence can often be linked to phenomena of globalization or migration. While inter- and transculturality are relatively new concepts and interpretive patterns, and are particularly applicable to texts of so-called migrant literature of recent decades, the phenomenon they describe is by no means new, but can also be used for texts from earlier eras. It is therefore plausible to apply inter- and transcultural interpretive patterns to more recent and – in a sense, retroactively – earlier literary texts, insofar as they fulfil certain thematic and structural criteria. For example, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Alfred Döblin's *The Three Leaps of Wang-lun*, or Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy* have been "rediscovered" from a transcultural perspective. Accordingly, the present study focuses not only on texts of so-called "migration literature," a mere overview of which would be an almost insurmountable task anyway, and can therefore only be presented in a kind of "runoff vote," but also on some interculturally relevant literary texts from the 18th to the 20th century. Some research uses the term "intercultural literature," which, however, is not far removed from the purpose of the present considerations. Yet the term seems to harbour an exclusionary quality: It creates the impression that texts "labelled" with this term are thoroughly intercultural in nature, as if interculturality were their dominant feature. Interculturality is merely a specific (intellectual, linguistic, literary) phenomenon that can appear in a literary text alongside many other aspects. We find intercultural aspects in contemporary texts, but also in those of the Enlightenment or Weimar Classicism, in Romanticism or Realism, etc., even if they do not exhibit a (global) migration background.

The handbook on intercultural literature edited by Chiellino examines German-speaking authors from Germany, Europe, and even other continents, addressing, for example, texts by the Turkish or Italian minorities in Germany, by Russian or Eastern European immigrants, but also those originating from African, Latin American, or Asian cultural areas. It addresses texts that "reflect" the last decades of globalization, migration to Germany (beginning, for example, with guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s), and so on. The phenomenon of migration lends itself perfectly to being read as "intercultural literature," although this can give the impression that the intercultural aspect is the most important aspect in these texts. However, with regard to texts from past centuries, when migration or the "hybridization" of languages or cultures was probably not yet so pronounced, the term "intercultural literature" seems to be too broad, as they are quite multifaceted. Intercultural phenomena such as cultural contact, questions of cultural identity, reflections on foreign cultures, identification with foreign cultural content, etc., may certainly occur in texts by Goethe or Novalis, but they are far more complex than could be dismissed with the term "intercultural literature." Therefore, in the following, we limit ourselves to considering interculturality as a (partial) aspect of this older literature, occasionally touching on its relationship to other aspects. However, comprehensive analyses are less to be expected here, as our sole aim is to demonstrate interculturality in its diverse (but also recurring) manifestations. It would also be beyond the scope of this article to simply list all possible authors and texts of "intercultural literature," as there has been a veritable overproduction of such texts, especially in recent years and decades. The "solution" therefore remains to cite only a few texts that can be considered representative of certain intercultural phenomena in literature. This not only pursues a simple chronological presentation, but also divides the overall problem into thematic units. Methodologically, it is possible to divide the phenomenon of interculturality or transculturality into two "variants."

This study is intended to be theoretically sound, but it also aims to provide practical assistance in the analysis of specific texts with intercultural (or transcultural) potential. The intercultural potential of (specific) literary texts was defined by Andrea Leskovec as follows: "The intercultural potential of literature is determined by the function assigned to literary texts in the discourse on interculturality." For Hofmann, the term implies the ability of a literary text to evoke and convey perceptions of cultural difference. It is therefore clear that not all literary texts

are suitable for intercultural analysis, but only those that carry this potential within themselves, i.e., those that can be read against the backdrop of intercultural research and discourse. Such texts enable a kind of "intercultural perspective," that is, a consideration of texts as carriers of cultures or cultural differences. It is important to examine texts that contain various elements of at least two cultures, thus transcending the boundaries of a single, homogeneous or monolithic culture and focusing on cultures or cultural content in their relationship to one another. Texts as carriers or exponents of cultures: This consideration was made possible in part by the so-called cultural turn of the second half of the 20th century, which essentially rejected the concept of traditional "high culture" and opened up the horizon of a much broader understanding of culture; but even more so by an inter- or transcultural turn in the 1990s, which is primarily associated with the name of Wolfgang Iser. However, approaches to intercultural hermeneutics date back to the 1980s, for example to Dietrich Krusche (1983) and Alois Wierlacher (1983). They consciously distanced themselves from Gadamer's universal hermeneutics by focusing on a hermeneutics of the foreign and intercultural research on otherness. Furthermore, parallel to globalization discourses, the adjective 'transcultural,' for example in the sense of "transcultural societies" according to Wolfgang Iser (2005), has also become established in cultural and literary studies. Thus, today's transculturally oriented literary studies incorporates the hybridity of cultures and thus also of literatures, cultural overlaps in literary texts, cultural transgressions, and the dissolution of boundaries into their scope of consideration.

The focus here is on texts that—analogue to intercultural potential—demonstrate transcultural potential and draw attention not so much to cultural differences as to cultural convergences. If we assume the transcultural potential of individual literary texts, the tasks of a transculturally oriented literary study include not only the investigation of cultural elements in texts from different cultures by placing two or more texts side by side, as in traditional comparative studies, in order to demonstrate their structural, stylistic, etc. similarities, but also the analysis of individual texts from the perspective of the coexistence or interweaving of cultural content. It is then necessary to view the texts from a transcultural perspective as carriers of cultural overlaps, convergences, and liquefactions. The inter- and transcultural view of certain literary texts—in our case, German-language texts—enables a further understanding of cultures in their encounters or interactions. Analyses of literary texts from an inter- and transcultural perspective must

consider two or more cultures and their diverse components in interrelation and interaction. Questions can be asked, among other things, about the linguistic nature (e.g., linguistic mixing phenomena) of the texts, their reflections on cultural influences and interactions, identities and othernesses, their cohabitations or conflicts, etc. It may be that in the age of globalization, literary texts with inter- and transcultural potential are emerging more frequently, but this fact by no means excludes the possibility that similar texts can also be found in past eras.

The Term 'Culture'

But what does "culture" mean, about which so many diverse discourses are conducted today, and which is the fundamental component of the above terms multiculturalism or pluriculturalism (and, of course, also fundamental to interculturality, as we will see)?

Wolfgang Welsch proceeds from the following assumption:

"We humans are essentially cultural beings. This applies both individually and socially. The development of individuals involves the development of cultural skills and the growth into a culture. And this culture, in turn, is based on a long cultural evolution that has taken place throughout human history, ranging from the mastery of fire to the founding of cities and the invention of the Internet."¹

Culture is therefore the product of both individual and social development and manifests itself in various material and intellectual forms. In the course of their evolution, humans shape the world around them and, in doing so, bring a culture into being. Culture is thus also the creation of form in both the narrow and broad sense of the word. Human culture, however, changes over time; it differs from era to era, from place to place, from region to region, etc.

The etymology of the word or concept of 'culture,' however, goes back to agriculture (see the Latin meaning of cultura, 'plough,' which is why 'cultivate' means 'to care for') in Roman times, i.e., to the materiality of agricultural work. It was only in modern times that it acquired a spiritual and moral meaning. The materiality of the objects thus acquired a spiritual and cultural

¹ W. Welsch: Was ist Transkulturalität?, p. 39, translated by L.V.Sz.

dimension. The specific distinction between culture in a modern versus an ancient, material sense thus became the "spirit," i.e., a spiritual content that remains inherent in culture to this day. The history of the concept of culture also includes its conceptual and ideological juxtapositions (dichotomies) such as nature versus culture, nature versus spirit, nature versus idea, as well as attempts to relativize or even deconstruct their semantic oppositions.

'Culture' has a long history behind it, from its original, more concrete meaning to its abstract, complex definitions in contemporary cultural theories. Today, it exhibits a myriad of definitions and descriptive models, for example, as a socialization process (Geert Hofstede), as an "onion skin" (Alfons Trompenaars) with the outer (food, language, clothing: "explicit culture") and middle "layer" (values and norms), as well as with the "core" (fundamental assumptions about human existence in general). or as an "iceberg" with manifest manifestations such as human behavior, (body) language, clothing "above the water level" and (latent) values, worldviews, beliefs, convictions, ideas, etc. "below" it. Jürgen Bolten, for his part, understands culture as "a process and/or as the result of specific forms of relationship building [...] with regard to: (1) social contexts (socioculture) (2) natural/manufactured environments (agri-/ecoculture) (3) meaningful instances (cultura Dei) (4) the person/self of an actor (cultura animi) that form and preserve." The concept of culture is therefore so broad today that one could rightly ask what exactly does not belong to it.

German Concepts of Culture

Following Reckwitz², four typological concepts of culture can be distinguished: 1. The normative concept of culture dates back to the Enlightenment and is based on the assumption that humanity can be improved and refined. This conviction can be found in classical German literature and philosophy, e.g. Lessing, Kant, Goethe, and Schiller, among others.

This conception of culture also has a moral content: to be "cultivated" also meant (as in Kant) to think and act morally. Here we also find the distinction between culture and civilization, which was also maintained in the following centuries (up to Oswald Spengler), namely the assumption

² Andreas Reckwitz: Die Transformation der Kulturtheorien 2000 (first edition). Dazu auch Csaba Földes & Marc Weiland: Blickwinkel und Methoden einer integrativen Kulturforschung, p. 6-10.

that culture differs from “civilization” or “civilizedness” precisely through its intellectual and moral content: “For the idea of morality still belongs to culture; but the use of this idea, which only amounts to the moral-like nature of love of honor and outward decency, merely constitutes civilization.”³ This normative concept of culture can therefore be subsumed, beyond a basic ethical and moral prerequisite, which is so pronounced in Schiller, among others, also to the concept of education of the time, which included, among other things, the appropriation of cultural content (not only one’s own culture!). Goethe's concept of education included, for example, knowledge of world literature and culture, of the Italian Renaissance no less than of Oriental literature, e.g., Persian poetry à la Hafiz. In addition to the normative cultural concept of the Enlightenment, one must also emphasize its openness to culture, be it to Greco-Roman, French, English, or even Oriental culture.

2. The totality-oriented concept of culture can initially be defined as opposed to the concept of nature: In this sense, culture is everything that humans create, shape, and produce, and interact with on a daily basis. The various objects and artifacts that humans produce belong here, as do their way of life and lifestyle, their customs and habits, rites and rituals, etc. A distinction between culture and civilization no longer exists here. Johann Gottfried Herder can be described as a precursor to this concept of culture. For Herder, humans were "intermediate creatures among animals," that is, beings who exhibit certain deficiencies and errors, yet are capable, through their "capacity for reason," as well as through their language, art, and science, of adapting to earthly life and shaping it to their own convenience. In the course of their cultural development, humans produce various artifacts, (cultural) objects of various kinds, that enable them to live a human life and help them establish themselves on earth. However, for Herder, artifacts were primarily of a spiritual nature, as found in folk traditions (e.g., ballads, fairy tales, songs, etc.). Contemporary cultural anthropology, on the other hand, understands cultural artifacts in a broader sense, from individual tools to space stations: culture and civilization become converging concepts.

³ „Denn die Idee Moralität gehört noch zur Kultur; der Gebrauch dieser Idee aber, welcher nur auf das Sittenähnliche in der Ehrliche und der äußeren Anständigkeit hinausläuft, macht bloß die Zivilisierung aus.“ Immanuel Kant: *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784). Transl. by L.V. Sz.

3. The differentiation-theoretical concept of culture focuses on social subsystems and subsystems or "social fields," such as art, religion, science, media, etc. They can be institutionalized according to their own norms and principles; they have their own "experts," etc. The "social field" is a term coined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and refers to a definable area of society that has its own norms, values, and laws. Social fields (e.g., those of culture, justice, politics, the economy, etc.) can exist side by side peacefully or smoothly, but they can also compete with each other or even come into conflict. Thus, culture is merely a (separate, more or less independent) field or subsystem alongside others, which can occasionally find itself in conflict with other fields, such as politics.

4. The symbolic or semiotic concept of culture is based on the findings of cultural semiotics and defines culture as a sign system with a diversity of signs and meanings. Culture is understood as a system of symbolic forms and orders that await decoding like coded keys. A given sign (be it a color, a costume, a ritual, a gesture, etc.) can carry various meanings that invite its "decoding." One can only understand a culture if one correctly decodes its signs. Cultural competence, in this context, means demonstrating one's ability to interpret and understand the signs of a culture. Incorrect interpretations, ignorance, or the refusal to interpret cultural signs as such can naturally lead to misunderstandings and even (more or less latent or manifest) conflicts. Xenophobia can also result from the lack of understanding or misunderstanding of cultural signs and forms. Intercultural competence comes into play here insofar as it implies the ability to decipher, for example, a foreign sign system, even in relation to one's own. Furthermore, one can also speak of intercultural semiotics today: This includes "stereotypes as well as communicative strategies of cultural self-assertion and their historical change not only in culture-, group-, media- and text-specific contexts [...], but also in intercultural comparison and their intercultural interactions."⁴ Intercultural competence and intercultural semiotics can be helpful in correctly interpreting the signs of another culture in the broadest sense, in identifying and perceiving their meanings, and thus in orienting oneself in the other culture.

However, one must always bear in mind that different cultures produce different sign systems and meanings; moreover, that even apparently similar or identical signs can have or evoke completely different meanings ('signified') in different cultures. Examples of this are legion. For

⁴ Martin Nies: Kultursemiotik, p. 223.

example, in the majority of European cultures, nodding means agreement or understanding, but in parts of Southeast Europe it can also mean "no," i.e. negation or rejection. In India, however, agreement, understanding, or respect are expressed with a shake of the head in a wide semicircle from shoulder to shoulder. The O sign with thumb and index finger can mean something like "Okay" or "Great!" in the USA or Germany, but in other cultures, such as Mexico, Brazil, or Thailand, it can certainly seem obscene. A raised thumb is also generally a positive, encouraging sign in Western cultures, while in Russia or Greece, for example, it can be "decoded" as rude or obscene.

Multi- and Polyculturalism

Multiculturalism is based on the assumption that cultures, in all their diversity, can coexist within certain political or national borders without "merging" with one another, i.e., without their differences disappearing despite their coexistence. It is therefore assumed that cultures are heterogeneous and cannot be isolated from one another. This conception of the heterogeneity of cultures is, however, a very old one and goes back to Herder. However, Herder was concerned with national cultures that have a national language, their own traditions, and even their own "soul." The national conception of cultures only intensified in the 19th century. In the 19th century, a massive development of nationalisms can be observed, including German nationalism, which increasingly assumed a unified idea of the German nation, which ultimately led to the realization of the political unity of Germany in 1870-1871. The development of nationalism can also be observed in literature, for example in the literature of the Vormärz period, the period preceding the revolutionary year of 1848. During the Vormärz period, a growing national patriotism can be observed in German literature, of which the *Deutschlandlied* (German national anthem) by Fallersleben is probably the best example. But a national sentiment can also be observed in literature after 1848, as in Josef Victor von Scheffel's *Ekkehard*, a novel from 1855 that still echoes the spirit of Romanticism, but at the same time subliminally betrays a national pride of the Germans, in that a German-national sentiment and German patriotism were characteristic of Scheffel's time, a sentiment that was, as it were, projected back onto the past, here specifically onto the Middle Ages. Yet even this novel by Scheffel is an example of how cultures came into contact with or into conflict with one another in past times, and how cultural

encounters have occurred in all eras. Scheffel's novel is therefore also insightful from another perspective, which can be called an intercultural one (see below).

However, **multiculturalism** (sometimes also called multiculturalism, based on the English word multiculturalism) is a term of recent decades that refers to so-called multicultural societies in which different cultures, ethnicities, customs, traditions, languages, etc. coexist in a global society. It is interesting how the writer Jurek Becker defined multiculturalism: "Multiculturalism presupposes the willingness of those involved to embrace multiculturalism. If this willingness is not there, then there is no multiculturalism." Seen in this way, multiculturalism implies the willingness of cultures to coexist peacefully, to accept and tolerate each other in their diversity. Without this willingness, the peaceful coexistence of cultures and thus also multiculturalism are threatened, which can generate conflict.

Pluriculturalism (or pluriculturality) refers to the encounter of two or more cultures in a particular cultural area. While multiculturalism assumes a reciprocal influence between the cultures in question, pluriculturalism tends to disregard this. Pluriculturalism thus suggests that cultures exist side by side but do not necessarily influence each other. Thus, the so-called phenomenon of parallel societies would also be subsumed under pluriculturalism. Parallel societies today are understood to be (sub)cultural, ethnic, or religious groups that separate themselves from the majority society and live according to their own norms, rules, values, traditions, or customs. However, such pluricultural or pluriethnic segregation carries with it a great potential for conflict.

Different cultures have not always coexisted peacefully. Samuel P. Huntington's famous theory assumes that the decisive causes of conflict today are primarily cultural in nature ("clash of civilizations"). While national conflicts once dominated Europe, they were replaced by ideological conflicts after the First World War and the Russian Revolution. After the Second World War and the so-called "Cold War," conflicts between Western and non-Western "civilizations" emerged. In addition, populations of non-Western civilizations could no longer be treated as mere objects and targets of Western colonialism. Colonies were lost to the Western powers, and new, independent states and nations emerged on various continents. It is also

interesting to note how the concepts of culture and civilization (which some German thinkers traditionally distinguished) relate to each other: Huntington defines civilization as a cultural unit (one could also say: a cultural area) with associated cities, regions, nationalities, ethnic, and religious groups. In his understanding, individual cultures exhibit different levels of cultural heterogeneity. Thus, for Huntington, cultural heterogeneity appears to be a more significant factor in world culture(s) than the factor of commonality between cultures. Rather, his theory seems to seek to provide an explanation for the recurring conflicts in the world. It is a kind of explanatory model for global conflicts.

Conflicts of a national, cultural, religious, or other nature have always accompanied the history of humanity, as well as of Europe and its various regions. If one looks no further than Central Europe, national and ethnic conflicts, for example, intensified explosively in the Habsburg Monarchy in the 19th century. Moritz Csáky uses the term polyculturality, as opposed to multiculturalism, to describe a cultural diversity that can certainly be fraught with conflict:

"Polyculturality is also a method of dealing with real diversity. The concept of polyculturality is therefore not identical with that of multiculturalism, since the latter assumes that cultural differences and contradictions can be overcome through harmonious cohabitation."⁵

For example, polyculturality can be understood as a characteristic of the multi-ethnic state of the monarchy and applied when examining certain literary texts. In Ferenc Herczeg's novel *The Seven Swabians*, written in Hungarian but featuring characters of other ethnic origins, including Banat Swabians, the interethnic conflict develops during the 1848-1849 revolution in a multicultural space in which Swabians, Serbs, Hungarians, Romanians ("Wallachians"), and Jews live alongside each other along certain ethnocultural lines of conflict, sometimes side by side, sometimes together, only to encounter (sometimes brutal) conflicts with one another during the course of the revolutionary events. Ethnically and religiously heterogeneous cultural spaces can thus also be prone to conflict, or rather, they have developed into potential hotbeds of conflict over the course of history or led to conflict events, of which wars (the First and Second World Wars) in particular bear witness. Understanding these conflict phenomena, latent or

⁵ Csáky: Kultur als Kommunikationsraum, p. 3.

manifest tensions, requires interdisciplinary approaches from several disciplines, be it political science, social science, history, cultural studies, and, last but not least, literary studies.

(Intercultural) literary studies can examine and explicate (literary) texts, revealing the relationships between different cultures—even if they may be conflict-ridden. In this way, it can contribute to understanding and understanding between cultures and even to preventing their conflicts.

Inter-, intra- and transculturalism

When considering cultural differences, be it in terms of (more or less divergent) sign systems, communication and metacommunication, thought and action, speech and writing, gestures and facial expressions, customs and traditions, objects and artifacts, norms and values, rites and rituals, etc., we are already entering the realm of interculturality.

The term **interculturalism** (or interculturality), however problematic its definition may be, assumes that cultures are ultimately independent entities, and thus heterogeneous. Added to this is the idea that cultures can encounter, exchange, influence each other, etc. Interculturality states that cultures are not isolated from one another, but exist in correlation with one another and influence one another, despite the fact that they ultimately remain different insofar as they possess different cultural content (values, norms, traditions, ideas, etc.). In addition, when different cultures encounter one's own cultural identity can be experienced in the mirror of the other culture(s). Interculturality means accepting and thinking from the other cultural perspective. The other (or "foreign") is viewed in its relationship to one's own self-image and is thereby consciously acknowledged. In order to understand the other, one must become aware of one's own point of view. The foreign and one's own culture thus enter into a productive relationship of mutual exchange. Little by little, otherness becomes familiarity as it is (gradually) integrated into one's own cultural experience.

Integrating a "different" culture into one's own cultural understanding is probably easier if one recognizes its (e.g., cultural-historical) commonalities. For example, if one perceives Asian culture as foreign, one can remember that Europe's dominant religion, Christianity, also has

Asian origins. Or one can recall that Greek philosophy and Greek myths clearly contain elements of the Orient. Or one can recall the influence of Arabic culture, for example, on the development of European sciences (e.g., mathematics) or (e.g., Iberian) architecture [see the Alcazar of Seville in the picture], the reception of oriental fairy tales in the Romantic era, etc. People and cultures have always been in exchange with one another; there is hardly a culture that has never been exposed to foreign influences. There have always been more bridges than dividing walls between cultures. One can therefore only agree with Rudolf Pannwitz when he writes: "Where there is culture, there man finds man."⁶

Today's concepts of **transculturalism/transculturality** distance themselves from a homogeneous or holistic concept of culture and emphasize its mixed character and the interweaving of cultures. Since 'transculturality' became a topic of debate in the 1990s, literary studies have also developed a new, 'transcultural' perspective on literary texts, not only in relation to migrant literature of recent decades, but also, retrospectively, to (post)colonial literature or even earlier texts in which cultural transgressions, hybrid or mixed identities, language blends, etc., could be observed and demonstrated. This does not mean, however, that terms such as multiculturalism or interculturality have been displaced or overtaken in literary discourse; rather, it is important to use these terms in parallel or complementary ways to transculturality. Certain literary texts can be viewed simultaneously from intercultural and transcultural perspectives – if they possess equal intercultural and transcultural potential – and may exhibit transcultural aspects without being exhausted by the term 'transculturality' alone. If one looks for specific differences between intercultural and transculturality, the former assumes (relatively) homogeneous cultures and can also imply (inter)cultural (or even national, ethnic) conflicts rooted in, for example, excessive prejudices, aggressive stereotypes, strongly diverging interests, or even power asymmetries. While a transcultural perspective seeks to defuse, relativize, or even exclude conflicts, an intercultural approach to (social) phenomena and texts is less likely to lose sight of the foreign or strange, i.e., anomalies, heterologies, and pathologies. While Wolfgang Welsch may wish for, or even prophesy, a world in which a gradual transformation of traditional 'reference cultures' into cultures in the sense of transculturality takes place, it is nevertheless difficult to assume that this would eliminate conflicts (including intercultural ones). A global transcultural society in its absolute form is certainly a utopia; but if

⁶ Rudolf Pannwitz: Sprüche und Ansprüche. Aphoristisches. Nürnberg: Hans Carl 2003, p. 115.

it is one, one could contrast it with a dystopia in which intercultural and ethnic, or national and other conflicts, would only intensify.

In recent decades, intercultural literary studies have established themselves alongside many other fields of knowledge such as intercultural (or transcultural) communication studies, intercultural linguistics, intercultural aesthetics, intercultural hermeneutics, transcultural pedagogy, transcultural gender studies, etc. A possible definition of an interculturally oriented literary studies, including its objectives and orientations, has been provided by Ortrud Gutjahr, among others:

"Intercultural literary studies [...] employs a processual and dialogic concept of culture that focuses on society's capacity to thematize itself and examines the context-related transformation of meanings and people who position themselves situationally and multiple times. In this oscillation between different action orientations, boundaries, power and violence relations, and gender roles are dissolved and recreated. Thus, the term interculturality focuses on a crossing of borders in which neither an inside or outside of the border, however conceived, nor the border itself becomes the actual object of investigation, but rather the inter itself. Thus, it is about the functioning of determinations of difference that support, change, or initiate new processes of curation."⁷

Gutjahr thus assumes—in addition to the above definitions of culture, which emphasize a processual and dialogic character of culture—that a multiple (and open!) society can conduct discourses (in various media forms, including literature) about itself and reflect on its own complex and multifaceted nature. These discourses consider different forms of action and culture, and address different forms and understandings of borders (in the broadest sense), power or gender relations, etc. The prefix "inter" here denotes interrelations, border crossings, but also definitions of differences between cultures, which can then be incorporated into the analysis of literary texts. However, "culture" in all its diversity and richness of meaning is always considered, as are phenomena of socialization, inclusion, curation (including acculturation), cultural interactions and overlaps, etc.

⁷ Ortrud Gutjahr: *Alterität und Interkulturalität*, p. 352.

For decades, intercultural literary studies have been concerned with literary texts that possess intercultural or transcultural potential. It is based on the assumption that literature is a form of expression and manifestation of culture(s), and thus that literary texts can address cultural content, norms, values, views, etc., or provide specific interpretive patterns for various cultural phenomena. Initially, texts of so-called migration literature were included, but it soon became clear that some older literary texts are also quite capable of intercultural interpretation. It is enough to think of Goethe's Italian Journey, for example, to realize that cultures and literatures do not only move within their own (political or cultural) borders, but always come into contact with other cultures and can thereby "expand" or enrich themselves. When Goethe left Weimar in 1786 to travel through Italy (from Verona to Sicily, for example), and encountered various manifestations of Italian culture, his text also reflects border crossings in more than one sense (after all, Italy was not yet a unified country at the time and exhibited even greater regional variability than today). Travel literature often implies border crossings, thus providing highly productive texts for an intercultural and literary-scholarly perspective. However, crossing political borders is not a *conditio sine qua non* for intercultural analysis. There are numerous literary texts from all eras whose plots take place within strict political borders and yet address cultural encounters and border crossings, as is the case when they take place in a modern multicultural city. Thus, in a literary text (e.g., in an "intercultural novel"), the plot can unfold in a relatively small space and yet still display intercultural relations. Even in so-called "non-places" (French: non-lieu, a term coined by the anthropologist Marc Augé), such as a train station or an airport, the most diverse cultures can encounter each other in close quarters and even interact. It is clear, however, that cultural encounters and interactions are only relevant for an interculturally oriented literary study when they are described in literary texts, i.e., when they are fictionalized.

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