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Genres and Their Problems

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Genrer och genreproblem:
teoretiska och historiska perspektiv /

Genres and Their Problems:
Theoretical and Historical Perspectives

Eds. Beata Agrell & Ingela Nilsson

DAIDALOS

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Introduction

Beata Agrell & Ingela Nilsson

I Why bother about genre?

This book deals with questions of genre in various literary and cultural fields. It is motivated by the fact that genre concepts and genre thinking seem to be indispensable in critical practice, in teaching as well as in research, even though theoretical and methodological problems arise again and again. Genre terms are frequently used, concepts of genre are habitually referred to, and questions of genre are continually posed; at the same time, problems of meaning, reference, and demarcation of genre are embarrassing, the function of genre is disputed, and the very phenomenon of genre is called into question.

In *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993), Frans de Bruyn describes modern genre research as a Babel of theories, designations, and concepts:

> Despite its long and impressive historical pedigree, the theory of genres is anything but a settled branch of criticism. The multiplicity of names that 'genre' has assumed in English—kind, species, type, mode, form—attests to the Babel-like confusion surrounding this critical discourse. Indeed, because the concept of genre raises fundamental questions about the nature and status of literary texts, there are perhaps as many definitions of 'genre' as there are theories of literature. Beneath this bewildering variety of approaches, however, lurk a number of persistent questions. (de Bruyn 1993, 79)

The field of research is here presented as similarly boundless and neglected. *Genre thinking* is apparently necessary: from a historical point of view it is built into every notion of literature and art; but whether there are *genres*, and, in that case, in what way they "are" and with which function—these questions are much disputed today. What the notion of genre looks like is not easy to tell, and, judging from the struggles of the theoretical tradition, the very concept may seem beyond reach of theoretical specification. In spite of that—or owing to it—the ongoing research in the field is frenetic, and at present it includes an ever-increasing number of disciplines, media, and discourse types, even outside the traditional literary area.

There is, thus, good reason to gather scholars with interests in the field of genre for a thorough discussion of the problematics. This book is an offspring of the conference "Genre Problems", arranged by the Nordic Society for Comparative Literature, and held in Göteborg (Sweden), August 23–26, 2001. Like the conference, the book

is problem-directed, focussing on questions of genre from theoretical, methodological, and historical points of view, but the conference-papers are here reworked and expanded. Important aims and tasks are the following: to document and highlight current research in the field; to make clear and critically scrutinize prevalent key concepts, approaches, and thought habits in the field; to consider complementary and / or alternative concepts and approaches, for instance from discourse- and media theory; to discuss concrete applications in theoretical, methodological, and historical perspectives; to indicate some possibilities of cooperation and common projects between scholars with different backgrounds and preoccupations. Above all, we would like this volume to be a stimulus to further research and reflection.

II The research situation

The current issues of genre research derive partly from the sidestepping of the old problems of ontological definitions, based on Platonic and Classicist concepts of generic universalia. These normative conceptions of ideal, timeless, and unchanging forms of literature were gradually found to be unhistorical and incompatible with the existing body of literature. Just as unacceptable became the associated Classicist demands of purity of genre. Finally, genre concepts and genre thinking today are considered to have other, more fundamental functions than just classifying texts.

Goethe and the Romanticists abandoned the demands for the purity of genre, but Goethe (1819) nevertheless introduced the idea of *Naturformen*, i.e., epic, lyrics, and

drama as ontologically given structures (Wellek 1955, 213–215, 218). Counter-reactions were bound to come, and some early modern theorists, like Benedetto Croce (1902), went so far as to deny the value of genre concepts altogether, arguing for the impossibility to classify a unique work of art (Wellek 1992, 194–195). Lately, some post-modernist theorists have been on a similar track, arguing that most works are hybrids without borders (Derrida 1986, Cohen 1987). But even so, leading theorists today seem to agree upon the heuristic and practical value of genre concepts and generic thinking. Yet, as can be seen in this volume, the problem of classification is still bothering scholars.

This problem gives rise to a paradox: knowledge about individual works depends on knowledge of the genre, just as knowledge of the genre depends on knowledge of individual works. For historical approaches to genre, this means that the generic norm on which the genre-historical discourse is supposed to be based will not be available until *after* the historical study—i.e., that the historical discourse is stuck in a somewhat vicious (or perhaps just hermeneutic) circle. By introducing the distinction between *theoretical* and *historical* genres, Tzvetan Todorov tried to tackle this problem, yet without solving it (Todorov 1973, chap. 1).

Nowadays, generic scholarship is changing from ontological, classificatory, and formalist perspectives to constructivist, functional and pragmatic ones.[1] Leading scholars in the field are Alastair Fowler (1982) (the concepts of family resemblance and generic

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[1] Frye 1957, and Hempfer 1973 versus Fowler 1982, Bakhtin 1986, and Jauß 1982.

repertoire), Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) (the concepts of dialogism, polyphony, speech genres, and addressivity), and Hans Robert Jauß (1982) (the concepts of reception history, alterity, horizon of expectations, and *Sitz im Leben*), all frequently referred to in this volume. Fowler's manifold theory of genre accumulates and synthesizes important points of previous research, including Bakhtin and Jauß, and his *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982) is currently the standard work on genre theory. He argues that genres are not primarily instruments of classification, but of communication and interpretation. Genre is a code made up by literary conventions, habits, and procedures—even the most important of literary codes, since it incorporates and organizes many others (20, 22). Seen in this perspective, genres are not classes of solid substances, but rather *families* held together in a dynamic structure of relationships (38–43).

This Wittgensteinian approach means that membership of a genre is not based on a common characteristic, but on participation in a joint network of similarity relations, overlapping and criss-crossing each other. This also means that genres do not have closed borders: membership of one genre does not prevent membership of another genre.

The basis of generic resemblance, according to Fowler, lies in literary tradition: "a sequence of influence and imitation and inherited codes connecting works in the genre" (42). This also means that genres are historically relative (47), based on a "principle of continuous movement of regrouping" (159), and it is "only in the context of changing generic paradigms that a single genre's function can be grasped" (235). In identifying individual exemplars of a genre, we use the "generic competence" acquired by intimate knowledge of the literary tradition—a never completed process of learning (45).

Generic competence, however, is not just a literary competence: as Bakhtin and Jauß have shown, it is a social competence as well, i.e., a general cognitive and communicative competence extending to all human experiences, practices, and contexts. This is what Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism, speech genres, and addressivity refer to. It also pertains to Jauß' concepts of reception history, horizon of expectation, and *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., the emphasis on the historically grounded reading process, governed by the experiential frame of reference and the pragmatic contexts of any kind of communication.

These more fundamental issues of genre have special relevance for the study of non-Western genres and generic systems. As Earl Miner (1990) has shown, there are entirely different ways of coping with generic concepts and issues, entirely different ways of thinking about genre, as will be seen also in this volume. The future of genre study will probably depend on cultural crossings of the kind already practised in the theoretical field of comparative poetics and in post-colonial studies.

Other types of generic crossings are represented in the field of inter-art and inter-media studies. In these cases, issues of generic mixtures and hybrids come to their peak. This is shown by, e.g., Ulrich Weisstein (1992), and in Sweden by the group of inter-art scholars in Lund (Lund 1992, Olsson 1992, Lagerroth 1993). But

this kind of study, in fact, has turned out to be highly relevant also within individual art forms and media. The relevance of, for instance, pictorial theory for narratological study has been shown by Mieke Bal (1997). The same kind of transgressing within the borders is practised by W. J. T. Mitchell, nowadays a leading name within pictorial theory (1995).

Thus, genre study is a growing field and an open-ended enterprise: expanding while deepening, as it seems, and deepening while expanding. The articles of the present volume exhibit a large part of the spectrum of current orientations—and perhaps some of the future ones too. Since the scope of the book is both theoretical and historical, the articles reach from barely theoretical reasoning, over discussion of individual genres, to historical textual analyses and close readings. The issues are different and so are the applied perspectives, but even the most close readings are dealing with questions such as "What kind of text is this and which reading conventions are associated with it?" In several cases, the text in question turns out to combine different genre strategies, which entails the analysis of highly complex structures of meaning. This task is different from that of the theoretical articles, which deal with generic concepts and philosophy of practice as such. By means of these various perspectives and practices, the articles of the book complement and elucidate each other.

III The disposition of the present volume

Composing a book like this one immediately raises genre problems of its own. How should it be structured? How are the different-but-related articles to be presented?

It may seem that the most reasonable strategy is to categorize them under carefully chosen headings. In that case, the first genre problem is classificatory: which "classes" are to be constructed and which articles belong to what class? There are no self-evident answers to these questions. The articles are indeed different, but at the same time interrelated in an intricate network of affinities. In fact, we are not dealing with classes here, but with *families within and along families*. Thus, the problem of composing or "constructing" the book happily demonstrates the very problems that the book is dealing with—problems that we as editors have decided to make the central theme also of the subdivisions.

We have certainly been at a loss many times, and the discussions have been both long and frequent. Some articles have changed place so many times that we hardly remember where we started. A case in point is Christine Hamm's study of melodrama and anti-theatricality in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. A first thought was to make a subdivision of "drama", under which we could gather Hamm and some other contributors. This idea was dropped due to our wish to avoid "traditional" generic division. A provisional heading, "lyrical discourse", was created, under which a number of contributions could be placed, including Hamm's. Then again, "lyrical discourse" is in fact as tra-

ditional as "drama", and may thus be just as problematic. In the end, we decided that we could hardly avoid the traditional and classificatory approach to genre, and the final structure began to appear. Hamm's article was still difficult to place, though; an article on *Crime and Punishment* should, according to traditional standards, be placed in a novelistic context, should it not? After some more thinking, we came up with the idea of incorporating our problems with the concept of the book: what if we could use subtitles that mirrored the very problem itself? The problematic aspects of genre, and also the problems of the editors, were thus to be incorporated in the very structure of the book. As for Hamm, her contribution was finally placed in the section on border problems, which—we hope—was the right solution considering the "journey" that her contribution had made between the different sections of the book.

Hence the final state of the volume. Any disposition may, of course, be criticised and we could have done things differently. We hope, however, that this slightly autobiographical note may serve as an explanation of the structure of the book, and also serve as a reminder that genre distinctions are more or less inevitable—at least to the editors.

IV The articles

We have decided to let Hans Skei's essay "On Literary Genres" open the volume, since we feel that his clear and honest remarks on genre nicely illustrate the problems which we wish to focus on, and that it thus prepares the reader for the problemat-ics that will be discussed further ahead. Skei acknowledges his own need of the concept of genres and points at the referential and signifying nature of literature, thus underlining the need for flexibility in our relation to genre. He asks us to concentrate on the *functions* of literature and warns against literary taxonomy and hierarchy of genre. Above all, he asks the central question: *what is genre*? A question which has no evident or absolute answer, but which still needs to be discussed, and indeed is to be discussed in the following articles.

The order of the following sections has been subject to as much pondering as the overall structure: in which order should they be arranged, and in which order should the articles then be organised within them? The final state reflects a certain tendency to move from the traditional towards the controversial, from the centre towards the borders, from a geographical point of view often from Western Europe to other parts of the world. This disposition should be understood from a purely practical perspective and not as any kind of hierarchical order, as will probably be apparent from the articles themselves.

1 Teoretiska problem / Theoretical Problems

In the first section, theoretical problems are brought to the fore from different perspectives.

Basic views of genre are defined and discussed by Anders Pettersson in the first article of this section, "Traditional Genres, Communicational Genres, Classificatory Genres." How do we understand genre on an everyday ("traditional") level and how

does this majority definition relate to concepts of genre used in a scholarly ("communicational" and "classificatory") perspective? In his attempt to outline a more practical and pragmatic understanding of genre and its roles than is usually employed, the author touches upon ontological aspects of genre, defining it as a social, communicative phenomenon—"*a text's genre is the way in which it is meant to be taken*"—and not as an objective reality. But he also emphasizes the scholarly need of clarifying classificatory concepts, and the necessity of refashioning traditional genre concepts (or even creating wholly new ones) for purposes of a better critical understanding. Thus, according to Pettersson, the three different perspectives of genre mentioned above are not irreconcilable and not necessarily in competition: they may be used one after the other by students and scholars, employed in various manners as intellectual instruments.

A pragmatic outlook is also that of Eva Haettner Aurelius in her "Att förstå och definiera genrer: ett semantiskt perspektiv på genreteori" ("Understanding and defining genres: a semantic perspective on genre theory"). Starting with the problems of defining genre, she argues that these problems are consequences of realistic semantics, regarding genres as classes kept together by a common quality. Haettner Aurelius finds ways of solving these problems in pragmatic semantics in the tradition of Wittgensteinian concepts of "language games" and "family resemblances" and in the hermeneutical concept of "horizon".

Another variant of pragmatic approach is given in Susan Sniader Lanser's article, "The '*I*' of the Beholder: Genre, authorship, and narrative voice." The focus here is on the double significance of genres as "literary qualities" and forms of "social action". Starting with the range of relationships between the "I" that enunciates a text and the "I" that gives the text its social significance, Lanser, by means of knotty literary examples, goes on to discuss the Foucauldian "author function" as a generically governed reader effect.

In "Seeing the World through Genres", Jostein Børtnes warns against abstract categorization of genre and asks us to turn our attention to literature's inherent dynamism: every literary work should be seen as a unique aesthetic utterance, conveying a meaning of its own. This does not mean that we should drop the idea of genre, but rather understand genre as a way of seeing texts (cf. Anders Pettersson's *ways of taking texts* above). With a point of departure in social anthropology and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Børtnes investigates generic interaction in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*.

In some literatures, politics has been an important factor in the shaping of genres and generic understanding. Such political influence upon the concept of literature and literary genre is the focus of the following two articles. Johan Öberg's "Socialist Realism and Stalinist Classicism" describes the complex relation between writers—both internally and in relation to the state—in the former Soviet Union, and thus provides an important and little-known background for the composition of, for instance, Bakhtin's "The Problem of Speech Genres" and his concept of heteroglossia.

Lena Rydholm, in "Genre Theory in China: The concept of genre and the influence of ancient literary theory and

politics on the development of genres and genre theory", describes a likewise complex situation in China, where the traditional Confucian view of the didactic function of literature contributed to the close relationship between genre and politics, which severely impeded the development of genre theory. Starting from the old non-differentiated and non-literary genre concept according to which genre was equated with style, Rydholm moves on to describe how genre rules for administrative documents emerged, while aesthetic writings were still being ignored or condemned. She follows the situation up to present days and the recent change in intellectual climate that finally allows an open discussion of these matters.

Political and social factors have been involved also in the development of Japanese genres, as is discussed by Noriko Thunman in her "Genres in Japanese Literature." Thunman concentrates on genre formation, that is, the way in which some Japanese genres have changed in form as well as esteem according to both literary and social circumstances, and especially the relation between highbrow and popular literature.

In the three articles by Öberg, Rydholm, and Thunman, the question of genre as an objective reality vs. a social construct, already mentioned in some of the preceding articles, seems particularly urgent. One may also consider, especially in connection with the two articles on Chinese and Japanese literature, the usefulness of the not-so-liked concept of classificatory genre: when confronted with literature and genre concepts that are largely unknown and foreign to one's own view of genre, classi-

fication as a tool of comparison in order to assist the unprepared reader — in this case ourselves — seems indispensable, a necessary frame of reference. This also illustrates the Fowlerian idea of genre concepts as tools of interpretation.

2 Romanproblem / Novelistic Problems

In the second section, novelistic problems are at issue. The novel, being a traditional and well-known genre, is similarly one of the most embracing and adaptable genres, and thus not free from complications. The main focus here is upon problems of generic dominance and marginalization with respect to culture, tradition, canon, and gender.

We start from an intercultural perspective with Margareta Petersson's "Romanen i ett interkulturellt perspektiv" ("The novel from an intercultural perspective"). Petersson investigates two modern, global literary histories, posing two main questions: how is the novel defined in these works, and how is the spread of the novel outside the West explained? Again, we are confronted with the nature of genre and its relation to social reality: is modernity and the novel to be seen as an isolated Western phenomenon or as a result of cultural encounters? Petersson discusses these issues along with the problematics of any such categorization.

No less problematic, however, is the Western novelistic tradition at issue in Peter Madsen's "Grass eller Adorno – Picaroromanens udfordring til romanteorien" ("Grass or Adorno — the picaresque challenge to the novel theory"). The focus is here on the Adornian dictum of the barbarity of writing literature after Auschwitz: its

effects on Günter Grass and its theoretical implications. Madsen analyses the coming into being of the grotesque picaresque novel *Die Blechtrommel* (*The Tin Drum* 1959) as a challenge of Lukács' classical novel theory and thus as a search for novelistic traditions allowing the aberrant generic perspective and responsible addressivity that is required in describing the moral and political dilemma resulting in the German *Kahlschlag* situation after World War Two.

We then move towards Scandinavian literature with Heidi Grönstrand's "Kvinnor, brev och kommunikation: perspektiv på romanens födelse i Finland" ("Women, letters, and communication: perspectives on the birth of the novel in Finland"). Here we get into the early history of the novel in Finland, examined from a gender perspective. Grönstrand's focus is on the supposedly first modern Finnish novel, written in 1840 by a non-emancipated woman in epistolary form, here investigated in the light of Bakhtin's concepts of speech-genre and dialogicity.

A comparative study of the early and late modernist novel in Sweden is the task of Catrine Brödje's "Kanon, genre och genus: Anna Lenah Elgström och Birgitta Trotzig" ("Canon, genre, and gender: Anna Lenah Elgström and Birgitta Trotzig"). Focussing on two experimental works by women novelists from 1912 and 1961 respectively, Brödje discusses their strategies of generic bending, e.g. by breaking up the logical narrative structure into lyrical segments, and the ambivalent reactions of the contemporary — predominantly male — literary critics. Thus, the problem of genre is connected with problems of reception and canon.

From these experiments in novelistic art forms, we move to experiments in novelistic thought forms. Roland Lysell's "Carl Jonas Love Almqvists *Smaragdbruden* som esoterisk / religiös roman" ("Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's *Smaragdbruden* [The Emerald Bride] as esoteric / religious novel") deals with the partly parodic reuse of plot-patterns of the popular and social adventure novel that appears in C. J. L. Almqvist and during the Swedish 1840s, and which is employed in order to represent a hermeneutic quest aiming at religious insight. Starting with the previous scholarly discussion of how to classify this novel, Lysell goes on to show that it displays a mixture of high and low novelistic conventions and that single generic labels thus are too narrow. This mixture also means interaction and transgression, and that is how the hermeneutic-religious quest emerges. In this way, the initial classificatory perspectives open up for communicative perspectives suitable for dealing with the complicated structure of this novel.

A related kind of novelistic discourse is the topic of "Omvändelseromanen i svensk 1900-talslitteratur: några genrereflexioner" ("The novel of conversion in Swedish twentieth-century literature: some reflections on genre") by Inger Littberger. The novel of conversion is here discussed with special regard to the confessional tradition. Starting from a conceptual point of view, Littberger proceeds with a comparative historical study of some displacements of the genre in nineteenth-century Sweden.

There is then a break with the Scandinavian novel as we move (back) to another cultural sphere with Lena Rydholm's "Genre and Politics in China: The development of

the modern Chinese novel." Rydholm chooses not to focus on the more often discussed influence from the West, but concentrates on the novel's traditional, popular background and the internal political influence upon the modern Chinese novel, arguing that the close relation between politics and genre (see above, Section 1) culminated in the novel during the twentieth century.

These various contributions all represent different perspectives of similar phenomena: the influence of social reality—whether political or gender based—upon the development of a traditional, yet constantly shifting genre.

3 Kortprosaproblem / Problems of Short Fiction

Novelistic perspectives are often misguidedly extended to include the genres of short fiction. Short fictions, however, are manifold and must be studied in their own right, with regard to the peculiarities and special possibilities of each. Some short fictions (but certainly not all) relate to the short story, and these are the subject of the third section of this volume, discussing problems of concept formation, tradition, and transposition. (Others, related to philosophical didacticism, are dealt with in the sixth section.) The scope here is wide, from short story collections to the transposition of fairy tale into drama.

Hans Skei's "Short Story Collections and Cycles of Stories: On the usefulness and insufficiency of genre concepts" brings up the basic problematics of the short story, but also some crucial remarks on the concept of genre in general. Skei warns against a deductive approach to genre, running the risk of resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy,

and recommends instead that hypothetical assumptions be put to inductive tests. The short story's particular nature, he argues, can help us to problematize our preconceived ideas about fixed genres or clear-cut borders between them. Skei proceeds to discuss the difference between collections of short stories and so-called cycles of stories, and the overall usefulness of genre concepts.

By comparing two novellas from early nineteenth-century Sweden, Barbro Ståhle Sjönell, in her "Från retorik till romantik: ett exempel på hur novellgenren förändrades i början av 1800-talet" ("From rhetoric to romanticism: an example of how the novella genre changed in the early nineteenth century"), discusses the first signs of transition from pragmatic-didactic aims to modern aestheticist ideals in early modern Swedish short fiction.

Gunilla Hermansson's "Fortælleniveauer og sløringsmanøvrer: om rammefortællingen og *Törnrosens bok*" ("Narrative levels and blurring manœuvres: on the frame story and *Törnrosens bok*") digs deep into the compositional logic of C. J. L. Almqvists ever-expanding system of frame stories in *Törnrosens bok*. Emphasizing the two divergent forces of the narrative project—towards wholeness and fragmentation, respectively—Hermansson points out the various generic conventions in use and their different functions.

Erik Granly Jensen, in "Snehvide vågner: om eventyrets genkomst i Walter Benjamins kritikbegreb og i Robert Walsers 'Schneewittchen'-enakter" ("Snow White awakening: on the return of the fairy tale in Walter Benjamin's criticism and Robert Walser's one-act play *Schneewittchen*") turns to the revival of the romantic conceptions

of fragment and fairy tale in early twenti-
eth-century literature and criticism, and the
transposition of fairy tale into one-acter. A
traditional fairy tale theme is certainly meta-
morphosis, but metamorphosis in this work
also pertains to genre, which anticipates the
transgressive prose forms of Walser's later
minimalist short fiction.

4 Självbiografiska problem / Autobiographical Problems

In the fourth section, problems of auto-
biographical discourse are discussed in
three articles, which consider problems of
subjectivity and voice from different angles.
Since autobiographical genres by tradition
are connected with subjectivity, spiritual-
ity, sincerity, authenticity, and a trustful
compact with the implied reader (Lejeune,
1975), problems arise when the authorial
instance can be suspected of hiding, self-
deluding, masquerading, fictionalising, or
simply lying. The three articles below dis-
cuss such problematic examples. Thus, they
all touch upon and concretise a main issue
of Susan S. Lanser's article: genre concepts
as referring to both literary qualities and
forms of social actions. Autobiographical
genres, she says, operate through a *contin-
gent* or *attached* literary and social compact:
"they depend on a symbiosis of authorial
and textual 'I'", which in these cases is
problematized.

Kristin Ørjasæter, in "Den romantiske
dagboken og den kvinnelige subjektiviteten"
("The romantic diary and female subjectiv-
ity"), deals with the assumed femininity
of the female voice in the romantic diary,
using, among others, Camilla Collett's diary
as an example. The problem here is the

authenticity of this female voice. According
to generic conventions, the textual "I" in a
romantic diary should focus on the devel-
opment of its own subjectivity by means of
writing. But what kind of written female
subjectivity can be developed within the
boundaries of Patriarchal culture?

Drude van der Fehr, in "Helbredelsen i
Oliver Sacks' selvbiografi *A leg to Stand on*"
("The recovery in Oliver Sacks' autobiogra-
phy *A leg to Stand on*"), studies Sacks' self-
narration about his physical healing process
from the point of view of "the somatic turn"
in the humanities, thereby questioning the
traditional distinction between body and
soul in conventional conceptions of auto-
biographical self-reflection. The focus of
the narrating "I" is here not on the devel-
opment of the soul or spiritual self-knowl-
edge, but on the biological fundaments of
consciousness and the quest for *neurological*
self-knowledge. This corporeal perspective,
however, opens up for spiritual dimensions
and existential questions that the narrated
"I"—himself a medical doctor—cannot
handle: when he loses his leg, he loses him-
self. Thus, this autobiography turns out to
transform the traditional issue of the devel-
opment of a spiritual identity to questions
of a neurological identity.

Cecilia Rosengren considers autobio-
graphical features in a discourse not often
discussed from a literary perspective, namely
the official annual report of the Swedish
secret service, in "Ämbetsmannaberättelsen
– en myndighets framtidsinriktade själv-
biografi" ("The official annual report—a
future-orientated autobiography"). Rosen-
gren focuses on the secret service's attempted
balance between secrecy and publicity, thus
conducting an unusual analysis of a genre

strictly bound to social reality and non-private matters. The declared target audience is limited to civil servants, i.e. the own group, and Rosengren's autobiographical perspective thus opens up for analysis of the didactic and edifying functions of this kind of pseudo-official narrative, and how it is suited to strengthen the identity and legitimacy of the organisation (cf Rydholm above, Section 1). In this way, Rosengren argues, also the autobiographical compact necessary for the genre is secured.

5 Lyrikproblem / Problems of Lyrics

Lyric poetry is one of the keystones of the traditional generic triad of *Naturformen* inherited from Goethe and by tradition seen as the highest branch of literature. Yet, the nature of lyrics and its special function is a much-discussed question both in poetic theory and in literary history. In addition, problems of lyrics may just as well appear in other genres, such as epics and drama, and this is a main track of the fifth section.

Anna Cullhed's "Känslans språk: om lyrikteorin 1746–1806" ("The language of passion: on the theory of lyrics 1746–1806") deals with romantic poetics, questioning the conventional scholarly idea of lyric poetry as the highest genre in this poetics as well as the idea that lyrics there is defined as an expression of true personal emotions.

Closely related to this discussion is Paula Henrikson's "Romantiken och dramat: poetik, polemik och verkningshistoria" ("Romanticism and drama: poetics, polemics, and reception history"), discussing the status of drama in Swedish romanticism. Questioning the prejudice of the dominant position of lyric poetry, Henrikson argues that in romantic poetics, drama, in fact, was seen as the most adequate expression of the literature of the future, combining lyrics with realism, monologue with dialogue, and subjectivity with objectivity.

Lyrics and the novel is the subject of Pär-Yngve Andersson's "Lyrisk roman—en omöjlig genre?" ("Lyrical novel—an impossible genre?"). With examples from three quite different modern Swedish novelists, Andersson investigates how the poetic function in Roman Jakobson's sense is realized by transferring means of expression deriving from lyric poetry to narrative prose.

6 Didaktiska problem / Didactic Problems

Didactic discourse has been included in or employed by many genres ever since antiquity. Although no such genre is mentioned in Aristotle's *Poetics*, didactic poetry was an important genre of its own already in Hesiod, and among didactic prose genres the *exemplum* has been of special significance both as a necessary means of rhetorical inference and as an illustration of moral behaviour—in fact, ever since Aristotle's *Rhetorics*, right through the Middle Ages up to the modern novel and the experimental fiction of today. These and other didactic genres may however combine with quite different kinds of didactic strategies, some of which do not operate with traditional didacticism. These problematics are dealt with in the sixth section, treating short narratives bending the tradition of the *exemplum*. The focus is on Kierkegaard, who needs no further presentation, and Willy Kyrklund, a late-modernist Swedish author

of short prose experimenting with irony and indirect communication.

Camilla Brudin Borg, in her "Genren och undantaget betraktat genom Søren Kierkegaards *Gjentagelsen*" ("Genre and exception considered through Søren Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelsen*"), investigates a text consequently escaping generic categorization. At the same time, the text itself seems to presuppose a certain pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis* in Heidegger's words) and expectation from the part of the reader. Brudin Borg addresses the relation between hermeneutics and genre: how can one understand the radically different and is it possible to pass beyond the horizon of expectation?

Thomas Hebsgaard Nielsen's "Kierkegaard: ironi, meddelelsesform og maieutik" ("Kierkegaard: irony, form of communication, and maieutics") investigates how, in Kierkegaard's thesis *On the Concept of Irony,* the ironic mode allows operating within the academic genre while simultaneously going beyond its conventions in establishing thought-provoking counterpoints, thereby exceeding generic expectations. Emphasizing the Christian religious element and especially the role of faith, Hebsgaard investigates this ironic play within the scope of maieutic-didactic efforts, which thus instantiates a dialectics aiming to enable subjectivity to be "born".

The following two articles deal with the Swedish prose writer Willy Kyrklund. Johan Sahlin, in "Kunskap och genre i Willy Kyrklunds *Om godheten*" ("Knowledge and genre in Willy Kyrklund's *Om Godheten* ['*On Goodness*']"), discusses philosophical and empirical problems provoked by the text in question. Even though the text's char-

acter makes generic classification difficult, genre is still important for the understanding of Kyrklund's work. By observing the violations of traditional modes of writing, Sahlin seeks the answers of different questions; which is, for example, the function of the essay's use (and misuse) of genre expectations in an empirical context?

Olle Widhe's "Willy Kyrklunds fråga: om majevtik och genre" ("Willy Kyrklund's question: maieutics and genre") concentrates on questions of maieutics: what would a maieutic text be like, and is there even such a thing? Like Sahlin, Widhe departs from Fowler's notion of genre as a communicational and interpretative instrument, but concentrates mainly upon contextual aspects of the text as instructive for its interpretation. In this case, the context is a press debate in a main Swedish newspaper during 1961. Departing from Kyrklund's contribution, Widhe discusses dialogue, irony, allusion, and *exemplum* in relation to a maieutic form or mode.

7 Transformationsproblem / Problems of Transformation

Having so far dealt with the traditional genres and discourses, we now come to the problems related to transformation, mixture, and inclusion. In this section, widely different texts are discussed from widely different perspectives, and one may note that transformation of genre is far from being a modern problem, as we move from antiquity and Byzantium to Swedish, Finnish, and Finland-Swedish literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ilmari Leppihalme, in his "Feminist Aspects to Bakhtin's Dialogic Genres:

Polyphonic novel and grotesque realism", applies the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony and carnival to the Finnish novel *Arkkienkeli Oulussa* 1808–1809 ("Archangel in Oulu 1808–1809"). Leppihalme argues that Bakhtin neglected gender as a position producing heteroglossia and polyphony and, furthermore, that the concept of the grotesque body would be useful for feminist body politics and counter aesthetics. His own investigation thus entails a feminist perspective and focuses on the female protagonist of the novel, characterized as a kind of "grotesque Cinderella".

Starting from the fairy tale and Walter Benjamin's discussion of the genre, Jenny Bergenmar, in "Den simulerade sagan: berättarens repertoar i *Gösta Berlings saga*" ("The simulated fairy tale: the repertoire of the narrator of *Gösta Berlings saga*"), examines how the narrator of Selma Lagerlöf's *Gösta Berlings saga,* by combining an oral and a textual rhetoric, makes the conventions of the fairy tale confront those of the novel, thus producing a text at the same time traditional and experimental.

Thomas Ek's "*Et in Arcadia ego* – om dödens närvaro i idyllen med utgångspunkt i Hans Ruins *Rummet med de fyra fönstren*" ("*Et in Arcadia ego*—the presence of death in the idyll, with focus on *Rummet med de fyra fönstren*, a work by Hans Ruin") discusses the idyllic setting in a Finland-Swedish autobiographical work. Questioning the romantic, idealized concept of the idyll, Ek aims at giving a deepened image of its complexity. Containing genre themes that can be traced back to Theocritus' idylls *par excellence*, Ruin's Arcadia contains not only happiness, but also struggle and even death.

Ingela Nilsson turns to the classical and medieval tradition in her "Archaists and Innovators: Byzantine 'classicism' and experimentation with genre in the twelfth century." Discussing genres such as the novel and the chronicle, Nilsson wishes to bring about discussion of a generic approach in Byzantine studies, pointing at a tradition displaying both generic fluctuation and self-conscious transformation of genre.

8 Intermedialitetsproblem / Intermediality Problems

Genre is not only a matter of literature, but—to quote Jostein Børtnes—a necessary "way of seeing" that affects other media as well. Different art forms operate within different media governed by different generic codes, conventions, and expectations. On the other hand, interaction between different artistic media is an age-old phenomenon, and also an age-old field of research, still expanding. These days, the number of media has multiplied and the borders between art and technology are blurred, raising ever-new generic problems that are under discussion in our eighth section.

Yvonne Leffler's "Genrebegreppet i ett intermedialt perspektiv" ("The concept of genre in an intermedial perspective") discusses relations between prose narrative and film narrative. The driving question is whether a genre is media-specific or not. Using horror fiction as an example, Leffler outlines impact of the medium chosen with specific focus on what happens when one and the same story is presented using different media.

The continuation of a narrative from the book-page to the Internet is the focus of Gitte Mose's "Fortsættelse følger – i Cyberspace" ("To be continued—in cyberspace"). Here, various cyber-texts from the Scandinavian 1990s—continuations of already experimental paper texts—are discussed both from the point of view of medial strategies and generic conventions and in the light of theoretical and methodological reflections on scholarly practice in this brand-new field. A special problem under discussion is the transient status of the texts and their often-obscure authorial status. The issue here concerns the relation of these texts to Literature as a macro-genre, and, thus, whether literary approaches (as we know them) are appropriate at all from a scholarly point of view. In analysing a couple of these texts, differentiating between text types with *striated* and *rhizomatic* strategies, Mose, however, gives the literary perspective a try.

The impact of visual art on the prose genres in Günter Grass is the topic of Edgar Platen's "'Ein schreibender Zeichner ist jemand, der die Tinte nicht wechselt': kommentarer till Günter Grass' samlade verk" ("'A writing draughtsman is someone who doesn't change ink': a commentary on the works of Günter Grass"). The point of departure here is Grass as a manifold visual artist—sculptor, printmaker, and draughtsman; and the focus of the discussion is on the literary generic transgressions and dissolutions enabled by this visualizing perspective, and how they structure the total corpus of Grass' literary work.

9 Gränsproblem / Border problems

Finally we reach the problem of borders, already touched upon in the section on transformation: what about works that do not seem to fit into any established genre? The wide scope in this section indicates the extent of the phenomenon in different times and literatures, just like we noted above in the case of genre transformation.

Arne Melberg, in "På spaning efter en okänd genre" ("In search of a genre unknown"), discusses "centaurian" ways of writing in Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Proust. This is an essayistic form of discourse, "consubstantial" with its author and characterized by a philosophic head and a literary body. This "monstrous" combination challenges our conventional generic expectations, and Melberg studies how it arises and, as written discourse, displays the mutual dependence between subject, language, and existence.

Gunilla Lindberg-Wada turns to the Japanese *monogatari* in her "*Monogatari* som genre i japansk litteratur" ("*Monogatari* as a genre in Japanese literature"). The *monogatari* (10th–13th century) is often referred to as a "novel", even though it contains lyrical passages. Linguistically and thematically it displays great variety: from fabulous tales to realistic description of historical events, moving on different levels of style and sometimes revealing sensitive descriptions of feelings and relations. How shall we understand it? Perhaps as a "lyrical novel"? Lindberg-Wada describes the structure and development of the *monogatari* and the problematics related to defining such a genre are discussed.

Maiken Tandgaard Derno investigates one of Shakespeare's "problem plays" in "Between and Between: Performing generic boundaries in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*." This Shakespearian treatment of characters drawn from the medieval "Troy matter", in its turn building upon Homer, has been censured for its lack of a simple story line and its particular tendency to escape generic labelling. Derno, applying Bakhtin's concept of speech genre and primary / secondary genres, argues that the "otherness" of the work in fact may be seen as a constitutive factor of the literary text.

Christine Hamm, in "The Question of Realism: Melodrama and anti-theatricality in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*", examines the seemingly paradoxical relation between realism and theatricality in *Crime and Punishment*. The famous novel has been praised for its realistic description of Russian life; at the same time, it has been criticized for not being realistic enough, but instead exaggerated in both content and style. Hamm argues that the realistic effect is a consequence of the novel's inherent theatricality, which may be seen as a first step towards modernism.

Johan Schimanski's "Genre Borders in a Border Novel: Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*" focuses on the borders of genre vis-à-vis thematic borders within a text. Schimanski points out that genre borders may be understood both as borders in the conceptual landscape of the genre system and as borders in the textual landscape, i.e. borders between different parts of the text. But a text may also contain, or even be structured by, a theme of borders, borders on the level of histoire. Using the example of Gordimer's novel, this article investigates the possible connection between the macrospatial borders described in the text and the microspatial borders of the actual text.

Hopefully, this disposition will fulfil its aim to present the articles in a working order. Read in this way, the volume is likely to elucidate what is going on in genre reflection in Scandinavia today. On the other hand, the articles may very well be read in any order whatever and, of course, even separately: indeed, each article has its own go.

V Formal remarks

Each article is accompanied by its own bibliography, and below this introduction you will find an additional list of genre literature not so frequently referred to in the articles, but nevertheless of much use.

To the articles in Scandinavian languages, an abstract in English is added. Information about the authors of the articles is to be found under the heading "Contributors" in the back of the book.

Göteborg & Berlin, April 2003
Beata Agrell & Ingela Nilsson

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