
The present book contains the proceedings of a symposium (2007), organized in honour of Prof. Barbara Kellner-Heinkele in occasion of her retirement from the Freie Universität Berlin, and has been published in an attractive hardback edition by the Orient-Institut Istanbul and Ergon Verlag in 2012. The three editors are related to each other as narrow research collaborators: Claus Schönig, former director of the Orient-Institut, succeeded Barbara Kellner-Heinkele as the chair of the Institute of Turkology of the Freie Universität in 2007, while Brigitte Heuer has been research associate at the same institution.

The carefully edited volume includes twenty contributions (seventeen in German, three in English) around the topic of nature and human contemplation of/interaction with nature in literature, language, history, and society, thus examining more than just ‘nature’ with its various aspects (landscape, botany, zoology, natural phenomena, seasons, and climate), but rather the cultural, political, and social interrelation between human life and aspects of nature in a very wide sense. It offers a broad panorama of stimulating approaches to a relatively new topic in Turkic studies, with the participation of a number of prestigious scholars in the fields of cultural and social studies, literature, history, and linguistics. The interdisciplinary contributions are divided into four subthemes: literature (‘Horizons of Literature’), language (‘Linguistic Assessment of Nature’), zoology and botany (‘(Mythical) Animals and Plants’), and society (‘Humans, Landscape and Environment’).

The first chapter of the literary subgroup (Catharina Dufft: “Natural Beauty” and Meeting Place: the Princes’ Islands Around 1900 in Selected Literary Texts) deals with the description of the Princes’ Islands in the works of four authors, namely Halid Ziya Uşaklıgil, Sait Faik, Orhan Pamuk, and Shirin Devrim. The author argues on the theoretical grounds of Theodore Adornos’s newly formulated concept of ‘das Naturschöne’ as a human analytical approach to nature and urbanity, and the chronotopos according to Michail Bachtin as spatial and temporal experience in literature. Dufft individuates mainly three attributes for the chronotopos of the island, namely the island as a paradise, the island as a microcosmos of society, and the island as a prison.
Very similarly, Erika Glassen in her contribution “The Perception of Nature in the Early Turkish Novel About Istanbul” selects four works among the earliest novels in Turkish literature in order to show the close interrelation between human psychology and perception of nature. Namık Kemal and Ahmet Mithat are presented as early examples where the description of the inner psychological state has not yet reached the differentiated expression as in later works at the turn of the century (Halid Ziya and Mehmet Ra’uf). The psychological processes in these novels, argues the author, are representable only by the subjective perception of natural phenomena. Her final argument, ‘Der Mensch bemächtigt sich in der Selbstreflexion der Natur und verleiht aus seinem Innern heraus dem Äußeren der Natur Bedeutung’ (36), could be the device for the whole volume and describes perfectly the cultural and counterpunctual interrelation between man and nature, between human perception of nature and the effect of nature on human psychology.

Karin Schweißgut (‘Beyond Civilization: Man and Nature in Anatolia on the Basis of Selected Works of Turkish Literature’) deals with the psychological stance on nature of a number of writers, choosing the so-called ‘village literature’ (köy edebiyatı), a group of texts that describe (and criticize) rural society in the middle of the twentieth century. Using texts by Mahmut Makal, Yaşar Kemal, and Ferit Edgü (and thus consciously exceeding the proper framework of the genre), she shows that these authors give the image of a nature hostile to human life, far from ‘civilization and culture’, the individual being in a constant fight with nature and its adversities.

The short contribution by Jenny B. White (‘Creating Turks in Fiction and Ethnography’) talks about the author’s cultural expectations of ‘Turkishness’ and the difficulty to present it as an anthropologist, resolving the dilemma by ‘inventing’ Turkishness in the form of a fictional character in her own crime narratives.

After this deviation from the proper theme of the volume, the last chapter of the literary section (‘Atmosphere at the ‘Periphery’—Poetry in Uzbekistan After 1990’ by Sigrid Kleinmichel), actually an excellent introduction and anthology of poetry trends in Uzbekistan after the societal changes in the 1990s, shows the metaphorical use of natural phenomena, seasons, the four elements, and plants.

The linguistic section includes very divergent contributions: the first chapter, by Yukiyo Kasai (‘Old Turkic Words About Nature and Society in Chinese Sources [6th and 9th Centuries]’) is a compilation of Old Turkic words in Chinese transcription with an excellent analysis of the