

TRANSMODERN PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

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The many changes in recent decades have strongly marked contemporary society. The overexposure to sources of information, the unavoidable instability of life, the radical influence of technology on our lives —and in particular on social relationships—, our interconnectedness, and the fragility of human life, exposed to wars, climate change and new diseases, have altered the world and the way we inhabit it. As a manner of understanding life, the arts have portrayed in various ways how contemporary communities acknowledge and live through these social and cultural changes. The feeling that there has been a significant shift explains the relatively recent need to answer the question of whether literature, and the arts in general, have moved beyond Postmodernism and, if so, what term can best be applied to our present time to encapsulate its characteristics. Some authors have suggested labels such as “post-postmodernism” (Turner 1996), “pseudo-modernism” (Kirby 2006), or “cosmodernism” (Moraru 2011), to name a few. The editors of the volume *Transmodern Perspectives on Contemporary Literatures in English*, Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen and José María Yebra-Pertusa, propose “Transmodernity” as the term that best conveys an ongoing move towards a new paradigm shift. In their view, the conceptualisation of Transmodernity has evolved in parallel with contemporary transformations, becoming a promising alternative to the aforementioned labels and providing an interesting perspective from which to observe and analyse the social construction of reality. Focusing on the critical perusal of a wide variety of contemporary

literary texts, the contributors to the present volume offer a valuable approach to the fields of literature and cultural studies.

The volume opens with an introduction in which the editors provide an overview of the concepts of the Transmodern and the paradigm shift. It quickly becomes clear that the contributors' perspectives will mostly rely on Rosa María Rodríguez Magda's approach to Transmodernity since it is she who first coined the term during a conversation with Jean Baudrillard in 1987. The book, however, addresses many other critics, sociologists and philosophers who have explicitly referred to Transmodernity, explaining its political and cultural characteristics and pointing, in particular, at the array of possibilities that this new paradigm offers, especially regarding cultural and ethical interconnectedness. These include authors such as Enrique Dussel, Ziauddin Sardar, Marc Luyckx Ghisi, Étienne Le Roy, and Nicanor Perlas. The volume also discusses other writers such as Alan Kirby, Irena Ateljevic, Linda Hutcheon and Alison Gibbons, to mention but a few, who have been announcing the end of Postmodernism since the eighties, expressing the need to define a new cultural paradigm aligned with the characteristics and concerns of current times. This broad view of Transmodernity allows the reader to understand this notion articulated in the book as an encompassing concept, as the contributors do not seek to present it as an ideal, unique or perfectly defined model, but rather as "a new complex paradigm which begs for multiple readings" (6).

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Given the heterogeneity of the notion, the most theoretical part of the collection, which opens the book, is perhaps one of its strongest points. This first section of the volume, "Transmodernity: A Paradigm Shift", is made up of three chapters that provide the theoretical basis for the contributions that follow. The first chapter, Aliaga-Lavrijsen's translation of a plenary lecture given by Rodríguez Magda in 2017, manages to maintain the orality of the philosopher's discourse, making her thesis clear, engaging, concise and effective, while simultaneously providing a solid foundation on which most of the following chapters rely. Among her key ideas, two can be emphasised: first, her definition of Transmodernity as simply "[t]he paradigm that allows us to think our present" (21), to turn towards the future (25) and understand societies that are "no longer liquid but gaseous" (27); secondly, the updated categorisation of texts into those that fit better within the open Transmodern model, "narratives of the limit", and those "narratives of celebration" that keep responding to the dominant discourse (21). In this way, Rodríguez Magda distances herself from other sociological conceptualisations such as Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid modernity" (2000) and offers a new understanding of textual analysis. In the second chapter, David Alderson assesses the limits and potential of the theories of Transmodernity offered by both Rodríguez Magda and Enrique Dussel. He deals with them in connection with

capitalism and queer theory through an analysis of Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* (2016). This first part of the volume ends with an enlightening chapter by Susana Onega focused on David Mitchell's first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999). Onega demonstrates that the pluriversality (Dussel 2001) of this experimental novel aligns it with the humanistic changes leading to the Transmodern paradigm. For Onega, *Ghostwritten* reflects the "complexity, instability, and ungraspability of this pluriversal world" (51) that the novel relates to the transpersonal configuration of the self's identity, no longer individually constrained but open to multinational and ethical connectedness.

Part II, "Transmodern Ethics", explores the ethical potential of the Transmodern paradigm from two different perspectives. First, Jean-Michel Ganteau analyses Harry Parker's *Anatomy of a Soldier* (2016) as a narrative of the limit. Ganteau offers an insightful study of this novel that, in his view, resists Transmodern totalisation at the same time that it fosters an ethical encounter with the other's singularity through attentiveness and vulnerability. Bárbara Arizti's contribution analyses the Transmodern elements in Tim Winton's *Eyrie* (2013) as a narrative of celebration. Apart from Rodríguez Magda's conceptualisation of Transmodernity, Arizti draws on Rifkin's theory of empathy, Moraru's cosmopolitanism and Held's ethics of care to re-evaluate Transmodern relationality. Both chapters in this section point at the importance in Transmodernity of both relationality and care for human and non-human others, which represents an advance on Modernity and Postmodernity.

The third part of the collection offers three approaches to the Transmodern paradigm focusing on space and identity. The contributions in this section share ideas that are again addressed in the fourth section, such as the poetics of the self, Transmodern space (Puschmann-Nalenz, Bayer, Herrero), marginality (Herrero and Ibarrola-Armendariz), and spirituality (Bayer, Kocot, and Ibarrola-Armendariz). The chapters in these two sections analyse texts from a remarkably wide variety of genres, including the dystopian novel, poetry and autobiography, which underlines the possibilities of application of the Transmodern paradigm in diverse contexts.

Part V, "Transcultural Femininities", consists of two chapters that again broaden the limits of Transmodernity. In the first one, Marc Amfreville challenges the traditional idea of adaptation by comparing the short-story collection *Runaway* (2004), by the Canadian author Alice Munro, with the Spanish film *Julieta* (2016), directed by Pedro Almodóvar, to conclude that the latter is a transcultural interpretation that exiles Canadian texts from their own gendered frames of understanding. In the following chapter, Violeta Duce analyses two short stories taken from the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) by the Nigerian

feminist writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. By citing the presence of themes such as globalisation, the glocal, transculturality and translingualism, she demonstrates that Adichie's oeuvre is a good representation of Transmodernity. In Duce's reading, Adichie clearly portrays women's challenges and possibilities in the globalised era of the Transmodern.

In their conclusion to the volume, the editors reiterate the need to name the current paradigm shift and the usefulness of analysing it through literature which "has often been the forefront of social changes when society as a whole was unaware of them" (238). They make an important point: Transmodernity distinguishes itself from Modernity and Postmodernity in that it "avoids confrontation" (240), that is, it does not exist in contradistinction to a centre or point of reference. Instead, it seeks to encompass multiple voices, to decentralise the main discourse, and to incorporate and expand on previous ideas in order to create new spaces, connections and commitments. As pointed out by Ganteau (2020: 92), this vision is contrary to Enrique Dussel's theory—even though this theory is also referred to throughout the volume—because Dussel considers Transmodernity as completely distinct from Modernity, which he is very critical about, looking at it from outside European academia. The editors, however, recognise that Transmodernity and the reality attached to it are "culturally sensitive" (238).

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Overall, the book achieves its main goals despite minor drawbacks. By drawing on multiple philosophers, critics, writers and literary texts from varied parts of the globe, all the contributors in this collection engage in an interdisciplinary, multifaceted dialogue on the Transmodern paradigm, showing its usefulness as a critical literary and cultural tool. The arrangement of the chapters, however, does not throw light on Rodríguez Magda's distinction between narratives of the limit and narratives of celebration. It is not always clear whether the texts analysed are representative examples of one or the other type, as the editors themselves recognise: "the borders between ones and others [are] not always [...] easily identifiable" (10). To some extent, this obscures a distinction that is repeatedly acknowledged as important and useful and, as such, should have been clearer by the time the reader reaches the end of the volume. As the chapters are instead organised ranging from more general topics to more specific ones, this results in useful cross-references but also repetitions of certain approaches throughout the different sections. However, this does not undermine the merits of a collection that will be of interest to anyone working in the fields of critical theory, contemporary literature, and cultural studies. The editors' and the contributors' approaches to Transmodernity create a valuable framework for cultural and literary criticism, and they also open up a promising path towards a new relational and connective humanist paradigm.

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