Postmillennial Trends in Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media

Postmillennial Trends in Anglophone Literatures, Cultures and Media

Edited by

Soňa Šnircová and Slávka Tomaščíková

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part II: Mapping the Dynamics of a New Sensibility

INTRODUCTION

POSTMILLENNIAL TRENDS IN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES, CULTURES AND MEDIA

SOŇA ŠNIRCOVÁ AND SLÁVKA TOMAŠČÍKOVÁ

"Let's just say: it's over." When Linda Hutcheon wrote these words in the 2002 second edition of her work *The Politics of Postmodernism,* (166), she was admitting that the postmodernist paradigm had undoubtedly lost its dominance and was giving way to new cultural developments in the postmillennial world. She concluded the book's epilogue with a glimpse into the future: "Post-postmodernism needs a label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it—and name it for the twenty-first century" (181). Since then cultural theorists have responded to this challenge, whether intentionally or otherwise, and formulated a rich variety of concepts and approaches in an attempt to capture the essence of the new state of western culture. Jeffrey Nealon (2012) who works with the term "post-postmodernism" to position his study clearly into "the orbit of Fredric Jameson's authoritative work, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,*" perceives the post-postmodern era as a form of intensification: the intensification of postmodern capitalism and the increasing influence of the economic sphere on everyday cultural life. Seeing the post-postmodern primarily as an intensification of the postmodern, Nealon (2012, xi) structures his work as a continuation of Jameson's efforts to map the "structuring mutations in the relations among cultural production and economic production." The replacement of late capitalism by the "just-in-time capitalism" that relies not so much on "the extracts of profit from commodities and services" but "on the production of money directly from money" (26), has produced a host of related economic and cultural trends. Nealson sees these trends as ranging from the consolidation of capitalism's hold over existing markets to the "intensification of the existing biopolitical sources" (32) through the increase of capitalism's control over social and cultural mechanisms of identity construction.

Gilles Lipovetsky (2005) shares Nealon's (2012) opinion that the contemporary offers more intense forms of postmodern trends. He sees the contemporary stage of historical development as "hypermodernity", a concept which he defines primarily through "hyperconsumerism" and "hyperindividualism." In the hypermodern era individuals find themselves caught in a "machinery of excess" in which "the mania for consumption" has resulted in substantially transformed social and personal identities: "Hyperindividualism does not coincide merely with the interiorization of the model of *homo oeconomicus*, pursuing the maximization of his own interests in most spheres of life (education, sexuality, procreation, religion, politics, trades union activities), but also with the destructuring of the old social forms by which behaviour was regulated, with a rising tide of pathological problems, psychological disturbances and excessive behaviour" (Lipovetsky 2005, 159). Although Alan Kirby (2009, 43) finds Lipovetsky's account of consumerism "particularly compelling," he claims that the new cultural paradigm can appear as significantly different from the postmodernist paradigm only if the impetus of new technologies is fully recognized. "Digimodernism," as Kirby terms it, "owes its emergence and preeminence to the computerization of text" (2009, 1). Digimodernist texts as a new form of textuality can be found across contemporary culture and are characterized by the way in which they allow "the reader or the viewer to intervene textually, physically to make text, to add visible content or tangibly shape narrative development." Kirby perceives the effect of digimodernist textuality on contemporary society in rather a bleak light, decrying how it produces an "apparent reality," illusory Internet communities and pathological forms of subjectivity such as "pseudoautism" (Kirby 2009, 231). Although Kirby's comparison of "solipstic subjectivity" with autism may be "problematic" (Rudrum and Stavris 2015, 271), his observations about the relationship between the rise of new technologies and the loss of individuals' ability to participate in the world of real social interactions cannot be easily dismissed: "computers, the Internet, and videogames…enable individuals to engage with 'worlds' or reality-systems without socially interacting; this systemic desocialization is subsequently extended to the 'real world' in the form of a diminished capacity to relate to or to 'read' other people, a preference for solitude and a loss of empathy; such technologies also do little to stimulate language acquisition. Derivative gadgets like the iPod hold their users in similarly isolated private worlds (cell phones too, though with less obvious causes)" (Kirby 2009, 230).

An argument about the power of new media and technologies to reshape relations between individuals and society also underpins Robert Samuels's study of "automodernity" (2007), as he terms the post-postmodern cultural epoch. Automodernity is an epoch defined by the combination of technological automation and human autonomy, in which modern technologies allow young people online to create and enjoy previously unknown levels of personal freedom and the privatization of social life: "the PC has enabled citizens the freedom to avoid the public and to appropriate public information and space for unpredictable personal reasons. Furthermore, even when people are socializing online, the power of the PC to personalize culture can turn this social interaction into a privatized experience" (Samuels 2007, 190). Samuels (2007) shares Kirby's concerns (2009) that the digitalization of life threatens society with the rise of extreme individualism since the ability of users of new media to "control the flow and intake of information [e.g. to respond, in chat rooms/online discussion, only to the conversations that interest them] provides a strong antisocial and self-reinforcing sense of subjectivity" (190). Thus although the Internet and the World Wide Web have the potential to promote "multiculturalism, social interaction and the movement away from the individuated modern self" (191), they also have the power to undermine the social world by "giving individual consumer of information the illusion of automated autonomy" (191).

While automodernity, as perceived by Samuels, encourages individuals to ignore difference and escape into a monologic discourse, Nicolas Bourriaud's altermodernity has a dialogic nature: "[it] arises out of planetary negotiations, discussions between agents from different cultures. Stripped of a centre, it can only be polyglot" (2009, 254). According to Bourriard, altermodernity is realized most clearly in contemporary forms of art that utilize visual language marked by travelling, nomadism and cultural creolization. In their responses to the processes of globalisation, altermodern artists become cultural nomads who move in space, time and among cultures, celebrating the multidimensionality of the contemporary world. Central to altermodernism, as Bourriard (2005) explains, is the search for a new form of modernity in which the cultural values of different communities can be translated and connected to a worldwide network with the aim of producing "singularities in a more and more standardized world."

"Metamodernism," a term used by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in their essay "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010) represents another attempt to describe postmillennial artistic and cultural trends that may offer a newer form of modernism. Vermeulen and van

den Akker define metamodernism as a new structure of feeling that they align to "the return of the Romantic, whether as style, philosophy or attitude" (8). Noting that Romanticism has been defined by its oscillation between opposing poles (beauty/ugliness, strength/weakness, individualism/collectivism, purity/corruption, love of life/love of death, etc.), Vermeulen and van den Akker identify a neoromantic sensibility in the metamodernist oscillation between "the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between naivete and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity" (5-6). Informed by a "both/neither dynamic," the metamodern sensibility is simultaneously both modern and postmodern and yet also neither of them. Artistic practices such as "performatism" that marks "a revival of theism in arts," a "Romantic Conceptualism" that endows "the ordinary with mystery and the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar", or "quirky cinema" that tries to "restore, to the cynical reality of adults, a childlike naivety," are combined with the postmodernist devices of "pluralism, irony and deconstruction". However, while postmodern irony is "inherently tied to [the] apathy" informed by the postmodern loss of a positive vision of human development, metamodern irony is "intrinsically bound to desire" (10): the desire to reconstruct hope, faith and metaphysics in the aftermath of postmodern scepticism, relativism and nihilism.

This book offers a collection of papers that draw on contemporary developments in cultural studies in their discussions of postmillennial trends in works of Anglophone literature and media. The first section of the book, titled *Addressing the Theories of a New Cultural Paradigm*, is comprised of ten papers that present, respectively, performatist, metamodernist, digimodernist, and hypomodernist readings of selected texts in order to test the usefulness of recent theories in explorations of the new paradigm in literary, media and food studies. The papers cover a wide variety of genres, including the novel, the film, the documentary, the cookbook, the food magazine and the food commercial, and present a number of themes which aim to shed light on the nature of the new paradigm: the role of performatist aesthetics in the artistic representation of metamodernist sensibility, the return of the grand narrative, the metamodernist oscillation between utopia and dystopia, metamodernist transformations of post-Holocaust literature, the relevance of digimodernism to literary studies, digimodernist modifications of the documentary genre, the role of digimodernist media in the construction of new identities and

the role of food and eating in the production of hypermodern cultural practices.

In the first paper **"Metamodernism for Children?: A Performatist Rewriting of Gabriel García Márquez's 'A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings: A Tale for Children' in David Almond's *Skellig*"** Soňa Šnircová reads Almond's novel as a response to Márquez's short story. Almond appropriates the main motifs of Marquez's classic postmodernist text and its deconstructions of metaphysical concepts and traditional beliefs but he infuses his novel with a metamodernist sensibility. The novel challenges postmodernist rationalism (sarcasm, indifference, ironic deconstruction) with a perspective of childlike naivety and a desire for metaphysical truths. It replaces postmodernist pastiche and parody with a representation of the sublime, mysterious and mystical. Šnircová uses Raoul Eshelman's theory of performatism to argue that Almond's novel includes "a double framing" which keeps the reader's metaphysical scepticism and irony in check and employs strategies that emphasize "unity, identification, closure, hierarchy, and theist or authorial modes of narration." Performatist aesthethics thus perform a major role in Almond's novel's participation in the central tension of metamodernist sensibility: the tension between "a modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all."

Michaela Weiss's paper "**Return of True Romance in Jeanette Winterson's *Stone Gods*"** follows a similar line in the exploration of metamodernist sensibility. It reads Winterson's dystopian novel as "a fitting reflection of the contemporary metamodernist tendency to provide balance between the Romanticist essence of modernism and the shattering doubts of postmodernism." The author sees metamodernist oscillations between dystopia and utopia, violence and romance, technology and nature as the central feature of Winterson's narrative and notes the ways in which the novel combines postmodernist techniques with the metamodernist quest for truth, authenticity, intimacy and responsibility towards community and nature. Winterson thus brings back to life the Romantic connection between self, nature, love, and meaning, and contrasts this with postmodern dystopian warnings about the extent of the ecological and political crises which mankind is now facing.

In the essay "**A Desire for Grand Narratives: Metamodern Reading of the Film *K-PAX*"** Vesna Lopičić discusses Iain Softley's film *K-PAX* in order to test it against some tenets of metamodernism as outlined in Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's seminal essay. She aligns the film's metamodern character to its interest in fictional elsewheres, its creative depiction of multiple ongoing crises, the sincerity

and informed naivety of its main character, the discourse over the possibility of having any kind of vision whatsoever, the questioning of reason by the irrational, and also its open-endedness. In her reading the film offers a narrative that reflects a new sensibility which is both ethically desirable and existentially consoling. In this respect the film illustrates what the author sees as the most important aspect of metamodernism—the return to mythical mega narratives.

Metamodernism is also the central point of reference in the paper "**Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as a Specimen of Metamodern Fiction."** Alberto Rossi reads Haddon's novel as one of the most complete instances of metamodern fiction. The novel's autistic 15-year-old protagonist is seen as representing the clash between hyper-rationality and a world dominated by irrationality, empiricism and haphazardness. The protagonist's hyperrationality is combined with a naive perspective that places him in contrast with a typical postmodern character while his Holmesian quest for the ultimate truth links him to the metamodern irony which is "intrinsically bound to desire." Rossi argues that the unconventionality of the main character's behaviour subverts both classical and postmodern detective fiction by introducing an apparent linearity, the frustration of that linearity brought about by the bewilderment which human society induces in an autistic boy, and the frustration of that frustration generated by the ability of the protagonist to avoid all obstacles and to uncover the truth.

Zuzana Buráková's essay **"Beyond Victimary Discourse?: Confronting the Victim and Perpetrator in Contemporary Anglophone Literature"** draws on perspectives that align the postmillennial era with the exhaustion of the original victimary experience and the emergence of narratives from the other side. She offers Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* as examples of a new type of narrative in post-Holocaust literature—the narrative of the perpetrator. Both novels suggest the limitations of the Holocaust experience and memory in which no perspective on history is ever complete. While Seiffert, a contemporary British author, chooses an indirect approach to the events of the Second World War via the concept of postmemory, Littell, a contemporary American author, confronts the reader with a detailed account of the perpetration of Nazi atrocities from a first-person perspective. These novels explore the tensions between private and public memory and engage with Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory which works productively through negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing. Buráková relates these new developments in post-Holocaust literature to a metamodernist "oscillation and simultaneity between and beyond

diametrically opposed poles" as she sees the victim and perpetrator narratives as the opposed poles of the same narrative about the horrors of the Second World War.

The paper **"Digimodernism and Literature: The Case of *The Enchantress of Florence* by Salman Rushdie"** moves away from the more theoretical considerations rooted in Vermeulen and van den Akker's ideas about metamodernism. Sooyoung Chon addresses Alan Kirby's claim that although digimodernist symptoms can be found across contemporary culture, digimodernism's relevance to literature seems limited to the facilitation of the physical production of and access to literature, the socialization of reading and the amateurization of criticism. The digimodernist forms, hypertext or electronic interactive literature adopted by creative writers can hold the attention of the reader only to a limited extent and offer little fertile ground for the creation of fascinating literature. In contrast, Sooyoung Chon argues that although digimodernist literature *per se* may not exist, literary texts may be affected by the perceptual changes and concepts available in the digital era. In support of her argument, Chon discusses Salman Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) as an example of a narrative that adopts elements of digital culture, such as web browsing as a method of research, the fast multidirectional linkages enabled by the internet, the experience of virtual reality, concepts such as avatars or extended memory units, and fusion as a means of composing a new image.

Kirby's digimodernism remains the centre of attention in Július Rozenfeld's text **"The Subjective Reality of Documenting in Digimodernism."** Drawing on Kirby's ideas Rozenfeld notes the ways in which digital technology has radically modified our sense of reality, has dramatically expanded the spectrum of human perception, and more than ever before enables the observer to create personal niches which allow more subjective interpretations of the surrounding world. The theoretical framework is used to explore the effect of digital technology on the visualization of reality and on its interpretation in documentaries. The difference between the objective reality and the "apparently real" that Kirby aligns with digimodernism is utilized in the author's analyses of the contemporary documentaries *Waltz with Bashir* and *Catfish*. Identifying the "fingerprints" of digimodernism, such as onwardness, multiple authorship, nonchronology in these films, Rozenfeld sees them as evidence that documentary production has moved beyond the boundaries of the postmodern.

"Asexuality and Autism in the Digimodernist Media: Emerging Identities?" continues the book's examination of Kirby's definition of

digimodernist text and its applicability in the practical criticism of media products. Petra Filipová considers Kirby's characterisation of digimodernist texts that appear to have a beginning but no discernible end; the readers of these texts may themselves become the authors at any point through contributing to the creation process; authorship is largely anonymous, or at least semi-anonymous; and the texts do not have specific, set boundaries, which often means that the texts might not in fact be recognized as such at all. She notices that these criteria appear to be fulfilled by online forums and social media websites, which offer, among other things, varied debates on asexuality and autism. In her paper she discusses the role of digimodernist texts in cultural constructions of asexual and autistic identities and explores how they relate to the televisual representations of these new identities.

Slávka Tomaščíková's essay **"Food in the Media–Above and Below the Sea Level of a Hypermodern Culture"** argues that under the influence of new economic, technological social and cultural developments food has become "a phenomenon of extensive mediation in both old and new media products." In consequence, the study of food has emerged as one of the central subjects of research in humanities and arts. The author draws attention to various media texts (e.g. cookbooks, newspapers' food supplements, food magazines, food commercials, chef TV shows, etc.) to illustrate the rise of hyperconsumerism and hyperindividualism that Lipovetsky identifies as the main symptoms of the hypermodern era. Tomaščíková sees British culture as "Lipovetsky's hyperconsumerist *society of fashion*" whose excessive interest in food production and consumption is highly visible in both old and new media. The author relates the richness of hypermediated food narratives to the hyperindividuals' search for the "narratives of imagination" and to the media production of lifestyle images that associate overconsumption with the fulfilment of one's dreams.

Silvia Rosivalová Baučeková's "Indulgent, Wholesome, Authentic: 21st-century Cookbooks as Hypermodern Artefacts" also turns to Gilles Lipovetsky's theory of hypemodernity, especially his definition of the postmillennial age as one of paradoxical chaos and his understanding of contemporary humans as paradoxical individualistic hyperconsumers. The author uses this theoretical framework to discuss the centrality of food to our contemporary consumption-based society and the analytical potential of food in explaining everyday phenomena. She focuses her analysis on a selection of cookbooks and reads them as multi-layered texts; texts which contain images as well as linguistic material; texts which have a prescriptive, but also a journalistic and aesthetic purpose; texts

which combine narrative and instructional modes of writing; and texts which exist simultaneously as works of art and as consumer products. Rosivalová Baučeková shows how these "hypermodern artefacts" express contemporary values and beliefs and illustrates how their categorization into indulgent, hedonistic cookbooks, healthy food manuals and "authentic" cookbooks corresponds with Lipovetsky's claims about the three different ways in which time is perceived in hypermodernism.

The second section of the book, *Mapping the Dynamics of a New Sensibility*, offers a wider perspective and presents seven papers that search for evidence of a new sensibility in selected examples of postmillennial texts. These papers move beyond the frameworks of the theories explored in the first part of the book with the aim of offering new perspectives in the studies of the authors' respective fields of interest. The themes covered in this section include contemporary developments in the works of Sam Shepard, representations of the global and the local in the postmillennial novel, the effects of globalization on documentary film production, explorations of healthism as a disciplinary discourse, the role of food programme narratives in the distribution of social practices, reconstructions of the past in popular culture texts and changing representations of the "geek" in postmillennial media.

Paulina Mirowska's chapter **"A Postmillennial Sensibility in Sam Shepard's Mature Playwriting"** presents Sam Shepard as a playwright who, at the outset of the new century, continues to reinvestigate the possibilities of the dramatic medium in a visible attempt to challenge both his audiences and himself, constantly striving for an authentic idiom in which to render postmillennial America. She focuses primarily on two of Sam Shepard's plays, *Kicking a Dead Horse* and *Ages of the Moon*, and aims to offer an insight into these elusive, multilayered texts which, in some respects, feel like a somewhat unsettling summation of, and a subversive comment on, Shepard's own artistic achievement. These uncanny plays resonate with Beckettian echoes and affinities while revisiting the familiar Shepard topography and negotiate the boundaries between the actual and the remembered or fictitious, stimulating debates on, among other things, authenticity, violence, aging, mortality, loss and love, culpability and the possibility of expiation. Mirowska argues that Shepard is reviewing the main concerns of his career in these works and extending his interrogation of American culture and American sensibilities, especially that of American masculinity, addressing the weight of the past upon the present.

In her paper **"The Global and the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: The Case of Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*"**, Soňa Šnircová reflects

on the influence of globalization on developments in the postmillennial novel. She notices that the novel emerged as a genre whose developments were influenced by the western centre/non-western periphery binary and its participation in the early discourse of globalization. Unlike the 18th and 19th-century "world novel" that played a crucial role in the formation of the global hegemony of the modern West, the present-day "global novel" reacts to the processes of globalization that cannot be seen as a simple extension or intensification of early imperialism. Seen by some as a product of global capitalism which offers undesirable simplifications of literary texts, the global novel has been praised by others for its ability to represent the global dimension of contemporary imagination and for its construction of global political consciousness. Šnircová uses McCormack's *Solar Bones* as an example of the novel that represents the opposite pole in the contemporary literary developments—a work with a focus on provincial problems, local traditions and everyday life in a small community—and examines the ability of the regional novel to address the most pressing issues of the globalized world.

Globalization remains the central concern in Július Rozenfeld's essay **"Eastern European Struggles to Redefine the Local in a Globalized World".** Opening with a discussion on globalization's potential to wipe out local, regional, and national cultural traditions, lifestyles, and values which are not compatible with the currently dominant discourse, Rozenfeld examines representations of Central and Eastern European countries in selected documentary films. The author discusses the films *Prague—At the Heart of Europe* and *Where Europe Ends*, a documentary that focuses on Rakhiv, a small border town in Ukraine, and utilizes iconicity and semiotic methods of analysis to examine the means of representations dominant in the respective portraits of two extremely different European locations. The author's conclusions include the finding that while iconic representations (such as those of Saint Vitus Cathedral or Charles Bridge) are used to reinforce the global knowledge of space (Prague), representations of space that stresses its local aspects (such as the image of small town in the backyard of Europe) rely more heavily on symbolic images (symbols of a distorted and deteriorated society).

In her paper **"Dieting Gluttons: Postmillennial Paradox in the Contemporary Healthy Eating Discourse"**, Silvia Rosivalová Baučeková addresses another problem of the globalized world: the newly emerging ideology of healthism that has spread through contemporary literature and media. Healthism seemingly subscribes to a feminist rejection of body image policing but simultaneously stresses the need to make specific food choices and adopt specific lifestyles in order to sustain "health". It thereby

"reframes dietary restrictions as positive choices while maintaining an emphasis on body discipline, expert knowledge, and self-control". Rosivalová Baučeková discusses the presence of the ideology of healthism in a selection of food-centric texts, cookbooks and food blogs and highlights the overlapping of the two types of food discourses to argue that food and eating are important battlefields on which the tensions of postmillennial culture are played out.

Food and its representation in the media remain at the centre of attention in the paper **"Cooking Narratives–Cooking Social Practices in Postmillennial Television."** Slávka Tomaščíková draws attention to postmillennial television's reverence for various chefs, ranging from professionals to celebrities, and reflects on the rising popularity of food reality television. She refers to such genres as chef shows, cooking contests, game shows, unscripted reality shows or hybrid genres of docu-soaps, food travel shows, etc. to illustrate the fact that a variety of food narratives are employed in order to attract audiences. Food narratives play a crucial role in the cultural distribution of the meanings and social practices of everyday life. Tomaščíková's discussion of British and Slovak food reality TV shows reveals that these shows possess the power to construct consumer fantasies which prompt the audience to buy food-related products, they also have the power to become heritage narratives. Relating food preparation and consumption to the lifestyles of our ancestors, food lifestyle narratives may transfer the value systems of our ancestors into contemporary representations of identities and thus contribute to the preservation of national, regional and local identities in the globalized world.

Haluk Üçel's chapter **"*The Tudors* as a Postmillennial Historical Televisual Text"** also focuses on contemporary television production. It discusses *The Tudors* (2007-2010), a historical drama constructed around the private life of Henry VIII, and explores the series as a cultural product of the postmillennial global era. The author uses the theories of Stuart Hall to investigate the position of *The Tudor*'s audience in a variety of text readings and emphasizes the elements of presentism that contribute significantly to the formation of the series' popularity. The author's analyses demonstrate how popular culture reconstructs the past for a contemporary audience and how history and historical memory constructed by globalised televisual production can determine the essentials of national identity.

The paper **"Geek Masculinities and Femininities in Postmillennial Pop Culture"** concludes the book with an examination of the different forms of the "geek" in postmillennial popular culture and a discussion of

the broadened definition of the category which has emerged in the twenty-first century. An increasing number of films, television shows and other cultural products are being labeled as "geeky" and gaining a following among people who willingly adopt this identity. This wealth of popular culture sources and the normalization of the status of the geek have also contributed to a shift in the gender of the term as well; while previously used predominantly to refer to men and boys, the term is now also used to denote female scientists, gamers or comic book fans. Petra Filipová explores the gendered differences in the representation of male and female geeks in popular fiction, and discusses the possible implications for the perception of men and women in postmillennial society.

The book is primarily aimed at scholars in the fields of literary, media, gender and food studies, but would also be of interest to a broader readership involved in explorations of contemporary cultural processes in the context of post-postmodern theories. The collection of papers can also provide useful and interesting material for students since it offers insights into a new cultural paradigm in the early phases of development using a variety of examples from popular culture. The authors of these papers work at universities in Slovakia, South Korea, Italy, Turkey, Serbia, Poland, and the Czech Republic. Two thirds of the papers are written by six Slovak scholars who have been involved in the VEGA 1/0336/16, *Postmillennial Sensibility in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures,* research project funded by the Slovak Ministry of Education. The remaining papers represent invited contributions by scholars who participated in the conference of the same name, organized by the Department of British and American Studies, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in 2017.

References

Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2009. "Altermodern Manifesto: Postmodernism is Dead." In *Supplanting the Postmodern, An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century*, edited by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris, 253-254. New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Bourriard, Nicolas. 2005. "Keynote speech to the 2005 Art Association of Australia& New Zealand Conference." Accessed July 30, 2017. http://www.trebuchet-magazine.com/alter-neo-meta-claims-to-a-new-era/.

Hutcheon, Linda. 2002. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Kirby, Alan. 2009. *Digimodernism: How New Technologies Dismantle the Postmodern and Reconfigure Our Culture.* London: Bloomsbury.

Lipovetsky, Giles. 2005. "Time Against Time, or the Hypermodern Society", translated by Andrew Brown. In *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century,* edited by David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris, 156-171. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Nealon, Jeffrey T. 2012. *Post-Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rudrum, David and Nicholas Stavris, eds. 2015. *Supplanting the Postmodern. An Anthology of Writing on the Arts and Culture of the early 21st Century*. London: Bloomsbury.

Samuels, Robert. 2009. *New Media, Cultural Studies, and Critical Theory after Postmodernism. Automodernity from Žižek to Laclau*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

Vermeulen, Timotheus, Akker, Robin van den. 2010. "Notes on Metamodernism". Journal of Aesthetics & Culture (Vol. 2): 1-14. DOI: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677. Accessed March 3, 2016.

PART I

ADDRESSING THE THEORIES OF A NEW CULTURAL PARADIGM

CHAPTER ONE

METAMODERNISM FOR CHILDREN?:
A PERFORMATIST REWRITING
OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ'S
'A VERY OLD MAN WITH ENORMOUS WINGS:
A TALE FOR CHILDREN' IN DAVID ALMOND'S
SKELLIG[1]

SOŇA ŠNIRCOVÁ

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a growing consensus about the exhaustion of postmodernism, voiced by such prominent theoreticians of the postmodern as Ihab Hassan (2003) and Linda Hutcheon (2002). Hutcheon relates the end of postmodernism to its loss of counter-discourse status due to its canonization in Western academia and appropriation by cultural industries. To Hassan (2003, 199), "Hype and hyperbole, parody and kitsch, media glitz and ideological spite, the sheer, insatiable irrealism of consumer societies all helped to turn postmodernism into a conceptual ectoplasm." In addition, he suggests that to many postmodernism has become a synonym for "extreme relativism in values and beliefs, acute irony and scepticism toward reason, and the denial of any possibility of truth, human or divine" (Hassan 2003, 200). Various attempts to map the post-postmodern phase in the development of the Western world have resulted in a number of studies that offer different names for contemporary cultural trends, such as hypermodern (Lipovetsky 2005), digimodern (Kirby 2009), altermodern (Bourriaud 2009), automodern

(Samuels 2010), cosmomodern (Moraru 2010) and metamodern (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, 2018). At the moment, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's term metamodern has the greatest potential to become a suitable term for what appears to be a new cultural paradigm in the process of emerging.

In their 2010 essay, Vermeulen and van den Akker maintain that the new cultural paradigm finds its "clearest expression in an emergent neoromantic sensibility," in "the return of the Romantic, whether as style, philosophy or attitude" (28). They draw on the definition of the Romantic attitude as an oscillation between two opposing poles, finite and infinite, attempt and failure, "modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony" (8). Taking their examples from visual arts and architecture, they maintain that "metamodern neoromanticism" should be understood first of all as a "re-signification: it is the re-signification of 'the commonplace with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seemliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite'" (12).

Raoul Eshelman's study *Performatism or the End of Postmodernim* (2008), which precedes Vermeulen and van den Akker's seminal work on metamodernism, presents a more systematic attempt to define a new aesthetic that could offer an alternative to the aesthetic of the postmodern. As Eshelman (2018, 199) states in a recent essay, while metamodernism is a broader term applied to the new structure of feeling that arises from an oscillation between modernism and postmodernism, performatism relates to "a functional analysis of the formal features of works" of contemporary art, architecture, cinema and literature. Eshelman (2018, 200) does not see his work as an attempt to map the new sensibility in contemporary culture, but he still admits that an analysis of "specific performatist visual or literary devices" can be employed to that end.

In Eshelman's theory (2008, xii), performatism is a name for a "new aesthetic trend towards monism—towards strategies emphasizing unity, identification, closure, hierarchy, and theist or authorial modes of narration." Eshelman calls performatist the works that demand of the reader the self-deceit to believe in something normally unbelievable. This requirement clearly suggests similarity with Coleridge's well-known "suspension of belief" that is often understood as the *willingness* of the reader to overlook some improbable or fantastic elements in the narrative for the sake of aesthetic pleasure. Eshelman's argument, however, focuses on the specific coercive frameworks that performatist work uses to *force* postmodern sceptics into believing "rather than [convincing] them with cognitive arguments. This, in turn, may enable them to assume a moral or ideological position that they otherwise would not have" (37). As some

suggest (Rudrum and Stavris 2015, 112), Eshelman's theory includes some problematic points that have to be addressed. One of the crucial ones appears to be, as the critics claim, that "many of the terms that [he] uses to describe performatist works could as easily be applied to postmodern texts: metafictional novels and films are perpetually breaking out of frames, while magical realism often embraces the spiritual and the theistic, for instance." Overall, they conclude that Eshelman seems to offer "a series of performatist readings of works that could, in principle, be read through a postmodernist lens just as easily."

To address this criticism and to test the usefulness of Eshelman's distinction between postmodernist and performatist texts, I compare two magical realist narratives: Gabriel García Márquez's short story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings: A Tale for Children" (1955) and David Almond's novel *Skellig* (1998). These two texts share some obvious similarities since Almond created *Skellig*, as he admits in a personal interview with Don Latham, under the influence of Márquez's tale (Latham 2006). At first sight, Márquez's and Almond's texts appear to be works for children; one uses an explicit subtitle, the other was classified as a "children's novel" and became a Whitbread Children's Book of the Year. However, it is well known that Márquez evokes the child reader in the title of his short story only to intensify the ironic character of the narrative that presupposes an experienced and educated adult reader. Similarly, although Almond uses a child's perspective and magical elements that may relate his book to a low fantasy for naive readers, he has managed to create, as the chairman of the Withbread judges claims, "an extraordinarily profound book, no matter what the age of the reader."[2] In this chapter, I explore the potential of Almond's book to address adult readers and provide them with aesthetic experience in the way that corresponds with the most contemporary trends in Western culture. I argue that Almond's novel presents a response to Márquez's magical realist tale that can be related to, what some call "meta-metafiction," a work that rewrites classic postmodern works and motifs to "give an ironic critique of *traditional* postmodern literature" (Kušnír 2015, 19). In addition, I show that despite their crucial similarities, Márquez's short story is a typical postmodernist narrative while Almond's novel participates in a metamodern, neoromantic sensibility and bears signs of a performatist text.

---

[2] Quoted on the back cover of the 1998 edition of the book.

"A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings:
A Tale for Children"

Using the frames of traditional story telling Márquez's story revolves around the mysterious figure of a very old man with enormous wings and his unresolved ontological status. Appearing after a strong storm in the backyard of a poor couple in a Latin American village, the old man with wings tests the ability of the small community and its institutions to incorporate the extraordinary into the mundane experience of life:

> He was dressed like a ragpicker. There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth, and his pitiful condition of a drenched great-grandfather took away any sense of grandeur he might have had. His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked were forever entangled in the mud. They looked at him so long and so closely that Pelayo and Elisenda very soon overcame their surprise and in the end found him familiar.

The couple is ready to "skip over the inconvenience of the wings" and use his foreign dialect and strong sailor's voice as a satisfactory reason for framing him into the ordinary as a castaway from a ship. On the other hand, the "wise neighbour woman who knew everything about life and death" ignores the signs of his possible humanity and proclaims him an angel of death that has come for the couple's ill baby. The local representative of the Church reacts with alarm and suspicion, seeing in the creature the possibility of the devil's carnival tricks and turns to Rome for help with the situation. While Rome starts a long process of inquiry about the man, the couple uses the winged creature in a more practical way. They keep him in a chicken coop and charge an admission fee to the miracle-searching crowd. By the time the angelic figure loses its attraction and the crowd finds a new spectacle to pay for, the couple earns enough to lead a comfortable life. After several years, during which Pelayo and Elisenda can barely tolerate his annoying presence in the yard, the old man acquires enough strength to fly away and turn into "an imaginary dot on the horizon of the sea."

Treating the mysterious old man as a figure that lies at the centre of the text's ironic deconstructions of both traditional superstitions and the more modern beliefs of organized religion, Márquez's narrative offers an example of what Christopher Warnes (2009) calls discursive magical realism. Warnes distinguishes two impulses behind magical realistic narratives, one informed by faith and the other by irreverence. The first one is concerned with collective ontologies—the "ways of understanding

cultural being-in-the-world" (13). The second deals with epistemologies; its concern is

> not only with knowledge itself, but also with what is done with that knowledge—how it replicates itself and the values that accompany it, how it is used in the perpetuation of privilege and oppression, how it takes on the status of the truth. Irreverence frequently attaches itself to specific cultural, historical and literary discourses that are asserted, negotiated and critiqued. The core difference between the approaches [labelled] as irreverence and faith is that the former treats discourse as discourse; the latter frequently translates it into being. Where faith based approaches utilise the magical in order to expand and enrich already-existing conceptions of the real, discursive magical realism deliberately elevates the non-real to the status of the real in order to cast the epistemological status of both into doubt. (13-14)

According to Warnes (2009), faith-based magical realism operates metonymically and discursive magical realism operates metaphorically. In faith-based magical realism, "the supernatural event or presence may stand synecdochically or metonymically for an alternative way of conceiving of reality usually derived from a non-Western belief system or world view". On the other hand, in discursive magical realism such an event or presence "stands in place of an idea or a set of ideas, say, about the ways language constructs reality, or about the incapacities of binaristic thinking" (14-15). As Warnes stresses, this type of magical realism coincides with "post-structuralist and postmodern approaches to art and the world" (16) sharing their focus on the discursive nature of the human experience of reality. Márquez employs such typical postmodernist elements as "fragments; hybridity; relativism; play; parody; pastiche; [and] an ironic, sophistical stance" (Hassan 2003, 200) to focus the reader's attention on the epistemological level of the text. In this way, he engages the reader in an intellectual game that reduces the possibility of experiencing aesthetic pleasure through the identification with characters, since they become nothing more than the tools of the author's ironic deconstructions.

The old man with wings functions in the discursive world of the story as a sign with a constantly deferred meaning. Despite his imprisonment in the chicken coop, he cannot be caught in a clear-cut definition and, as a mystery, escapes the frames of all the available discourses. Although the old man evokes the binary oppositions, celestial/human, human/animal, angel/monster, high/low, etc., the text emphasizes his in-between, neither-nor position. He clearly lacks, as the priest notices, the "proud dignity of angels"— his body bears signs of aging and disease, he smells, his wings are dirty, half-plucked, and ridden with parasites and his miracles that the

crowd receives are few and showing "some mental disorder." His humanity is also disputable—he speaks a hermetic language, has a strange diet (eats only eggplant mush) and his only undisputable quality is his patience that relates him, depending on the perspective, either to the superhuman (it is seen as a "supernatural virtue") or the subhuman ("the patience of a dog who had no illusions"). Due to his in-between position, the extraordinary figure functions in the text as a tool that invites the reader to participate in the playful, ironic deconstructions of the outmoded beliefs and enjoy the feeling of the intellectual superiority of one who professes epistemological scepticism and metaphysical pessimism over those who live lives saturated with false metaphysics.

Márquez's short story clearly presupposes (despite its subtitle) the adult reader who can appreciate its participation in the postmodern critique of religion and science, the two institutions that have constructed the most powerful discourses about humanity. The inability of the Catholic Church to deal with the materialization of one of its central concepts—an angelic being—is parodically related to the scholastic tradition in the explanation of the metaphysical. While the village priest suspects an imposter because the winged creature does not react to Latin, the authorities in Rome keep inquiring about the old man's navel, a connection between his dialect and Aramaic, about "how many times he could fit on the head of a pin," and about the possibility of him being just a Norwegian with wings. The local representative of science, the doctor, is equally perplexed—by the "logic of [the old man's] wings [that] seem so natural on that completely human organism that he couldn't understand why other men didn't have them too," and by his inability to explain how a creature in such a bad physical state (with "so much whistling in the heart and so many sounds in his kidneys") could be still alive.

Failed by the modern institutions the villagers create their own perceptions of the creature, mixing religious beliefs, superstitions, and common sense approaches. The reactions of the crowd attracted by the apparent angel become a ground for Márquez's ironic explorations of desires, hopes, preferences, selfish instincts, cruelties, corruptions, utopian visions, and fascinations stored in human nature and released by the presence of the extraordinary:

> The simplest among them thought that he should be named mayor of the world. Others of sterner mind felt that he should be promoted to the rank of the five-star general in order to win all wars. Some visionaries hoped that he could be put to stud in order to implant the earth a race of winged wise men who could take charge of the universe.

Their lack of reverence (they treat him like a circus animal) and their cruelty (they pull out his feathers to touch their defective parts with them, throw stones at him and even burn his side with an iron to make him move) mix with their desire for miracles. In a parodic image the couple's courtyard becomes a place of pilgrimage in which the indifferent, passive and silent angel fails to provide the expected healing—the blind man does not recover his sight but grows three new teeth, the paralytic does not get to walk but almost wins the lottery, and the leper's sores sprout sunflowers. However, what he does not fail to provide, despite his passivity, is an opportunity for Pelayo and Elisenda to charge the miracle-searchers and thus, imitating the Churches' ancient practices, cram their house with money. The parody achieves its peak when the now affluent couple cannot find any use for the creature with the potentially divine origin and their sense of nuisance grows to the point when it seems that they live, as Elisenda complains, in a "hell full of angels."

The villagers' loss of interest in the imperfect angel and their new fascination with a travelling circus attraction, a spider woman, draws the reader's attention to the centrality of narrative in human life.[3] The crowd's enjoyment of the tragic story about the disobedient daughter's grotesque transformation, her willingness to answer their questions and the possibility to "examine her up and down" stresses the people's preference of a dialogue to silence, an explanation (however irrational) to a mystery, and "of pathos and 'fearful lesson' to the opportunity for a (possibly) divine encounter" (Latham 2006). Placing the winged man on the same level of the crowd's interest as the "frightful tarantula the size of a ram and with the head of a sad maiden," Márquez emphasizes the grotesque aspects of the angelic figure (the combination of the human and the animal) and undermines his possible connection with the sublime. Although he remains a mystery, the "presence which is not rationalized or explained away" (Warnes 2009, 14), more than the material evidence of the metaphysical, the old man appears to the reader as a metaphor that represents "an idea or a set of ideas" (15). He seems to stand for the metaphysical concepts of human creation that, as the narrative reminds us, have been frequently used for personal and institutional profit and have brought, in the history of humankind, more confusions than chances for miraculous salvations.

---

[3] As Slávka Tomaščíková (2012, 96) notices, "Whether we realize it or not, in everyday life, a person is surrounded by narratives and it is these narratives that enable an individual to learn from and/or to teach others - all in the very essence of the meaning of the Latin word *narrō* - 'to make known, to convey information.'"