

INTRODUCTION

In a book published in English in 2015, the German media theorist and philosopher Sybille Krämer attempts to provide a model for transmission that preserves the possibility of community without succumbing to notions of communication as the imposition of sameness. As Krämer insists, it is essential to safeguard the difference that emerges during the process of transmission, defined as “an external, corporeal, and material process that can be conceived as a kind of embodiment” which is “also associated with a ‘disembodiment’—namely, the way in which media ‘become invisible’ in their (interference-free) usage” (75). Transmission “lets appear”, or makes difference perceptible, and as such renders culture and community possible, in Nancean terms, as loci of both connection and separation. According to Krämer (and many others), transmission does not amount to neutral repetition of information, but implies “creativity,” distortion and noise, which means transformation is just as important as reiteration. Krämer’s model successfully reminds us that transmission, through the persistence of the medium—whose materiality, even if self-effacing, never ceases to intrude—makes the world manifest. As contemporary novelist Tom McCarthy put it in his essay titled *Transmission and the Individual Remix*, “[i]n the beginning is the signal,” and literature’s work is to fix our attention to it, encouraging us to “listen in on listening itself” (McCarthy 2012, section ii).

In its most capacious understanding, transmission comprises everything, from the circulation of information to the endless exchanges of matter and energy making up the substance of the universe, from the reproduction of genetic material to the replication of historical memory. In the narrower acceptance imposed by our approach, it has to do with the flow of cultural discourses that give rise to the meanings we attach to the world. Not least, narrative transmission, especially in its literary instantiations, can also point to the capacity to better grasp the ethics of difference that should guide our way across the predicaments of today’s world.

The inescapability of transmission may have never been so clear as at the time of the Covid pandemic, of social media, fake news, generalized



dissensus and, importantly, climate crisis. The essays collected in the present volume self-consciously act as both transmitters and as spaces for the close examination of transmission's processes and mechanisms. They allow transmission to thematize itself, staging the multiplication and propagation of conduits, messages, senders and addressees across histories, geographies, and media. Aware of their own embeddedness in space and time, they simultaneously perform and investigate the work of cultural production by traversing forms and genres, modes of narrative, poetic or visual representation, attesting to literature as a privileged site for the "wordling" of the world.

The opening part of the collection foregrounds the medium and its message-producing functions. To use the words of the authors of the now classic study of remediation, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, the essays gathered here inspect the "double logic" of "immediacy"—the illusion of transparency—and "hypermediacy"—the "fascination of media" (2000, 31). Ros Ballaster's paper investigates the ways in which contemporary filmic remediations of eighteenth-century "scenes of writing" reconnect us to a lost practice and forgotten forms of embodied communication (manuscripts) while performing a gendered critique of history which simultaneously highlights affective distance and purports to give rise to new forms of political, ethical and emotional commitment. In Ballaster's view, the tensions inherent in the "screening" process, encapsulated in the semantic ambiguity of the term itself (as either 'cinematic adaptation' or 'concealing'), remain unresolved, as the progressive representation of formerly marginalized identities may amount to nothing more than the affirmation of the medium's power to signify and therefore to (re-)produce reality. The concomitant potentials and perils of transposing narrative from text to screen are also tackled by Veronica Popescu's analysis of Ramin Bahrani's *Fahrenheit 451*; the film's "appropriation" of Ray Bradbury's classic dystopia is shown to participate in the dynamics of the consumerism it is supposed to undermine by turning current popular political ideals into visual spectacle, insufficiently concerned with salvaging the possibility of ethical and affective connection.

A second section of the volume is more overtly concerned with novelistic transmission. Focusing on Anna Burn's *Milkman* as a vector of contemporary Northern Irish writing in the wake of the 1998 Good Friday peace accord, Eve Patten's essay discusses fiction as an agent of "political and cultural memory" that critiques and mobilizes community-building energies by emulating the work of interpretation, forensic inquiry, negotiation, integration or exclusion staged by the protocols of "agreement." Through its voracious assimilation of

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discursive forms, the novel becomes a crucial vehicle for the construction and transmission of values across generations, and for the emergence of (competing) versions of history. The novel's contribution to nationhood is also examined by Dragoş Ivana, who looks at the ways in which the dissemination and revision of English models in early American writing allowed for the rehearsal, assessment and crystallization of forms of societal consensus and dissensus. The ethical and political effects of the act of reading turn out to be a predilect focus of our collection, as confirmed by Andreea Paris-Popa's meticulous scrutiny of the metafictional devices in Virginia Woolf's short stories, which project "transactional" modes of interpretation, actively creating textual and readerly identities. Cristina Chevereşan closes off the segment by once again shifting attention to contemporary fiction's critical capabilities in her study of the polarizing dimensions of the 'American dream' as depicted in Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*.

Finally, the volume's conclusion section brings to the fore the generic diversity and the multiplicity of transmission, approached through the discursive conventions of poetry, drama, science and translation. Octavian More reminds us of the points of contact between the poetic and the scientific via an analysis of Canadian astrophysicist and poet Rebecca Elson's sense of "awe" at the ecstatic and the rational experiences of the cosmos alike. Andreea Şerban and Dana Percec examine the production of ambiguous social ("third-")spaces through the propagation of magic in two Shakespearean plays. Magic's capacity to disturb hierarchies and the order of the world performs power relations, especially gendered identities, informed by the crisis in worldview that manifested itself at the end of the seventeenth century. Last, but not least, Ira Torresi discusses what is perhaps the prototypical mode of linguistic transmission and its hurdles, the work of translation, via its practitioners' framing of their profession through metaphors of purity and contamination. There is hardly a better way to end our collection than with such a reminder of the inevitable intrusion of the medium in the meaning-making process.

WORKS CITED

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Petronia POPA-PETRAR

Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
Email: petronia.petrar@ubbcluj.ro

Nóra SÉLLEI

Professor, Institute of English and American Studies
University of Debrecen
Email: sellei.nora@arts.unideb.hu