

INTRODUCTION

POST-NOVEL/POST-SEMIOTIC/POST-DISPOSITIF IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE. A WORLD-SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Many of the theoretical fundamentals developed for literary and cultural studies throughout the twentieth century have become less efficacious. In recent decades, scholars have, indeed, investigated the transformations of storytelling and cultural consumption in the digital age. However, this issue looks to further explore the future of literary and cultural studies from a world-systems perspective with a focus on the alterations of novelistic narratives in the larger context of the supplanting of liberal, humanistic, sense-making mechanisms by computational regimes of meaning. In this context, we would like to investigate 1) the decline of the category of the “novel” for long-form fiction, 2) interpretive methods grounded on semiotics, and 3) the claims for truth-formations through Michel Foucault’s notion of the apparatus/*dispositif*. Today we assume all long fictions are novels because of the way this form so adeptly housed and reconfigured liberalism’s divisions. The novel could promote public-oriented national imaginaries and fictions of manifest destinies while plumbing the depths of privatizing desire by listening for interior signals. As liberalism promoted the self-enacting individual as the bulwark against the tyranny of the majority, the novel promoted the corresponding ideals of autonomous authors’ unique genius and stylistic signatures. Such was the novel’s success and dominance of liberal print culture that it managed to marginalize other forms of narrative, making them residual (the epic), or pushing them into the social subordination of “genre,” understood as the realm of para-literature and pulp or lowbrow production. Yet, all the cultural languages that were once dominant lose their magnetic authority. The novel today, for instance, is now shaped by its nemesis through what is called the genre turn, wherein prestige writers adapt the para literature of supernatural, fantasy, and science-fiction as a form better equipped to register and respond to the current moment.



Similarly, those credentialized by the university to study liberal literature similarly begin to devote their intelligence to serious discussion of generic writing or new media forms, like television, comic books, and video games. The liberal apparatus buttressed its civilizational claims for gradual development by deploying mechanistic and deterministic science and frequentist statistics to argue that social complexity could be expressed in predictable laws that were easily visualizable. However, the new computational platforms, from Google's search query to new forms of artificial intelligence now depend on a different kind of mathematics, one called Bayesian probability, wherein the known input of frequentist statistics is not required, since these are replaced with an inferential probability of future occurrences based on past examples. Unlike frequentist statistics, Bayesian probability does not seek to create regularities but looks to dynamic optimization that aims at developing better, but not necessarily always correct results. The linguistic turn that motivated so much of the Humanities in the last 50 years, in its structuralist or poststructuralist guises, was based on the Saussurean binary claim that meaning is differential. Yet meaning today is not differential, but correlative, and the semiotic models have decreasing efficacy. Nowadays, we experience life in a "post-truth" society, not because of the appeal of relativizing claims about history and documentation, but because the academic institutions that authorized these statements have themselves become prey to the declining authority of liberalism's binary theoretical machinery. This issue aims to track the changes and substitutions in the semiotic regimes of the liberal apparatus, especially through the attempt to define a concept of the "irrealist" or "post" novel from a world-systems perspective, including the Romanian contemporary literary system and beyond.

The Issue's Interventions

In the opening article, Alex Ciorogar and Stephen Shapiro explore the transformations of authorship in the algorithmic age, investigating literary production from a world-systems perspective in the larger context of both posthumanism and computational regimes of meaning, questioning the interpretive methods grounded on semiotics and liberal theory. Lightly drawing on various theoretical frameworks, their intervention offers a swift but comprehensive and historicist framework for conceptually understanding authorship beyond the limits of both ethico-political autonomy and poststructuralist intertextuality. The overcoming of authorship describes a trans-individual, oscillatory, and eco-technological configuration of authorship shaped by affective systems, platform dynamics, and epistemological shifts located well beyond the confines of postmodernism.

In her study, "The Novel Goes Utopia: On Volodymyr Vynnychenko's *The Sun Machine*", Natalya Bekhta draws attention to the homogenizing tendency in (world-)literary theory, caused by its strong focus on the genre of the novel. She examines the limits and limitations of the novel in opposition to utopia. In particular, a discussion of Volodymyr Vynnychenko's bestselling "utopian novel" *The Sun Machine* (1928) and its critical reception draw out a host of critical-theoretical presuppositions related to the novel and questions of aesthetics, politics and narrative. Bekhta argues that the "unnovelistic" genre of utopia also invites a discussion of the semiotic method of reading (for) utopia and the problem of binary oppositions for literary theory more generally.

In "The Post-Communist Romanian Novel – Navigating the Political and Sociographic Dimensions", Iulia-Maria Vîrban argues that, in post-communist Romania a genre shift has occurred, particularly in the Romanian novel. The memorial and biographical forms, cantered around the figure of the author, increasingly dominate, she argues, marking a dissolution of traditional novelistic structures in favour of fragmented, introspective, and hybrid narratives. Vîrban further contends that these forms align with broader trends of precariousness and cultural commodification, mirroring the destabilising effects of the transition, dividing this shift into two phases pre-EU accession (post-communist novels adopting a historiographical approach to document systemic trauma in the works of Vasile Ernu, Lucian Dan Teodorovici, and Dan Lungu) and post-accession works, with narratives addressing economic disparities and minority identities (Tatiana Țîbuleac, Liliana Nechita, Adrian Schiop). Overall, Vîrban maintains, the dissolution of the Romanian novel into memorial and biographical forms symbolises a dual response: a critique of transitional instability, on the one hand, and a capitulation to Western frameworks of cultural consumption, on the other.

By instrumentalizing the concept of life writing, Mihai-Cătălin Popa examines, in "Realism Without Fillers: Life Writing and Literary Form in Radu Cosașu's *Supraviețuiri*", the way realism is constructed in Radu Cosașu's texts, arguing that both literary and non-literary texts could serve as social and political documents. This approach, Popa argues, not only offers a novel perspective on the construction of realism in Radu Cosașu's *Supraviețuiri* but also contributes to a deeper understanding of collective memory formation regarding communism in Romanian literature. In "Contemporary Romanian Historical Fiction as a Mediating Transistor of the Zemiperiphery", Alina Bako then argues that historical fiction, characterized by its ambivalence between political instrumentalization and fidelity to the real, emerges as a vector of transnational connectivity, translating (semi)peripheral narrative scenarios into the language of the global core. Post-1990 Romanian historical fiction, through its recourse to historical themes, emblematic figures, conflicts, and conquests functions as a neohermetic

channel of transculturation, liberating historical discourse from past ideological constraints and integrating it into the global networks of the publishing market. This process, Bako shows, is underpinned by an aesthetics of hyperconnectivity (Deckard, Niblett & Shapiro 2024), enabling the Romanian zemiperiphery to negotiate tensions between the local and the global.

In “The Case for Romanian Autofiction. Love & Anxiety in The Neoliberal World in Radu Vancu and Saşa Zare’s Novels”, Horaţiu Tohăţan argues that the so-called 2000s generation of Romanian writers developed an appetite for autofiction that exposed the questioning potentialities of self-narration towards the contemporary neoliberal status-quo. Specifically, he shows how two particular novels, Radu Vancu’s *Transparenţa* (Transparency) and Saşa Zare’s *Dezrădăcinare* (Uprooting), engage in polemics regarding the way in which individuality, memory and trauma are revisited through autofiction, using metadiscourse, autobiography, and fictive discourse. Tohăţan examines how sensibility, eroticism, and anxiety are handled in an introverted way, where the decentralization of self is dealt with maximalist strategies, while also highlighting autofictional innovations portraying extrovert characteristics, where the self and queer eroticism are expressed towards an integrated communitarian audience.

Amalia Cotoi, in “Cultural Trauma and Contemporary Women’s Writing. The Case of Saşa Zare’s Somatic Scriptotherapy”, examines the conceptualization of cultural trauma and its representation in Saşa Zare’s contemporary women’s writing (*Dezrădăcinare* [Uprooting]) (2022), while also addressing the emergence of a new genre informed by these concerns. Her aim is threefold: first, Cotoi analyses the contested concept of cultural trauma and its relationship to both clinical studies and women’s writing. Second, she extends Suzette A. Henke’s notion of “scriptotherapy” into somatic scriptotherapy and investigates the emergence of a new genre within contemporary women’s literature. Third, her paper explores the cultural and traumatic representations of motherhood, alongside the somatic dynamics of the mother–daughter relationship in *Dezrădăcinare* by Saşa Zare. Cotoi demonstrates that the expansion of writing into the exploration of traumatic stressors and processes of individual transformation requires a broader conceptualization of trauma, such as that advanced by theories of cultural trauma. She also reveals that the interrelation of procedural memory, therapeutic reenactment, and traumatic outcomes in contemporary women’s writing.

Bogdan Vişan and Ioana Danilescu, in “Platformising Storytelling: Short Fiction, Neoliberal Immediacy, and Twitch Streaming in Romania”, argue that, in light of the neoliberal ascent of platform capitalism, storytelling is undergoing an unmatched metamorphosis in semi-peripheral cultures. They examine both literary and cultural transformations by situating a particular case study within the ideological framework of neoliberal capitalism as it manifests on streaming

platforms. Their aim is three-fold: first, they analyze the interrelationship between the literary and platform-based content; second, they investigate the revitalization of the short story genre through participatory digital practices in the context of the prevalent trend of creative writing workshops in Romania; and, finally, they assess the immediacy-driven nature of post-millennial storytelling and its broader ideological implications.

Maria Bojan's article, "Hydrocolonial Memory, Gendered Trauma and Queer Erasure in Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia*", foregrounds post-liberal critical positions by prioritizing affect, materiality, and embodied memory over representational paradigms. She argues that Koleka Putuma's *Collective Amnesia* explores the complex intersections of memory, identity, and trauma within the socio-political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. Through the lenses of hydrocolonialism, ecofeminism, and postmemory, her study examines how Putuma challenges dominant narratives of race, gender, and sexuality, revealing the fluidity of identity and the persistence of historical trauma across generations. By moving beyond traditional semiotic readings and instead emphasizing embodied, affective, and ecological dimensions of trauma and resistance, Bojan's analysis not only highlights Putuma's poetic activism as a powerful call for visibility, resistance, and healing, but also affirms the necessity of reading contemporary literature through critical frameworks that exceed representational politics.

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