

Introduction

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The aim of this special issue is to explore interdisciplinary dialogues between cultures, languages, and literatures from theoretical, methodological, and thematic perspectives. Susan Petrilli¹ argues that “the acquisition of knowledge implies the capacity to establish links and connections in translational, interpretive processes” (Petrilli 2015: 98). The interdisciplinary essays in this collection exemplify this principle. They demonstrate that cultures, languages and literatures are complex and dynamic systems. The presence/existence of the “links and connections” identified by Petrilli is evident throughout this collection. Most of the essays have their basis in the analysis of written verbal texts. The texts comprise a broad spectrum that includes high literature (narrative fiction and poetry), popular literary genres (memoir, fantasy, myth and science fiction) and popular non-fiction (cookbooks). In their interdisciplinary approaches the essays demonstrate the intersections of these diverse literary and extra-literary genres with a large variety of other disciplinary knowledges, discourses and practices including science, medicine, history, philosophy, cultural studies, art theory, film, gardening, therapy, journalism, political treatises, postcolonial studies, environmental criticism and theology.

In bridging the gap between apparently divergent disciplines, practices and discourses the essays suggest that interdisciplinarity is a transgressive and generously productive practice. The proliferating ‘connections’ that Petrilli identifies in the quote above form links across disciplines, integrating disciplines and circulating new knowledge between disciplines. To mention just a

¹ Petrilli is summarising the work of Victoria Welby here.

few examples, Maria Micaela Coppola coins the term “psychiatric fictional pathography” to identify a new cross-disciplinary narrative sub-genre which describes the experience of mental illness. Greta Perletti traces parallel discourses of the visibility and representability of the tubercular body in medical science and nineteenth-century literature. Francesca Di Blasio demonstrates that Australian Aboriginal life stories bring history and narrative into proximity to produce new ways of reading what she identifies as “counter-histories”. A similar argument is evident in essays that identify the centrality of language to transcultural world-making such as Laura Giovannelli’s and Eleonora Ravizza’s discussions of literary texts from authors of Caribbean heritage. These last three essays explore how political and historical knowledge are integrated into literary narration.

Many of the other essays in this collection also allude to debates about nationalism, localism and globalisation. They explore the effects of the expanding mobility and migration which characterise the contemporary world, and the concomitant radical diversification of the socio-economic, cultural, religious and linguistic profiles of migrants and their human capital, migration histories, civil status and diasporic networks. This paradigmatic intensification of diversity has been termed ‘superdiversity’ by the theorist Steven Vertovec (2007). In order to accommodate this superdiversity, scholarly knowledge production has developed a renewed interest in and commitment to interdisciplinary approaches. In his essay in this collection, for example, Esterino Adami maps the supermobility of Indian food discourse across colonial and national histories in an elegant integrative interdisciplinary methodology, and Angelo Monaco traces language migration and translingualism in the “porous frontiers” of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Italian writing. Milagro Martín Clavijo picks up the theme of translingualism and generic cross-pollination in her essay on Annie Vivanti.

The idea of the scene of ‘contact’ is diversified throughout many of the essays in their investigations of intertextuality, textual adaptation, translation and the reception of cultural texts. Sabrina Francesconi and Francesca Bianchi and Sara Gesuato investigate the dialogues opened up across genres in the adaptation of literary texts to film. In Silvia Antosa’s discussion of interactions between writers/performers and their audiences, questions of ethical engagement

come to the fore, and in her essay Sole Alba Zollo theorises reading as agentic and participatory. Annalisa Bonomo analyses fantasy as a capacious genre for accommodating interdisciplinarity.

Across Cultures, Languages, and Literatures is a response to the idea that innovative and integrative scholarly practices are required for us to make sense of the globalised ‘superdiversity’ of the contemporary world. These practices include macro-accounts of diversity which address sites of commonality and identify provisional universalities, as well as micro-accounts which investigate localised specificities and difference. David Hass has said that “the language of any one discipline is a product of many other languages or discourses” (Hass 2003: 7). The essays that this collection showcases draw upon a broad range of disciplinary expertise and knowledge in their efforts to mine the many incidents of interrelatedness and resonance within that complex and variegated field.

In his essay Esterino Adami analyses the ways in which Indian food discourse mirrors multifaceted dynamics of belonging, migration and change. Food, he argues, has the ability to negotiate, discover and translate identity. Using an interdisciplinary approach that draws on cultural studies, postcolonial theory and linguistics, Adami discusses culinary memoirs, cookbooks and narrative fiction, referring to literary works by British, Indian and diasporic writers (such as William Thackeray, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Bannerjee and Anita Nair). He analyses the ways in which food discourse contributes to national and migratory identities and to debates about localism and globalisation. He looks at the ways in which Indian food has become an integral part, for example, of English culture, but also argues that within India traditions around food are not static but characterised by adaption and revision. He looks at the movement both within and beyond India of recipes across caste, language and ethnic boundaries. Languages and customs are intertwined, he argues, to generate (in)authentic and hybridised traditions. Literary representations of food and the consumption of food, he suggests, depict the cementing of bonds between subjects and their homelands; they also depict how the process of cultural transformation unlocks new identities.

Laura Giovannelli’s essay examines the intersection of literature, (post)colonial history, botany and horticulture in the Caribbean-American author, Jamaica Kincaid’s, *My Garden (Book)* (1999). This

book investigates the conceptual, aesthetic and productive functions of gardens, demonstrating the many agencies of gardens in the diverse domains of scientific and medical research, environmental issues, food production and physical and psychological healing. For Kincaid, her garden is a landscape imbued with story-telling; it is an “exercise in memory” (Kincaid [1999] 2001: 7f) and identity (re)construction. Retracing her attempts to grow a garden in Vermont, Kincaid meditates on the various aspects of history: colonialism, ancestral heritage, the exploitation and domestication of otherness. She excavates a triangular route between North America, the Antilles and the British Imperial centre. Kincaid comments that “you could write a history of an empire through plants” (interview with Balutansky 2002: 793). Giovannelli argues that the text’s cross-references, digressions, asides and paratactic syntax explore the terrain of “unconnected contiguity”. Kincaid’s book, she suggests, poses key questions about place and identity, transnational capitalism, the transplantation of New-World flora and the transmigration/dispossession of ethnic groups.

Francesca Di Blasio’s essay is also concerned with the work of literature in a postcolonial context. It addresses the intersections and reciprocal interactions between literature and history with reference to two Australian Aboriginal life-writing texts, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996) by Doris Pilkington/Nugi Garimara and *Auntie Rita* (1994) by Rita Huggins and Jackie Huggins. Borrowing from Barbara Foley’s discussion of “documentary novels” (Foley 1986: 24f), Di Blasio explores the border between fictional discourse and (auto) biographical narrative, on the one hand, and factual discourse, on the other, to suggest that this border is porous. She argues that both texts can be regarded simultaneously as life writing and re-tellings of Australian (post)colonial history. As literary narration, these texts foster empathy and emotional understanding and, in the contact zone between literature and history, they integrate historical and political knowledge to produce a distinctive memorial awareness of the past. Di Blasio’s analysis deals with the instability of the history *versus* narration binary, pointing out the proximity of history to narration and the fact that the texts by Pilkington Garimara and Huggins and Huggins make of history a (non-univocal) story and a counter-history; these literary micro-histories in effect re-narrate the *grand récit* of macro-history.

Maria Micaela Coppola's essay continues the focus on literature. It examines how fictional narratives can be used as tools to gain insight into Alzheimer's disease. In her discussion of two novels, Lisa Genova's *Still Alice* (2007) and Samantha Harvey's *The Wilderness* (2009), borrowing from Anne Hunsaker Hawkins (1999), she proposes the term "psychiatric fictional pathography" to name fictive accounts that describe the effects mental disease has on patients, witnesses, and ultimately readers. Coppola defines "psychiatric fictional pathographies" as "artefactual narrative accounts of mental disorders, which provide persuasive representations of the mental patterns of those who suffer from psychiatric illnesses". She analyses the very different styles of these two novels, how *The Wilderness* re-creates the functioning of the Alzheimer's brain while *Still Alice* uses language that is empirical and logico-scientific. She analyses convergences between the scientific project of understanding Alzheimer's and the literary one, suggesting that the Alzheimer's brain is ultimately as unintelligible to scientists and physicians, as to laypeople and writers. For this reason, an interdisciplinary approach, borrowing from medicine, neuroscience and literature, could provide insight into people suffering from Alzheimer's.

In her essay, Sabrina Francesconi examines *Edge of Madness* (2002) by Anne Wheeler, a film adaptation of Alice Munro's short story "A Wilderness Station". She mobilises a socio-semiotic multimodal analysis of the film to examine the intertextual contact zone between the adapted text and the adaptation. Her analysis focuses on the semiotic function of the close-up, arguing that close-ups of the female protagonist, Annie's, face establish intimate social distance among interactive participants, and trigger shifts from present and past narrative strands. The narrative of both texts focuses on the putative murder of her husband by the female protagonist. In Munro's story, Annie is defined as insane by the doctor and the reverend, who are both representative of discursive authorities. Munro's autobiographical writing has indicated that the kernel of the short story is based on a real incident in Munro's paternal family history. Francesconi argues that, in the film, Wheeler's pervasive and emphatic close-ups invite us to approach, listen to, and feel with the female protagonist. Through a multimodally-shaped intimate social distance, spectators are able

to understand and deconstruct the ideological label of madness attached to women in South-Western Ontario's pioneering nineteenth-century past.

In their essay, Francesca Bianchi and Sara Gesuato also analyse filmic adaptations of a literary text. They discuss the dialogues of two of the best-known screen adaptations of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, namely the films directed by Robert Z. Leonard (in 1940) and by Joe Wright (2005). The subtitles of both films are analysed for their lexico-semantic make-up in an auto-semantic tagging methodology and a corpus-informed approach. The automatic extraction of key domains is followed by a close reading of the data. The goal is to see if this bottom-up, evidence-based approach and the quantitative analysis of data accord with the more conventional qualitative analyses of films which focus on content, style and structure. Literary scholars have argued that the novel shows how individuals' desires are constrained (and enabled) within society's conventions. The results of the linguistic analysis indicate that, while reflecting the core themes of the novel, the two films are characterised by different approaches, with different weight being given to the shared themes. The results corroborate the findings of qualitative analyses of the films.

Sole Alba Zollo, in her essay, analyses the trajectory of the reception of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1989). This essay undertakes a reading, informed by discourse analysis, of Vernon Lee's review in *The North American Review* (1902) of Gilman's book. In addressing the conversational features of stance and engagement in Lee's review, Zollo demonstrates how Vernon Lee in effect 'converses' with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in a metaphorical cross-cultural dialogue. Zollo unpacks Vernon Lee's engagement with 'The Woman Question' which, she explains, was strictly linked, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the socio-economic-political context. Lee herself was a cosmopolitan writer, born in France, living in Italy and visiting Britain regularly. She wrote in many genres. Borrowing from the model of interaction developed by Hyland (2005) and others, Zollo explores how Lee interacts specifically with her British readers. By theorising both the author and her readers as social actors, Zollo defines them as "agentive forces" who are invited to be "participants" in Lee's analysis of the important ideas and arguments that Gilman

prosecutes. By analysing the interactive qualities of Lee's language, Zollo concludes with the suggestion that Lee's review convenes a dialogue between Vernon and Gilman and a 'trialogue' between Lee, her readers and Gilman's readers.

Annalisa Bonomo reads the ways in which Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* combines scientific discourse and theological references with myth and fantasy to produce a unique mode of literary intertextuality and interdisciplinarity. In her essay she argues that intertextual space is not nominally of the 'real world' and therefore provides a 'safer' space for cultural work. Myth, she argues, allows for "a pragmatic mode of thought" and is thus a valuable forum for the discussion of moral and social themes, with Pullman's fiction exploring issues of religion, gender, race, identity and justice. Fantasy literature, she argues, is a 'contact zone' comprised of intersections, adaptations and liminal zones where the literary, mythic, philosophical, scientific and theological intertwine. While the central theme of the trilogy, drawing on the Bible and John Milton's work, is childhood and its 'balance' of innocence and experience, the fiction destabilises the conventional stereotypes of adulthood *vs* childhood and personal freedom *vs* prohibited knowledge. The fiction is essentially a "secular humanist fantasy" (Hatlen 2005: 76) although it has also been described as "a scientific-theological parable" (Johnson 2005: 79).

Jhumpa Lahiri is a major contemporary author of Indian origin writing in English, whose work investigates issues of diasporic identity, belonging and the everyday lives of Bengali expatriates in the United States. Angelo Monaco's essay focuses on her Italian writing and its "translingual journey", arguing that this writing offers instances of resilience and "renewed sense of self". He argues that Lahiri's translingual writing is a means of "compensating for identity disintegration". Drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, Monaco argues that translingualism and the "lack of a fixed identity" prove to be a "reparative" resource which allows the subject to inhabit simultaneously the "irreconcilable" zones of belonging and not belonging. He suggests that language migration constitutes a "potentiality rather than loss", leading to the creation of the subject. He defines Lahiri's first Italian book, *In altre parole* (2015) as autofiction and "self-begetting fiction" that indicates a shift

from fictional realism to a new poetics of abstraction, in spite of its autobiographical content. He also identifies this shift to abstraction in her first Italian novel, *Dove mi trovo* (2018), where, he argues, it epitomises “dwelling in transience”.

Milagro Martín Clavijo examines the work of Annie Vivanti, a multicultural and multilingual writer (1866-1842), who was born in England to an Italian father and a German mother, and grew up in Switzerland, England, the United States and Italy. A poet, fiction writer, travel writer, children’s writer, dramatist, journalist and political activist, she wrote in several languages (predominantly in English and Italian). Clavijo focuses on the novel *Naja Tripudians* (1920) which is written in Italian and set in post-World-War-One England, examining the ways in which the novel straddles the high literature/popular literature divide. She is interested in how the novel incorporates and refers to various pressing political and social issues which dominated the media at this time, namely drugs, leprosy and child prostitution. *Naja Tripudians* represents a convergence between Vivanti’s journalism and her literary writing. Clavijo surveys other high literary texts (in English) on these topics and refers to their popularity in cinema and the non-fiction writing of this period, situating *Naja Tripudians* in its historical and cultural contexts.

In her essay, Greta Perletti analyses figures of consumptives in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and Walter Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits* (1887-1893) to suggest how diaphanous bodies in these literary texts converge with medical science’s representation of consumptive bodies and its turn to the visual. The latter’s claims to render the body transparent resonate, Perletti suggests, with the transparent-like representation that is typical of the realist project of fiction. However, Perletti also argues that in Eliot’s novel the depiction of diaphanous bodies has the potential to problematise realism. The consumptive bodies of scientific discourse turn into diaphanous types in Eliot’s and Pater’s texts which partake in a “tubercular aesthetics” (Byrne 2011: 96ff). These two writers share the belief that receptivity has an aesthetical as well as ethical function. Transparency in these literary texts and the concomitant self-effacement it evokes are seen to lead to receptivity and sympathetic understanding. However, both Pater and Eliot evince ambiguity in their literary portraits of “the vanishing self”

that also emerges as a form of weakness and renunciation of life and agency.

Eleonora Ravizza's essay adopts a Deleuzian methodology to analyse the transcultural imagination in African-Caribbean literary and cultural space which is marked by colonisation, slavery and exploitation. She notes the significant impact of Deleuze and Guattari on various Caribbean thinkers and writers such as Edouard Glissant and Wilson Harris. The essay examines how Caribbean theorists, writers and artists refashion ideas of difference and otherness and embrace a pragmatics of identity which is dialogical and dialectical. Taking her inspiration from Edward Kamau Braithwaite's poetry, Ravizza analyses the centrality of language to transcultural world-making, arguing that rupture and conversion begin in language. While language has been a site of domination, it is also one in which otherness can be mobilised and resemanticised. She analyses the literary use of the figure of Ananse, the little spider god, as an expression of transcultural imagination, which epitomises resistance and resilience and discusses the "possibility of sharing" that arises from the histories produced by the "triangular trade" in slaves which connects Africa to Europe and the Americas.

Silvia Antosa, in her essay, focuses on the British contemporary versatile writer and performer Kate Tempest, who has published poetry, plays, fiction and musical albums. In this article, Antosa restricts her attention to Tempest's postmodern epic poem *Brand New Ancients* (2013) that draws its inspiration from the Homeric epics. Antosa's discussion focuses on the performative aspects of the poetry. She analyses the triangular relationship between written and/or performed text, the role of the author and/as performer, and the traditional function of the (reading) audience. In doing so she addresses the issues of authorship, ethical responsibility, textual plurality and reception. Tempest's innovative borrowing from and contemporary reshaping of the Homeric orality tradition, and her situation of her epic in the marginalised lower-socio-economic community of south-east London allows her to excavate the violent impact of class and gender hierarchies on this community. People, Tempest suggests, like the Homeric gods, are beings struggling to find meaning in their lives, and Antosa argues that Tempest elicits empathy for the characters' imperfect lives.

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