

‘Make It New’ Once Again: Experimental Trends in 21st-century Poetry in English

One hundred years ago T. S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, the acme of High Modernism (alongside Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* and, for fiction, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*), in which the poet articulated his response to post-WW1 disillusionment. Five years before the appearance of Eliot’s ‘long poem’, Ezra Pound had begun serializing the *Cantos* in *Poetry*, an epic *magnum opus* which took him half a century to complete and cast a long shadow across the best of postmodern(ist) poetry, such as William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson* (1946), ‘a hodgepodge, the American version of Pound’s more famous “ragbag”’, Charles Olson’s own epic project of the *Maximus Poems* (1950-1970), and, more generally, much of the experimental poetic output of the second half of the 20th century that still owed its aesthetic principles, however distantly, to an ‘ideogrammic’ method of composition (Laszlo K. Gefin).

Fast forward to our contemporary epoch and the (broadly defined) ethno-ethical – including in the sense of a localism, or *ethos* – and political re-anchoring of much post-WW2 (especially North American) poetry, in the wake of (*inter alia*) Olson’s epoch-making castigation of the moral failure of Poundian aesthetics, but also ethnopoetics *à la* Jerome Rothenberg which emphasized connections between human activity and the environment that produces it, continues to leave its imprint on some of the latest poetic agendas. Witness trends such as ‘poetry and the environment’ (Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver), ‘nature poetry’, or a renewed tradition of ‘ecopoetics’ which, for Lynn Keller in *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene*, designates contemporary poets’ ample movement of bringing together humans, nature, culture, and the nonhuman world. From the turn of the millennium onwards, we can speak, still with Keller, of a ‘self-conscious Anthropocene’ as the ‘period when people in the developed world, at least, are very conscious of the impact of humans and often anxiously so’. ‘Making poetry’ (*poein*) is no stranger to this engagement.

In 1922, at the heart of the modern breakthrough, humanities were still dominant in the scientific paradigm. One century later, humanities have lost their privileged position in the public sphere of knowledge and the dominant scientific discourses at the turn of the millennium are those of cosmology, on the one hand, and neurosciences, on the other. Contemporary poets have allowed their art(s) to be pervaded by these sciences of the brain and of the cosmos; also, neuroscientists openly admit that the production of meaning in the brain follows a metaphorical procedure (Vicky T. Lai) and that the history of neuroscience is the history of the production

of such cognitive metaphors (Matthew Cobb). Therefore, the ‘metaphorical brain’ (Seana Coulson, Vicky T. Lai) proves to be essential for the understanding of how the contemporary *Zeitgeist* works, and some contemporary poets have made its mapping the very goal of their writing.

In what concerns physics, after the already classic 1982 book by Roger S. Jones, *Physics as Metaphor*, the contiguities of cosmological thinking in contemporary physics with the ‘metaphorical brain’ have been ever more explored and found to be central to the explanations of the production of physical models; Hanna Pulaczewska has demonstrated how ‘the aspects of metaphors in physics’ produce concrete knowledge, while Corni, Fuchs and Dumont have shown how physics are a reticular construction of ‘conceptual metaphors’. Moreover, there exists in contemporary poetry a lineage of poets fascinated with this metaphorical proposal of cosmological models, and their writing is a manifest exploration of such models and such metaphorical-physical worlds. The current issue of *Word and Text* is interested in observing how humanities and, *suum cuique*, poetical practice respond to this blending of cognitive poetics and physical cosmology.

The turn of the millennium has also witnessed a re-enchanting of the world, a *Wiederverzauberung der Welt*, if we are to echo Max Weber’s famous phrase from his Munich conference about the experience of modernity as an *Entzauberung der Welt*. Poetry reacts and responds to these new pulsions of the sacred made visible in the social body. The private body (as the siege of this sacred pulsion) also reacts to this re-enchanted world; we are interested in mapping these reactions, in charting the responses poetry has towards this new type of sacred (where the former transcendental pulsion geminates with information coming from politics, cosmology, physics, neurosciences, genetics, etc.) Also, the works of post-confessional poets (Olena Kalytiak Davis, Terrance Hayes, Meg Freitag, etc.) can be read as a direct response to this new re-enchanting of the world – their poetry documents how the self reacts when its synthesis has to take place in a such a context.

Over the last three decades, the world has also turned posthuman, while a thinker like Mark Greif reads contemporary literature as pertaining to ‘the age of the crisis of man’. Poetry has naturally reacted also to this posthumanization of the world, which has altered everything, from the relation with our own technological body (and with the disease) to the relation with the world, where feelings of alienation and of (gnostic) exile into the world are experienced even by people who have never experienced exile itself. The ongoing recreation of the linguistic Babel adds to this feeling of alienation; poetry tends thus to become transnational and plurilingual, mirroring the translanguistic and transnational texture of the globalised world.

The aim of this special issue of *Word and Text*, whose title echoes a previous issue on “‘Keep It New’: Recent Trends in Experimental Fiction in English’ (1. 2014), is to offer a comparable roadmap of some of those more recent territories towards which poetry and poetics have been gravitating, a full century after *The Waste Land*. Taking into account that, as Julia Jordan and Laurent Milesi stated in “‘Keep It New’: A (Re-)Introduction’, ‘[t]he experimental [...] has connotations of risk, excitement, innovation, and aesthetic progressiveness, but it also frequently contains a knowledge of its own possible failure: an awareness that experiments by their nature might go badly wrong’, we invite contributions that investigate the self-consciousness of experimenting with new poetic departures, with the risk of erring and failure this might incur, in relation, but not limited, to the following set of possible topics:

- Poetry and ecocriticism / environmental studies / ecopoetics; nature as functional metaphor in poetry; climatic catastrophes / climatic representations of paradise in poetry (from ancient to modern and contemporary); climate semiotics and poetry; (anti)pastoral poetry; poetical representations of (historical) ecology; poetic intersections between the body and nature / the self and the planet;
- New subjects and approaches in the field of cognitive literary studies and cognitive poetics; metaphors and metaphorology in cognitive theories (from neurosciences to cosmology and to experimental psychology);
- New poetry and pulsions of the sacred; poetry and the representations of the *Entzauberung der Welt* in modernity; poetry and the representations of *Civitas Dei* / City of God / City of Destruction; poetry and the *paradiso terrestre* / poetry and social protest; poets as technicians of the sacred;
- Poetry and the body; corporeal metaphors / corporeal representations in poetry; poetry and the representations of health / of the disease; poetry and epidemics (plague, etc.); poetry as soteriology / poetry as (self-)destruction;
- Poetry and social habitations; poetry and the city / poetry and the rural; urbanization metaphors and representations; modern poetry and the modern city; poetry and the *ville tentaculaire*; the end of the city / the end of time in modern/postmodern poetry; post-apocalyptic landscapes in poetry;
- The confessional / post-confessional in poetry; poetry and the synthesis of the self; poetry between the human and the posthuman; poetical representations of normative / counter-normative identities;

- New poetry of exile; representations of alienation and of deprivation in poetry; linguistic identity / linguistic alterity in poetry; translinguistic / transnational poetry; verbal personae in poetry; poetry and verbal self-camouflage / self-revelation; poetries of historical and contemporary diasporas.

We welcome interdisciplinary approaches, ranging across critical theory, literary and cultural studies, linguistics, as well as other disciplines in the humanities and the sciences. Contributors are advised to follow the journal's submission guidelines and stylesheet, which can be downloaded from the journal's website at <http://jls1.upg-ploiesti.ro/>. The deadline for abstract submission is 30 December 2021. Please send 500-word proposals, alongside a short (max. 10-line) biographical note, to the journal editors, who will answer any queries you may have. Articles selected for publication must be submitted by 30 April 2022. All submitted articles will be blind-refereed except when invited. Accepted articles will be returned for post-review revisions by 30 June 2022 and will be expected back in their final form by 30 September 2022 at the latest.

Proposals and articles should be sent as attachments to the journal's editors (anionescu@sjtu.edu.cn and milesi@sjtu.edu.cn) as well as to this special issue's guest editor (rvancu@gmail.com).