

TRANSCULTURAL WRITERS AND NOVELS IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL MOBILITY
BY ARIANNA DAGINO

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In *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*, Arianna Dagnino argues that literature in the 21st century challenges us to re-think what we understand by it. Dagnino posits that the neonomadic patterns of global mobility produce a new species of transcultural writers by means of creative transpatriation, a transcultural and translingual identity formation. Through fictionalized narrative accounts of her own actual encounters with the authors Ilija Trojanow, Brian Castro, Inez Baranay and Alberto Manguel, the first half of Dagnino's monograph introduces four paradigmatic examples of such transcultural writers, while a fifth interview with Tim Parks is fragmentarily dispersed over the whole study. In its second half, the analysis discusses its epistemology by exploring the five self-coined concepts neonomadism, transculture/ality, transcultural literature, creative transpatriation, transcultural writers and transcultural novels. As a result, one gets a meticulous introduction into the background discussions of Dagnino's conceptual derivations.

The proposed research merit of the inquiry is to reread the current debate on World Literature(s) from the notional angle of the transcultural. The transcultural has an implied emphasis on the confluent nature of cultures. Therefore, it represents a conceptual overcoming of the limits pertaining to previous discourses of postcolonial and multicultural literatures. Due to their ideological adherence to notions of difference, those were not able to transcend essential binaries. By contrast, the transcultural offers a 'set of critical tools and vocabularies' with which to paraphrase a dialogic encounter with the Other in which difference is replaced with the notion of interference (8). Accordingly, Dagnino considers transcultural literature the conceptually 'youngest representative of the literatures of mobility', precisely those literatures 'which are affected and shaped by migratory flows' in general (145). Dagnino seconds the criticism that world literature in scholarship oftentimes is 'presented as a juxtaposition of national literatures' (8). Instead, she argues for what she calls a transcultural comparativism (8).

Dagnino's study is an attempt at rethinking cultural critique in the 21st century. In that, it is comparable to Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone* (2006). However, whilst Apter emphasizes the significance of translation when calling for a *New Comparative Literature*, Dagnino singles out neonomadism as a conceptual prism through which to analyze present literary production. She uses neonomadism as an extrapolation from the original nomadism after Deleuze/Guattari applied on the potentialities of physical and virtual mobility characteristic for the neonomadic turn in the 21st century, as observed by D'Andrea. According to Dagnino, the nomad in and of her/himself is an individual representation of a societal elite with the necessary capital and 'slow time' to indulge in personally transformative travels. In her book, Dagnino singles out the primacy of literary writers. In order to accommodate this specification, she creates the neologism transculture/ality: it enables a distinct understanding of the transcultural as both a 'new conceptualization of culture' and 'a mode of identity building', as it notionally encloses transculturality (Welsch) and transculture (Epstein) (127).

With this emphasis on authors, Dagnino intends to fill a gap in World Literature(s) research, which she considers to be narrowly focused on literary texts and their circulations (Damrosch) (149–150). Dagnino argues that analyzing the 'cultural attitudes and dispositions

of transcultural authors while writing their imaginative texts', allows for a definite study of transcultural fiction, while 'specific stylistic solutions can obviously belong to a range of different literary genres, subgenres, and approaches' (5). In doing so, she resurrects the author as a preliminary presence to the text: whereas the legacy of poststructuralism complicates 'aiming to capture and convey any absolute truth of another person—or even of ourselves', she suggests, 'at least we can show how even "facts" are being created, that is, through what kind of psychological and imaginary processes' (94). Accordingly, she locates her analysis in a visceral discourse on the author being, quasi literally, alive. As a result, creative transpatriation not only is a 'psychological threshold' to acquiring a 'transcultural sensibility' (156). It also requires a 'physical, effective immersion in cultures, languages and geographies of the Other' (158). In general, creative transpatriation is foregrounded as a self-induced diasporic or exilic state by conscious choice, resulting in a creative gain: 'We might even expect that other writers could become interested in experimenting with the transcultural by consciously transpatriating themselves in order to use this form of cultural *depaisement* as a potentially creative tool' (157).

Through its choice of a new materialist discourse, Dagnino's monograph doubtlessly stands out. However, it may have been consistent then, to go for the authors at all: one single chapter is conceded to the analysis of transcultural novels; paradoxically to the overall refutation of postmodernist discourse, their textual analysis largely resorts to notions such as 'narrative unreliability' and 'fuzziness'. By contrast, the method which Dagnino proposes for paraphrasing the authors' transcultural identity formations is so invigorating that it could have deserved an exclusive emphasis: as creative non-fictions, the interviews are set in an imaginary Istanbul as a site of cultural confluence. While their content mostly is rendered truthfully, individual details of the meetings between first-person narrator 'Arianna Dagnino' and the authors' literary selves are fictionalized. By interspersing the narratives with excerpts from her own travel diaries, they further reflect on her positionality, both as the narrator within the semi-fictions and as the scholar behind the overall study. Accordingly, the creative part of her analysis destabilizes socio-anthropological methodologies of qualitative data collection and participatory observation.

Two questions were left open: firstly, while race and class are amply referred to in this analysis of transcultural writers as a travel elite, gender curiously is left out of the conceptual equation. This surprises, especially if one considers that the study outspokenly works with visceral metaphors in constructing its argument. Can an analysis relying in discourse on the materiality of bodies entirely overlook their gender? While female corporeality is invoked as an image, when 'Dagnino' meets with 'Inez Baranay' in a Turkish bath, a potential complication of gender finishes with the evocation of a homosocial intimacy (62). Gender does play a conspicuous role in postcolonial representations of female experiences of (im)migration. Does it have no relevance at all, when it comes to the creative transpatriation of neonomadic writers and their fiction?

The second question concerns the study's positive reduction of transpatriation. Dagnino seconds that 'forced displacement is too serious to be metaphorized as a new ideal' (112). However, as an inquiry on the social reality behind literature production explicitly focused on the 21st century, does this limitation need revision in 2017? After the so-called refugee crisis since 2015 and the parallel rise of populism in Europe and North-America, we may have to ask ourselves in how far, in defining transcultural literature in the future, we necessarily have to accommodate the difference between (im)migrant writers who were dislocated either by choice or by force? Having to face this question obviously is not the problem of the inquiry: who would have expected that a study, as carefully thought-out as to choose an Istanbul 'driven towards a roughly European future' (89) as the foil on which to unfold an investigation on transculturality in 2015, would need to differentiate this choice

only two years later? Quite on the contrary, one may conclude that because of recent history, Dagnino's suggestion that 'transculturality can offer a profound and responsible approach to cultural encounters and their inevitable tensions' (147), makes the monograph indeed a pertinent intervention now. Overall, it is to be hoped that this multiply enriching study stimulates further discussion on how to read and research World Literature taking into account the political issues raised by global mobility. As such, it should call for the attention of any scholar interested in advancing cultural critique in the second decade of the 21st century.