

David Rudrum, Ridvan Askin, and Frida Beckman. *New Directions in Philosophy and Literature*. Edinburgh University Press 2019. 496 pp. \$195.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781474449144).

The contemporary academic world offers many heterogeneous *Gestalten* through which it is possible to design histories of the theoretical and practical intersections between literature and philosophy. So, some scholars will write their histories according to syntagmatic forms as ‘Philosophy of Literature,’ others to ‘Literary Philosophy,’ and others even to ‘Metaphysical Literature’ or ‘Philosophical Literature’; each essentially pointing to an idea of literature as an object of philosophy and philosophy as a possible thematic object of literary elaboration. *New Directions in Philosophy and Literature*, edited by David Rudrum, Ridvan Askin, and Frida Beckman, decidedly contributes to a reevaluation of the traditional conceptual intersections between literature and philosophy intended by these syntagms.

Through diverse subtle forms, these three *Gestalten* frequently are associated with two fundamental questions. If philosophy claims to interpret literature, it will be necessary to produce a ‘scheme’ that can be a relational hinge between literary and philosophical languages. Therefore, some philosophers assume or argue that philosophy cannot be reduced to literature to ponder it better philosophically. Furthermore, if literature claims to teach us something, which would presuppose a central role for truth, it will be a philosophical content for literature. On the contrary, those who appraise it beyond mere contingent cognitive benefits will not pursue veiled philosophical meaning among literary pages. Neither do they require that writers dress up these intentional philosophical contents into literary robes. So, the long philosophical and literary traditions ever presuppose heated polemics on the nature of knowledge and art.

New Directions in Philosophy and Literature holds that it is theoretically fruitful to transcend that canonical, hermetic classification of literature, on the one hand, and philosophy, on the other. To do that, the cultural horizon assumed by the book is that of the past, the meanwhile, and the aftermath of postmodernity. So, the book does not disguise, but, on the contrary, defends its elective affinities. Like Franz Kafka, according to J. L. Borges, *New Directions* creates its precursors. This book aims to break the hierarchies involved in the above syntagmatic forms of tradition, pretending to be an alternative to analytic, gender, cognitive, and narratological approaches to literature. Therefore, unlike what happens in the Anglo-Saxon canonical philosophical traditions, the chosen precursors do not engage with debates that presuppose no prior certainty about the cognitive potential of literature. So, *New Directions* defends the significant role of literature in our comprehension of the contemporary world. That is the main aim of the book. In this sense, those who expect a mere book on ‘Philosophy of Literature’ will be disappointed and will probably question their assumptions.

The long (almost five hundred pages) book consists of twenty-three chapters organized in six parts or sections with no obvious thematic connections. So, in some way, every part of this book is in its own right a book in itself. Because of the work’s length and the heterogenous thematics, every set of chapters has its own ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ which balances out the thematic jumps from one set of chapters to the others employing mild cross-references. The same could be said about Claire Colebrook’s General Introduction, ‘Opposition of the Faculties, Philosophy’s Literary Impossibility,’ because it is a thematic introduction with no specific connection with the following chapters, and in so doing be regarded as a chapter in its own right.

The first part, 'Beyond the Postmodern: Literature, Philosophy, and the Question of the Contemporary,' contains four chapters ('(n)' will indicate the chapters' numbers): (1) 'The Poly-modern Condition: A Report on the Cluelessness' by David Rudrum, (2) 'Metamodernism: Period, Structure of Feeling, and Cultural Logic – A Case Study of Contemporary Autofiction' by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen, (3) 'The End of Metafiction, or, The Romantic Time of Egan's *Goon Squad*' by Josh Toth, and (4) 'Virtually Human: Posthumanism and (Post-)Postmodern Cyberspace in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*' by Nicky Gardiner. Through different subtle ways, every chapter of this section engages with the idea that autofictions, metafiction, digital literature, and audio-visual fictions can 'depict' an entire epochal *ethos*. Characterizing the aftermath of postmodernity needs not merely to analyze philosophical discourses, but also literary works. According to the authors, postmodernity has come to an end, opening the way to new tendencies revealed by literature, as, for example, the contemporary tendency to cluelessness or the digital technological domain of big data.

The second part is related to the third and both with the fifth. 'Beyond the Subject: Posthuman and Nonhuman,' consists of four chapters too: (5) 'Hélène Cixous's *So Closer*: or, Moving Matters on the Subject' by Birgit Mara Kaiser, (6) 'Meillassoux, the Critique of Correlationism, and British Romanticism' by Evan Gottlieb, (7) 'Fictional Objects Fictional Subjects' by Graham Priest, and (8) 'On the Death of Meaning' by R. Scott Bakker. As thematically continuous as the previous one, the third part could constitute a unique book with part two. 'Beyond the Object: Reading Literature through Actor-Network Theory, Object-Oriented Philosophy, and the New Materialism' also has four chapters: (9) 'Neither Billiard Ball nor Planet B: Latour's Gaia, Literary Agency, and the Challenge of Writing Geohistory in the Anthropocene Moment' by Babette B. Tischleder, (10) 'Three Problems of Formalism: An Object-Oriented View' by Graham Harman, (11) 'A Field of Heteronyms and Homonyms: New Materialism, Speculative Fabulation, and Wor(l)ding' by Helen Palmer, and (12) 'Emerson's Speculative Pragmatism' by Ridvan Askin.

The contents of these two parts can be considered theoretical conditions to the fifth part's main points. 'Embodiment as Ethics: Literature and Life in the Anthropocene,' contains four chapters: (16) 'Living to Tell the Story: Characterisation, Narrative Perspective, and Ethics in Climate Crisis Flood Novels' by Astrid Bracke, (17) 'Contemporary Anthropocene Novels: Ian McEwan's *Solar*, Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*' by Robert P. Marzec, (18) 'The Day of the Dark Precursor: Philosophy, Fiction, and Fabulation at the End of the World – A Fictocritical Guide' by Charlie Blake (19) 'So to Speak' by Adrian Parr.

According to the authors, concern about the environment and global ecology does not seem adequately grasped by traditional philosophical 'narratives.' These narratives assume many forms of anthropocentrism, which, in turn, presupposes a static distinction between subject and object. In this sense, criticizing this distinction would be a theoretical condition for integrating the 'nonhuman others' into contemporary ethical human concerns. Part two calls into question the subjective side of such an equation, appealing to various philosophical and literary approaches; meanwhile, part three researches different apparitions of alternative forms of objectivity in literature. Focusing on the Anthropocene itself is the main task of the fifth part. Meanwhile, interpretations of literary works, such as *The Flood* by Maggie Gee or *Solar* by Ian McEwan, point out climate change, the last two chapters of this section put literature in the same hierarchical level of philosophy. The fictocriticism developed by Charlie Blake and 'So to Speak' by Adrian Parr are two bold attempts to question the traditional polarization between 'Philosophy of Literature' and 'Philosophical Literature.'

The sixth part of the book, ‘Politics after Discipline: Literature, Life, Control,’ has four chapters: (20) ‘Literary Study’s Biopolitics’ by Rey Chow, (21) ‘We Have Been Paranoid Too Long to Stop Now’ by Frida Beckman and Charlie Blake, (22) ‘Securing Neoliberalism: The Contingencies of Contemporary US Fiction’ by David Watson, and (23) ‘Automatic Art, Automated Trading: Finance, Fiction, and Philosophy’ by Arne De Boever closes the book. This part of the book presupposes a prominent Foucauldian framework, which, in turn, clashes, to some extent, with the reconstruction of contemporary philosophy tried in parts two and three in terms of materiality and embodiment.

The fourth part should be considered last—firstly, because it does not have four chapters like each of the other parts and, secondly, because it does not follow the dominant framework approach of the entire book. ‘Ordinary Language Criticism: Reading Literature through Anglo-American Philosophy,’ as the fourth part is entitled, consists of three chapters: (13) ‘Two Examples of Ordinary Language Criticism: Reading Conant Reading Rorty Reading Orwell – Interpretation at the Intersection of Philosophy and Literature’ by Ingeborg Löfgren, (14) ‘Stanley Cavell and the Politics of Modernism’ by R. M. Berry, and (15) ‘Inferentialist Semantics, Intimationist Aesthetics, and *Walden*’ by Bryan Vescio. Meanwhile, the rest of the sections focus on the literary works they analyze and their ethical, cultural, environmental, and political relationships with the contemporary world; the fourth part’s focus on philosophy itself in elucidating the object of literary criticism through contemporary analytical tools used by Richard Rorty, James Conant, Robert Brandom, Stanley Cavell, and Donald Davidson.

To sum up, *New Directions in Philosophy and Literature* challenges the dominant contemporary approaches to literature because it calls into question the philosophical agenda itself. Understanding contemporary literature is not merely a task of interpreting literary works through traditional tools, but rather questioning the limits of philosophy by questioning if our present concerns are recognized by it and why this is not so. Furthermore, its framework does not assume a hierarchical priority of philosophy and social sciences to perform this task. On the contrary, literature can open the door of the contemporary world’s comprehension. Nevertheless, these ‘new directions,’ firstly, do not clearly reduce the contemporary (mostly European and American?) thematic agenda and, secondly, do not categorically exclude the problems of fiction analyzed by other philosophical schools. Even so, this book calls for a role in future academic and non-academic debates.

Washington Morales Maciel, Universidad de la República