Futurist Women

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Futurist Women

Florence, Feminism and the New Sciences

Paola Sica

Connecticut College, USA

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Series Editors' Preface

Many of the most significant European writers and literary movements in the modern period have traversed national, linguistic and disciplinary borders. The principal aim of the Palgrave Studies in Modern European Literature series is to create a forum for work that takes account of these border crossings, and that engages with individual writers, genres, topoi and literary movements in a manner that does justice to their location within European artistic, political and philosophical contexts. Of course, the title of this series immediately raises a number of questions, at once historical, geo-political and literary-philosophical: What are the parameters of the modern? What is to be understood as European, both politically and culturally? And what distinguishes literature within these historical and geo-political limits from other forms of discourse?

These three questions are interrelated. Not only does the very idea of the modern vary depending on the European national tradition within which its definition is attempted, but the concept of literature in the modern sense is also intimately connected to the emergence and consolidation of the European nation states, to increasing secularization, urbanization, industrialization and bureaucratization, to the Enlightenment project and its promise of emancipation from nature through reason and science, to capitalism and imperialism, to the liberal-democratic model of government, to the separation of the private and public spheres, to the new form taken by the university, and to changing conceptions of both space and time as a result of technological innovations in the fields of travel and communication.

Taking first the question of when the modern may be said to commence within a European context, if one looks to a certain Germanic tradition shaped by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), then it might be said to commence with the first 'theoretical man', namely Socrates. According to this view, the modern would include everything that comes after the pre-Socratics and the first two great Attic tragedians, Aeschylus and Sophocles, with Euripides being the first modern writer. A rather more limited sense of the modern, also derived from the Germanic world, sees the *Neuzeit* as originating in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Jakob Burckhardt, Nietzsche's colleague at the University of Basel, identified the states of Renaissance Italy as prototypes for both modern European politics and modern European cultural production.

However, Italian literary modernity might also be seen as having commenced two hundred years earlier, with the programmatic adoption of the vernacular by its foremost representatives, Dante and Petrarch.

In France, the modern might either be seen as beginning at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, with the so-called 'Querelle des anciens et des modernes' in the 1690s, or later still, with the French Revolution of 1789, while the Romantic generation of the 1830s might equally be identified as an origin, given that Chateaubriand is often credited with having coined the term *modernité* in 1833. Across the Channel, meanwhile, the origins of literary modernity might seem different again. With the Renaissance being seen as 'Early Modern', everything thereafter might seem to fall within the category of the modern, although in fact the term 'modern' within a literary context is generally reserved for the literature that comes after mid-nineteenth-century European realism. This latter sense of the modern is also present in the early work of Roland Barthes, who in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953) asserts that modern literature commences in the 1850s, when the literary becomes explicitly self-reflexive, not only addressing its own status as literature but also concerning itself with the nature of language and the possibilities of representation.

In adopting a view of the modern as it pertains to literature that is more or less in line with Barthes's periodization, while also acknowledging that this periodization is liable to exceptions and limitations, the present series does not wish to conflate the modern with, nor to limit it to, modernism and postmodernism. Rather, the aim is to encourage work that highlights differences in the conception of the modern – differences that emerge out of distinct linguistic, national and cultural spheres within Europe – and to prompt further reflection on why it should be that the concept of the modern has become such a critical issue in 'modern' European culture, be it aligned with Enlightenment progress, with the critique of Enlightenment thinking, with decadence, with radical renewal, or with a sense of belatedness.

Turning to the question of the European, the very idea of modern literature arises in conjunction with the establishment of the European nation states. When European literatures are studied at university, they are generally taught within national and linguistic parameters: English, French, German, Italian, Scandinavian, Slavic and Eastern European, and Spanish literature. Even if such disciplinary distinctions have their pedagogical justifications, they render more difficult an appreciation of the ways in which modern European literature is shaped in no small part by intellectual and artistic traffic across national and linguistic borders: to grasp the nature of the European avant-gardes or of high modernism, for instance, one has to

consider the relationship between distinct national or linguistic traditions. While not limiting itself to one methodological approach, the present series is designed precisely to encourage the study of individual writers and literary movements within their European context. Furthermore, it seeks to promote research that engages with the very definition of the European in its relation to literature, including changing conceptions of center and periphery, of Eastern and Western Europe, and how these might bear upon questions of literary translation, dissemination and reception.

As for the third key term in the series title – literature – the formation of this concept is intimately related both to the European and to the modern. While Sir Philip Sidney in the late sixteenth century, Martin Opitz in the seventeenth, and Shelley in the early nineteenth produce their apologies for, or defenses of, 'poetry', it is within the general category of 'literature' that the genres of poetry, drama and prose fiction have come to be contained in the modern period. Since the Humboldtian reconfiguration of the university in the nineteenth century, the fate of literature has been closely bound up with that particular institution, as well as with emerging ideas of the canon and tradition. However one defines it, modernity has both propagated and problematized the historical legacy of the western literary tradition. While, as Jacques Derrida argues, it may be that in all European languages the history and theorization of the literary necessarily emerges out of a common Latinate legacy – the very word 'literature' deriving from the Latin *littera* (letter) – it is nonetheless the case that within a modern European context the literary has taken on an extraordinarily diverse range of forms. Traditional modes of representation have been subverted through parody and pastiche, or abandoned altogether; genres have been mixed; the limits of language have been tested; indeed, the concept of literature itself has been placed in question.

With all of the above in mind, the present series wishes to promote work that engages with any aspect of modern European literature (be it a literary movement, an individual writer, a genre, a particular topos) within its European context, that addresses questions of translation, dissemination and reception (both within Europe and beyond), that considers the relations between modern European literature and the other arts, that analyzes the impact of other discourses (philosophical, political, scientific) upon that literature, and, above all, that takes each of those three terms – modern, European and literature – not as givens, but as invitations, even provocations, to further reflection.

THOMAS BALDWIN
BEN HUTCHINSON
SHANE WELLER

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