

Recensões

Rewriting Academia. The development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe, edited by Renate Haas. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015, 442 pp.

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After working on the history of English Studies across Europe¹, Renate Haas aims for a different yet poignant angle when looking at the connection between English Studies and the proliferation of women's studies in the Academia. Her new edited book, *Rewriting Academia. The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe* (Peter Lang, 2015), departs from an assertion by Rosi Braidotti, who claimed that «both the terminology and the bulk of the scholarship in Women's [and Gender] Studies have been generated in English-speaking cultures and traditions». In order to address such a statement, Haas compiled a series of academic essays organized as a form of National Surveys spanning from Southern Europe (Portugal, Spain and Italy), Western and Central Europe (France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Croatia), Northern Europe (Sweden, Finland, Lithuania) and South-Eastern and Eastern Europe (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Armenia). This gives us a clear account on how predominant Anglo-American strand have been for Women and Gender Studies' climb to its current highly significant and even central role in the Academia across Europe, far away from the marginal position it assumed a few decades ago. When presenting the basic concept and realization of this book, Haas reminds us that the institutionalization of this field of study has «coincided with the so-called linguistic turn», English being the epicentre of such a move that «ran parallel to globalization» (11). However, even though focusing on a level of international cooperation, the organization of the volume also brings to light specific regional and national specificities that need to be acknowledged in order to fully grasp the diversity and depth Women and Gender Studies across Europe encompass.

Even though English, today's «*lingua academica*», has made the problems of terminology in the field more blurry, the fact is that, for Haas, they «have not simply dissolved, if distinctions and differences are not to be levelled out» (12); and they were also acknowledged in the construction of this volume. This is, actually, one of the major strengths of *Rewriting Academia* that uses historical perspective in order to bring clarity to the too often confusing terminology of this scientific field of study. If not for achieving a straightforward conclusion, at least for bringing awareness into the issue of defining the field, which is akin to the definition of any critical approach.

¹ Cf. *European English Studies: Contributions towards the History of a Discipline* ed. by Balz Engler and Renate Haas. Leicester: The English Association, for ESSE, Vol. I (2000) and Vol. II (2008).

The difficulties that are acknowledged in the introduction by Renate Haas become clearer with the different essays. When going deeper into the book, the reader clearly grasps the conundrum, for straightforward and linear approaches to Women's and Gender Studies acquire more complexity when one steps out of its own axis and realize other, different contexts and points of departure. Besides the geographical diversity, a «broad understanding of English Studies» (13) is also recommended to the reader: American Studies enter the equation, for the English and American Studies are often put side by side in Continental Europe's academia. This creates, as Haas points out, «basic structures in the very wide and uncharted field» (14).

The first essay of this book is on Portugal. Ana Gabriela Macedo and Margarida Esteves Pereira (Universidade do Minho) describe the history of the struggle of Women's Gender Studies in the country, not just in terms of teaching («you have to struggle to feed it into the curricula», p. 28), but also in terms of publishing, for «the word 'feminist' is often thought as unmarketable» (28). They trace an overview of the field in Portugal departing from their own experience, being that Women's and Gender Studies departed, in their university in the mid 1990s, from an English Studies matrix that allowed for a subsequent more interdisciplinary approach. In this essay, we learn about the development of feminist movements in Portugal, from the inaugural struggle for basic women rights in the late 19th Century to the second half of the 20th Century, when Portugal made the transition from a dictatorship to a democratic political regime. As the authors state, «it was only after the revolution in 1974 that we can speak of the establishment of Women's Studies in Portugal, first still outside academic structures» (37). The difference between the first and the second half of the 20th Century in the Portuguese Academia is duly noted: there was a transition from a French influence to an English one around the 1960s, akin to a reform «in the 'classical' older universities» (42) and to the founding of new schools (Universities and Polytechnics) that were more focused in teaching English. As a consequence, English Departments increased fairly and simultaneously so did the preponderance of Women's Studies, following the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The close relationship between Women's and Gender Studies with English, but also with a period of democratization, was also a reality in Spain, as authors Ester Álvarez López, Isabel Carrera Suarez and Carla Rodríguez González conclude [«Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies in Spain have grown steadily since the crucial year of 1975, and have reached a relatively high degree of institutionalization and relevance in Spanish Academy», p. 82]. To close the section dedicated to Southern Europe, Vita Fortunati opts for a different angle, focusing on a particular case study to account for the importance that the cultural dialogue between the Italian and North-American Universities had in the proliferation of Women's and Gender Studies, that has gone far in terms of research but still lacks «recognition at an institutional level» (91).

The essays devoted to Western and Central Europe bring to the surface a whole different set of issues: in France, for example, the main influences of Wo-

men's and Gender Studies were the Women's Liberation Movement and, of course, the student's and intellectuals' protests of May 1968 that, however, did not result in a substantial alteration of the higher «constrained structure» which, as Florence Binard notes, helps explain the difficulties presented to this field in France. Here, too, Sociology and History were the main areas within which most of the research in Women's and Gender Studies was conducted. As for English, this was fairly important in the development of the field for it introduced academics to «pluridisciplinarity». It is not without significance the fact that H el ene Cixous was an English scholar, which «was instrumental in the development and institutionalisation of feminist/feminine studies in France» (115).

In Belgium, Marysa Demoor situates the emergence of the field in late 1970s, whereas in Germany, as Renate Haas points out, «characteristic developments of Eastern and Western Europe in the area of Women's and Gender Studies might be analysed within one and the same state» (141). The specificities of Northern Europe are accounted for through the analysis of the Swedish, Finnish and Lithuanian cases, concerning issues like the Welfare State or the afterwards of the Soviet Baltic Republics. When we come to the last section, dedicated to South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, we are even more aware of the complex fabric that shape Women's and Gender Studies in Europe and just how deep Anglicist Studies run in this stream of knowledge, but also of how political and economic ideologies were instrumental for the matter. Aleksandra Izgarjan and Dubravka Djuric identify three moments in the development of feminism in Serbia (late 19th century, 1970s – «the period of late, liberal Yugoslav socialism» (303) – and «a third major phase followed at the beginning of the 1990s as a part of the post-socialist process in East European countries» (303), i. e., the coming of capitalism and neo-liberalism. From the former Yugoslavia to present day Serbia the authors explain how the dismantling of the multiethnic Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and two civil wars put feminism in «the broader political antiwar movement» (303) which brought centres for Women's Studies to focus on education and academic institutionalization as late as the 2000s. It was only «after the downfall of communism» that the history of Women's and Gender Studies began in Romania, and this is still seen there, as Ana-Karina Schneider and Corina Selejan emphasize, as «an alien importation, largely of Anglo-American extraction» (328). The volume continues with a glimpse at the Bulgarian context in which the author focus on its «particular geopolitical location by projecting relations and similarities across nation-state borders to historically, politically and culturally constructed spaces such as the Balkans, South East Europe, Europe and beyond» (357), ending with an account of the evolution of the field in Armenia.

In conclusion, Renate Haas points out that the major objective of this book is to provide information and foster international exchange, and it succeeds in showing «the impressive variety of Continental Women's and Gender Studies in general and in English Studies in particular» (405). The objective is clearly accomplished even though «not all countries envisaged are represented». Still, this is,

overall, a very relevant instrument for academics in Europe in a time of crisis and great instability and, therefore, of great ethical responsibility when working within a field that needs not only to keep its ground but also to find new ways of dealing with current and future challenges.