

## From the Editor

### Women Writing across the World

Despite plenty of preparation for this moment, I still find it hard to believe that, with this issue, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* completes twenty continuous years of publication. And such a year this is, with the endless images of war circulating through America's insistent electronic media—battalions of men everywhere one looks. What is a women's lit journal doing in a place like this, one might ask?

Well, kicking up her heels against phallocratic social norms, as usual. Our subscription numbers too are down this fall, as if asking the same question in more material terms. Survive we nonetheless do, and never has it seemed more important to me to remind ourselves of the histories of and in diverse women's writing, to herald the achievements and struggles of women writing today, to imagine a different sort of future. We will continue to produce a journal that manages, moreover, both to feature groundbreaking work by eminent scholars and to sustain our openness to the work of emerging scholars—and to do this at an indubitably affordable rate for our less than wealthy subscribers.

So with this issue, we do all these things yet again. With articles both on writers from earlier in this century and on writings as recent as last year, 2000, we continue the hard, everyday work of feminist scholars, keeping the past in view, keeping the present in touch with our pasts. With this international issue, I am made particularly aware of how much more work there is still to do, how much more ground to bridge, how many more "firsts" to undertake: for this issue is itself our first compilation of unsolicited articles to be entirely devoted to women writing beyond the shores of England and North America. Until this year, despite our pronounced and reiterated purpose to publish scholarship on women of all times and places, we had not received in any given year enough articles on non-Anglo-American writers among our innumerable submissions to fill a single issue with essays recommended for publication by our readers. Thus *Tulsa Studies* has forged its reputation through publication of articles almost entirely on Anglo-American women writers. But with this year, a seachange has occurred, and the greater stretch of this journal becomes suddenly visible.

Emerging, then, through articles we have received in the regular anonymous submission and review process, and accepted well before the crisis of September 11, the essays included here remind us of the many worlds of

women's writing that cry out for our attention. At the same time, with the scrupulousness of concern for detail and for the local that has become a hallmark of this journal, most of these essays probe the complex negotiations of just one or two texts by just one or two writers at a time: opening with Jennifer Yee's article on H  l  ne Cixous's recent novel, *Les r  veries de la femme sauvage* (2000); proceeding through articles on writers from war-torn lands, first, on the 1994 and 1995 translations of Lebanese writer Hanan al-Shaykh's novels *The Story of Zahra* and *Beirut Blues*, and, second, on the poetry of Irish feminist Eavan Boland, especially from 1982 through 1994; then, extending back, first, to the modernism of neglected Scandinavian Stina Aronson's "The Fever Book" in 1931 and Edith   berg's "Man in Darkness" in 1939, second, to the more famous modernist experiments from 1910 to 1939 of French writer Colette. This issue concludes with an archival piece surveying the work of Spanish women writers of the 1990s, including those who both do and do not belong to the "new narrative" and to the "boom" of Spanish women's fiction. Each article, in its turn, shows us ways modern women writers of many nationalities have sought paths around and through the sharply delineated territories—variously male, imperialist, Western, warmongering, and/or white—in which they found themselves.

In "The Colonial Outsider: 'Malg  rie' in H  l  ne Cixous's *Les r  veries de la femme sauvage*," Jennifer Yee discusses a novel in which "for the first time" the famous French feminist writer Cixous "deals directly with her childhood experiences in Algeria." In this novel, Cixous focuses on the "outsider" who must paradoxically reside within the colonial system: neither colonizer nor colonized, neither master nor slave, the protagonist of Cixous's novel is a girl whom "the colonial system . . . condemns . . . to a necessarily false position." Yet at the same time, Cixous eludes the "narrowed space" of the colonialist story through a linguistic play that, Yee points out, accounts for the comparative neglect of Cixous's fiction by Anglo-American scholars. It is this language play nonetheless that "maintain[s]" a "freedom" equatable with "marginality of vision" precisely through "constant slippage from one gender role to another, thanks here, in part, to her 'hermaphroditic' semiunity with her brother, and from one place to another in the overdefined series of exclusions, of walls, doors, and gateways that is her childhood Algeria." This fascinating essay discloses the intricacy with which semantic playfulness, in Cixous's hands, simultaneously provides a scathing critique of colonialist and patriarchal normative assumptions.

Focusing still more directly on the problem and problematic of the "nation," Ann Marie Adams argues in "Writing Self, Writing Nation: Imagined Geographies in the Fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh" that it is too

soon to replace the concept of “nation” entirely with that of the “world” when it comes to examining the ways in which literature—here, that of an Arab woman writer—continues to think through and against the construct of the national: “Without denying the importance of these critiques [of the ‘nation’], or the very real phenomenon of ‘new’ literatures in global languages that do seem to move both beyond and below national affiliations, it must be noted that a study of the nation is not without merit in some contemporary ‘minority’ literatures.” The embattled, acne-scarred, and finally murdered body of protagonist Zahra in *The Story of Zahra* works, in part, in a conventionally iconic manner to tell the story of her nation and the bleak impasse with which that story must end, but it also works to critique “the logic of gendered stereotypes used to ‘map’ [the] ‘imagined community’” of “nation” and “homeland.” In *Beirut Blues*, al-Shaykh returns to this nationalist scene to insist on an “imagined community” that is neither coherent nor stable, but embedded specifically within its own self-dispersed fragments: “Whether or not [protagonist] Asmahan fully agrees with the politics of the people she writes to and for, they are accorded spaces in her shifting and fluid map—a contradictory map that even manages to incorporate the countryside of the South into the cityscape . . . ‘you stayed where you were, but kept close to us even in Beirut.’”

Shifting from the ways the “nation” is implicated in and depends upon war, Christy Burns sees in Eavan Boland a similar refusal to iconicize the Irish female in the lyric, yet also an ability to negotiate the conflict between attraction to Irish lyricism and antilyrical feminist convictions. Returning to some of the themes of our recent special forum on “Problems of Beauty in Feminist Studies” (19.2), Burns’s article “Beautiful Labors” pivots on the contradiction between women’s “labor” that adamantly is not beautiful and yet defiantly may be so. “Critical of the romanticized images of women in the Irish, lyric imagination,” as Burns explains, “Boland is keenly aware of [the] risks” of cliché and “tethers her imaginative creations to the concrete details with which she herself is intimately familiar.” In other words, while seeking to avoid the romanticization produced by the lyric, Boland wishes even so to combine the beauties and seductions of lyric language with the knitty gritty “sensate” burdens of “domestic lives.” In “Writing in a Time of Violence,” for example, Boland “issues a warning of what lies behind the mere aesthetic or the graceful, silken language. Rhetoric is seductive, and one should watch for the serpent or tool of violence twined within the words.” Yet, as Burns argues, “beauty” itself becomes an agent that for Boland can “speak across differences” between “aesthetics and politics”: the beauty of “sensate pleasure.” Moreover “in this aesthetics, beauty and pain alternately define each other and dissipate the rigidification of the emblematic,” enabling the recovery

of “lost histories” not only for Ireland, but for “the transnational feminist context.”

Ellen Rees begins her essay, the next in this issue, with two simple glaring facts of omission: “Until quite recently, anyone surveying histories of literary modernism in Scandinavia from the years between the two world wars would notice the glaring absence of experimental prose and women writers.” Moreover, despite changes within Scandinavia itself in the 1990s, due to the language barrier “none of the most radical Scandinavian experimental prose by women has been translated into English. . . . This ghettoization is unfortunate, given the innovation of their texts, which when placed in the context of European literary modernism as a whole both enhance and complicate our understanding of what it meant for women to write in the modernist mode.” Taking up the cases of Swedish Stina Aronson and Norwegian Edith Øberg in her article “Problems of Prose Modernism and Frigidity in Stina Aronson’s ‘The Fever Book’ and Edith Øberg’s ‘Man in Darkness,’” Rees’s interest resembles Burns’s in exploring the ways these writers undercut mainstream Scandinavian “literary objectification” of women and binarization of them as “either intellectual or sensual, but never both.” Rees shows further how these writers “explicitly problematize the notion of female sexual frigidity” in works that are “highly self-reflective regarding their status as texts.” This lucid article traces the confluence of desire and writing in texts that Rees shows surely belong in the reformation of the European modernist canon: these Scandinavian women in fact “played a central and highly creative role in the cultural dialogue we know as modernism” and, in particular, “in conceptualizing and producing Scandinavian prose modernism.”

In a variety of ways, Helen Southworth’s “Rooms of Their Own: How Colette Uses Physical and Textual Space to Question a Gendered Literary Tradition,” brings this issue full circle back to a constellation of issues raised by Yee’s essay on Cixous: experimentalism as a means to renegotiate textual and physical spaces traditionally dominated by Western Caucasian men. Thus this essay returns us to the “notion,” in Southworth’s terms, of “linguistic mobility.” Extensively analyzing Colette’s famous novels *La Vagabonde* (1910) and *La maison de Claudine* (1922), then her lesser known novels *Duo* (1933) and *Le Toutounier* (1939), Southworth uncovers “a spatial poetics of sorts,” one in which the conventional marriage plot is rejected in favor of a thickened plot of interwoven and fractured narratives and, with these narratives, a thickened language, made dense with metaphor and simile, color and texture. Space here has less to do with national categories than with gendered ones. Still, generating space that, in Nancy Miller’s now-famous phrase, is “subject to change,” Colette’s spaces are ones where her protagonists “remain on the move” across bor-

ders of various sorts, and her spaces remain thus “necessarily incomplete.” Recalling also Virginia Woolf’s appeal for a “woman’s sentence” as well as Woolf’s admiration for Colette’s new form, Southworth argues that Colette “answers” Woolf not so much with a sentence as with a question, “retaining rather than resolving the problem of space.”

In our Archives section, Carmen de Urioste draws our attention to “Narrative of Spanish Women Writers of the Nineties.” Frankly confronting the thornier questions of literary value and commercialism involved in the “boom” of Spanish women’s narrative, de Urioste nonetheless directs us to the ways this narrative “opens up the Spanish narrative at the edge of the millennium to new techniques and to new themes with transnational traits.” One of the more interesting points made by de Urioste—in her tabulation of these new women writers, their literary prizes, and their textual strategies—arises from “the fleeting character of the texts” in the literary marketplace: although “a fundamental disservice is rendered to these texts by women writers when they are thrown onto the market in massive quantities . . . [despite] the quick commercial evolution of substitutable texts . . . women writers retaliate with a transtextual resistance, which rides through and across all the texts and undoubtedly dismantles the program of textual agility of literature understood sheerly as serving the ephemeral goals of leisure, entertainment, and industry.” These textual strategies include choice of first-person, psychological narratives, polyphonic perspectivism, groups of women protagonists, and narrative fragmentation. De Urioste’s informative essay and appended tables constitute a valuable resource for the study of “Spanish women writers at the end of the millennium” and their “consolidation . . . in the Spanish cultural circles of the twenty-first century.”

Finally, on a sadder note, I wish with this preface to acknowledge and mourn the deaths of two women writers closer to home. The first is Mitzi Myers, scholar of women writers, friend to and longtime reader for *Tulsa Studies*. Mitzi never recovered from a fire in her home in the summer of 2000. The second is Eudora Welty, who in my college and graduate school years honored me with the name of friend. Once described as a “regional” writer by critics who had trouble grasping the global value of the local, Welty became internationally acclaimed and globally valued long ago. To her this twenty-year-old issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* is dedicated.

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