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*Renate Haas (ed.), Rewriting Academia. The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe, Peter Lang Edition, Frankfurt am Main, 2015.*

*Riscrivere l'Accademia. Lo sviluppo degli studi anglicistici delle donne e di genere nell'Europa continentale*

*Abstract*

La recensione prende in considerazione *Rewriting Academia. The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe* a cura di Renate Haas, Docente di Letteratura Inglese presso l'Università di Kiel e autore di importanti opere sugli English Studies. Il volume contiene 25 contributi da parte di esperti europei del settore, ai quali è stato chiesto di descrivere la condizione dei Women's and Gender Studies nei rispettivi Paesi. Lo studio quindi si sviluppa attraverso una prospettiva storica e prettamente europea. La suddivisione geografica scelta dalla curatrice aiuta ad identificare le differenze e le difficoltà che i vari Dipartimenti incontrano quando viene chiesto loro di confrontarsi con un tema così relativamente nuovo; e, allo stesso tempo, aiuta a comprendere la reticenza che alcuni governi nazionali hanno ancora nel garantire fondi che possano rafforzare ed ampliare questo campo di studi. Particolare enfasi sarà data all'Italia e al Centro Studi di Bologna, che rappresenta un luogo significativo per lo sviluppo degli Studi di Genere in Europa. Infine, si delineerà il bisogno di ulteriore attenzione sui Women's and Gender Studies in quanto essi rappresentano una fase cruciale per il raggiungimento dei diritti e dell'equità di Genere.

*Parole chiave:* Gender, Europa, Accademia, diversità, equità.

*Abstract*

The review considers *Rewriting Academia. The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe*, a volume edited by Renate Haas, Professor of English at University of Kiel and author of important publications focusing on English Studies. The book contains contributions by 25 experts from Continental Europe who had been asked to survey the status of Women's and Gender Studies in their respective countries, taking as privileged perspective the historical and European contextualization of the subject. The geographical division Haas has chosen helps to identify the differences and difficulties Departments are facing when confronted with such a relatively new topic, as well as the reticence some national Governments keep to maintain when asked for funds to help strengthen and broaden the area of study. Particular relevance will be given to the Italian case of the Bologna Centre, which on the other hand constitutes an emblematic example of how Women's and Gender Studies need further increase as they represent a crucial phase in the development of Gender's equality and rights.

*Keywords:* Gender, Europe, Academia, diversity, equity.

In the Introductory chapter of *Rewriting Academia. The Development of the Anglicist Women's and Gender Studies of Continental Europe*, Renate Haas offers an outline of Women's and Gender Studies' topic's State of the Art in Continental Europe. She recognizes the innovative character Women's Studies first and Gender Studies later have had for the past 40 years, and how they represent today a core element in the central role research and education should have for the global democratization process. Moreover, as contributors will later explain in their Chapters, the aspect of the world's progressive democratic development holds onto the deconstruction of the long-established triad race-class-gender, which now more than ever needs a complete revision and re-negotiation of these terms and their correlative sub-categories. The question of terminology arises since the title of the volume, made up by quite problematic words, which, in combination, widen the theoretical field of analysis and highlight subtle distinctions and differentiations. As Haas explains, "'Women's and Gender Studies' has been chosen,

because it is most common across Europe” and leaves room “for the inflections of meaning current in various countries” as it “may comprise a great variety and include gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer studies without alienating the public” (p. 12). “Gender Studies”, in fact, would have forced a consideration of larger context and higher theoretical level that could have turned out into an exclusion or a lesser focus on the feminist concerns, “Women’s” being not a “simple and straightforward signifier” but “an internally differentiated category” (p. 13). Though sharing the international use contemporary politics, organizations, networks and research projects are making of the term, it must also be admitted that it is in the broad use of the word “Studies” that continental scholars can take advantage and combine their own understanding of their work with local or national academic traditions. As the term suggests “different degrees of disciplinary fixity” (p. 13), it could be argued that it is in terminology that the real change should happen, in order to accommodate the geographical and historical varieties in a new branch of the big “English Studies” ensemble.

Unfortunately, Haas acknowledges how she had to confront “with colleagues who could not really imagine that ‘proper’ Women’s and Gender Studies could be practised within English Studies” (pp. 15-16). According to her, they have fossilized on the autonomous exclusiveness of Women’s and Gender Studies, or rather associated them with the social sciences and seemed “unaware of the important role literature and literary studies played for the Women’s Movement of the 1970s and the beginning of Women’s Studies” (p. 16). Do Women’s and Gender Studies have actually reached a full academic establishment within English Studies, then? In this case, how and to which degree each country behaves in this relatively new field of analysis? If this is not the case, what could be done in order to enlarge the common understanding and to enrich the urgent necessity this topic has? To these questions, *Rewriting Academia* tries to answer with its surveys of national specificities among Continental Europe. It suggests contributors should “transcend national limitations” (p. 16) when chasing a structured and rather fixed scheme. It asks for a short introduction/overview of the situation of Gender Studies in the country, which should consider their connection with the teaching and research activities of English Studies. The institutionalization, if any, should also be highlighted, together with main lines of development and important achievements of Anglicist Women’s and Gender Studies in the country. Then it asks for a conclusion, where all the elements at stake are summed up and reviewed in the light of other disciplines as well as in accordance with Women’s and Gender Studies’ future perspectives.

The major difficulties Haas faced while proposing this structure lied in two diverse but somewhat tied fields. The first one arises from the recent economic crisis, which has forced many universities to close down their English Departments or to blend them with other Departments that in many cases had very different research aims and purposes. This hit the Women's and Gender Studies sector more than any other sector, as it often lacks "the recognition of the highest levels of the academic administration", Haas laments (p. 18). The cause may be probably the fact that although they continue to be practised mainly by women, who are a majority at students' and junior staff's levels, at the same time they still find obstacles in their career for a chair or other leading positing within academics. The crisis has led to a deterioration of the lower ranks, and to a drastic increase of short-term contracts that are in most cases not extended or renewed. The second difficulty lays in finding contributors from certain countries of Continental Europe – mainly Eastern countries. The case of Russia is particularly exemplifying. Haas solicited a number of scholars, heads of departments and departments in general (such as the Gender laboratory at the Centre for Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies of the Moscow State Linguistic University). She only found one contributor who enthusiastically recognized how women's works had been extremely important in the development of Russian *anglistika*. However, the essay was not submitted, leaving Haas speculating on the reasons of this choice – "increasing ideological pressures", she calls them (p. 20).

As far as the rest of Continental Europe is concerned, the book groups each country in four great macro-systems using geographical parameters. We have a first section called "Southern Europe" (including Portugal, Spain, and Italy); a second one dealing with "Western and Central Europe" (France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Croatia); a "Northern Europe" area (with Sweden, Finland and Lithuania); finally, a last section which takes into consideration "South-Eastern and Eastern Europe" (Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Armenia). What emerges in this classification is the fact that in many cases the geographical distinction corresponds to a common situation when the attention turns to Women's and Gender Studies "outside" English Studies. This is evident when a compare-and-contrast activity is carried out on the titles of the contributions. For example, the "Southern Europe" category, indeed, presents captivating elements such as "Women's Studies and English Studies in Spain: From Democracy to Transnationalism." The Chapter focuses on English Studies on one hand and on Women's Studies on the other, "two disciplines [that] achieved recognition in the last quarter of the twentieth century" when their institutionalization took place with unusual speed "fostered by the

transformative urge that guided Spain politics and culture after a long period of totalitarian isolation” (p. 51). After 1975, then, Spanish academia decided to separate Women’s and Gender Studies from the overarching field of English Studies. As a result, from 1981 to 2013 the number of doctoral theses in Gender or Women’s Studies dramatically rose in the universities where strong groups with institutional recognition were present – Oviedo (24), Seville (16) and Madrid (14) listed in the first three ranks according to TESEO, the official database of doctoral theses of the Spanish Ministry of Education.

The tone of the contributions radically changes in Western and Central Europe: in this case, titles attempt to represent a situation still in progress yet uncertain. For example, French English Women’s and Gender Studies struggle to place themselves “Beyond Invisibility and Bias”. Whereas in Belgium they tried to pass “Through the Gate of English Literature”, its academic centres being rather recent: the one at the Free University of Brussels opened in 1988, while all the researches were archived, informed and supported by an umbrella organisation called “Sophia” in 1990. The following year, Ghent University hosted a successful international conference on women’s studies whose proceedings contributed to establish the Centre of Gender Studies in the mid-1990s. When Women’s and Gender Studies meet English (and American) Studies, the process of institutionalization is not “a smooth and easy ride” (p. 190). Although Austria hosts some of the oldest universities in German-speaking Europe (the University of Vienna was founded in 1365), the country’s educational realm has offered little space for female *and* male faculty members and students “to develop and discuss a feminist positionality in the academia until the late 1980s and early 1990s” (p. 191). As Susanne Hamscha’s essay points out, it was only after feminist’ achievements in the U.S. that the systematic agenda for women within academia was re-structured “by challenging well-established patterns of behaviour, thought, and perception and thus changing the academic landscape” (p. 191). However, if Austria’s road is “long and winding”, Renate Haas uses the metaphor of the snowball to describe the “Two Steps Forward and One Back” Women’s and Gender Studies are experiencing in Germany. The “Setting Out” year being 1968, while in the 1980’s they have been “Pushing Through” in order to reach a “Professionalization” in the early 1990s and a quite complete “Normalization” from 1997 onward (p. 146). Now when she writes, however, there is no “comprehensive and detailed survey” that would cover “the development and present state of the fields, underlying theories, methods,

approaches, and achievements” (p. 158) of German Anglicist Women’s and Gender Studies.

If Women’s and Gender Studies are still “An Uncertain Discipline” in the Czech Republic, things enhance when it comes to Northern and Eastern Europe. From the “Institutionalization of Gender Research” in Sweden to Romanian Anglicist Women’s and Gender Studies struggling “Between Persistence and Resistance”. From “Diverse and Established Gender Studies” in Finland to Armenian attempts of “Beginnings” after decades of “gender ignorance” (p. 392), “Upheavals” and asymmetry; in spite of many difficulties, a “very broad, varied and representative panorama has been accomplished” (p. 20).

Vita Fortunati’s Chapter on the Italian’s situation deserves careful consideration. Because if on the one hand Anglicist Women’s and Gender Studies in Italy have experienced nearly the same difficulties that have been described for the other countries when confronted with the institutionalization of the studies themselves in the universities, on the other hand the Bologna projects represented a unique case within Italian (and today European) Academia. As they “examine the distribution, the accessibility, the production of knowledge and *savoirs* in different disciplinary fields” (p. 87), Women’s and Gender Studies are part of the issues and questions related to Multicultural Studies. In this respect, efforts have been made by Italian Ministries for equal opportunities Laura Balbo (1998-2000) and Katia Belillo (2000-2001) for an “effective disciplinary insertion of Women’s and Gender Studies in academic curricula” (p. 87). To this line of work, one should add the development of fruitful relationships between Italian and North American universities. Nowadays, the Italian perspective appears double-folded. Many courses, seminars, PhD and master’s programs on Women’s and Gender Studies do exist in the various institutions, yet the discipline is not actually recognised institutionally which led to a “difference in level between the research and the visibility of Women’s and Gender Studies inside the Academia” (p. 89). As a matter of fact, Bologna’s tendency to internationalization has produced “very fertile results and hybridisation” (p. 90), so much that at the School of Languages and Literatures, Interpreting and Translation, a *Women’s and Gender Studies Permanent Course* was created, in order to host students and teaching staff from various European universities. The seminars allow people “to confront each other with the main theoretical debates on cultural traditions and critical methods of

Women's and Gender Studies, maintaining a multicultural, transdisciplinary and multimedia approach" (p. 91).

The most recent and significant result is Bologna's inclusion in GEMMA, a joint European postgraduate and multidisciplinary programme consisting of two years of study at two chosen centres of the seven prestigious European universities that participate in the Consortium. Through the GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies, high-quality students would foster their competencies in the area of equal opportunities and Women's and Gender Studies, with the objective of improving both research and works within this field. The GEMMA partnership has recently received financial support from the European Commission in order to develop a model for a joint European PhD on Women's and Gender Studies.

In the last part of her Chapter, Fortunati also acknowledges that Italian Women's and Gender Studies have a distinct specificity from their Continental Europe correlatives; yet according to the different points of view privileged, distinctions can be highlighted within the various academic institutions. For example, Ornella De Zordo and Mirella Billi are trying to re-vision (in Adrienne Rich's sense, that is of looking at history with new eyes, of observing knowledge from new critical perspectives in order to "survive") the long andro- and Euro-centric assumptions in different artistic codes. Other scholars are engaged with the re-reading of classics (Maria del Sapio and Laura di Michele) and with postcolonial texts as well (Lidia Curti and Eleonora Rao). Others focus their interest on the theme of the body and its re-writing as a source of "nomad" and "fluid" subjectivity (Nicoletta Vallorani and Paola Zaccaria). While Oriana Palusci and Eleonora Federici concentrate their research on "Translation and Gender" through the study of translation theories and the role of women translators in different historical contexts. In order to acquire full appreciation within academic institutions, a complete new body of linguistic devices should be constructed upon the conviction that it is primarily through language that thought can really change. Indeed, Haas notes how Women's and Gender Studies institutionalization at least partially "coincided with the so-called linguistic turn" (p. 11) of the late 1960s. Furthermore, Rosi Braidotti's projects show how "both the terminology and the bulk of the scholarship in Women's [and Gender] Studies have been generated in English-speaking cultures and traditions (Braidotti 2002, p. 285). English as *lingua academica* and *lingua franca*, in fact, has helped to include Women's and Gender Studies within the frame of English Studies, including the study of Anglophone literatures and

cultures as well as international communication in English. In Haas' opinion, this could yield "fundamental insights not only for English Studies but for further disciplines as well" (Haas 2015, p. 12). Yet it is also true that the term "English Studies" contains in itself enormous differentiation. The solution, as Fortunati suggests, is probably in crossing "the boundaries between literary genres and disciplines", in bridging "the gap between different cultures" and in eliminating the Western dichotomy "between high and low culture". Only a full re-thinking of women "in their being 'different' and [...] 'marginal'" (p. 91) could favour the re-evaluation and the re-writing of their status in the higher levels of institutions.

The conclusive Chapter aptly summarizes the contexts and the conditions of Women's and Gender Studies in Continental Europe, and underlines their dependence upon the political, economic and cultural developments, education systems, and academic traditions, under which they are practised. According to Haas, highlighting Europe's internal diversity as well as giving "greater visibility to the Continental achievements" regardless of "an astonishing lack of information" (p. 405) would help to foster exchange within Europe, within individual countries, and within English Studies of individual countries. The exemplificative title of the Conclusion, "Europe and Beyond", suggests to go ahead the obsolete "poor academic establishment of women [which] has greatly impeded the institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies" (p. 411); and, on the other hand, to look at this peculiar condition as stimulating for their growth as an independent branch of Academia. The contributions in *Rewriting Academia* raise then a double concern with Women's and Gender Studies in Continental Europe. On one side, they would offer a wealth of new material on a relatively raw discipline to start from; on the other side, they prove how Women's and Gender Studies have great potential for advancing the phase of "reorientation and reconceptualization" (pp. 423-424) of English and English Studies.



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REVIEWS