



Foreword

As we break the centenary mark of the historical avant-garde movements, the concept of a modernist prose undergoes a series of political, theoretical and aesthetic revisions. Historically, critical efforts to engage with modernism culminated in terminology that, at times, separated modernist writers from the literary traditions they were responding to — in approaches that were often misinformed by Ezra Pound’s urge to *make it new* —, and, at others, alienated them from our own time — in approaches that understood the “post” in *postmodernism* as a political and/or aesthetic correction of the past. Why has postmodernist criticism of modernism focused so heavily on prose, anyway? Was modernism’s “revolution of the word” actually *in* prose? Is contemporary modernist criticism still preponderantly *about* prose? Dedicated to Literary Studies, this issue of MATRAGA contributes with answers to these questions. Under the theme of “Modernist Prose in Contemporaneity” — and, therefore, eschewing the performative imperative that, through abstractions, dislocates texts from their context and from ours —, the works collected here probe the pastness and the presence of modernist prose across diverse contexts of the 20th century.

Can prose chant the elegy? Virginia Woolf formulates this question in 1927, as she looks forward to a new kind of book written in prose “which has many of the characteristics of poetry”³, at a time when avant-garde writers were testing the fusion of narrative and lyric, along with experimenting with new technological forms, such as photography and cinematic montage, or forging new non-verbal languages. Such fusions are inscribed in the very essays, manifestos, diaries, letters and fictions describing and demanding lyric transformations in prose worldwide. In the 21st century, it is imperative that we reassess how modernist experimental prose engages with the language of information, and the burdens of story or history or science or philosophy. This issue of MATRAGA fulfils this task. Closing this collection, the reader will find Angela

³ Cf. WOOLF, Virginia. *The Narrow Bridge of Art*. In: WOOLF, Virginia. **Granite and Rainbow**. London: Harcourt Brace, 1986. p. 11-23

Maria Rubel Fanini (UFTPR/Uniandrade) reading “The Discursive Recreation of Technology in Oswald de Andrade”; Ricardo Postal (UFPE) reading figurations of the harlequin that cut across Mário de Andrade’s poetry and prose; Tarso do Amaral de Souza Cruz (FFP-UERJ/Souza Marques) reading James Joyce’s “essayistics”; Marcela Lanius and Marcia A. P. Martins (PUC-Rio) reading modernist drama as a medium for experimentation with prose, with special interest in the “closet dramas” authored by Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald; and Patricia Marouvo Fagundes (UFAC) reading the “Outlines of Modernist Prose in *The Waves*”. Continuing this investigation, the reader will also find a review of Mariângela Alonso’s new monograph, *A água e as pulsões em O lustre, de Clarice Lispector* (2019), by Eduardo Neves Silva (USP), who writes in celebration of both Alonso’s acute critical eye and the centenary of Clarice Lispector’s birth.

These pieces exemplify the contemporary effort of modernist scholarship to trace the transitions that inform the amalgamation of literary texts under the aegis of *modernism*. Going back to the critical vocabularies of “modernists” before they were called “modernists”⁴ proves productive for contemporary scholars attempting to untie the critical knots of the past. Furthermore, the same movement allows us to mark how the modernist critical and fictional arena operates as a remnant from which we often write and think. Elucidating these remnants of modernist prose as literary practice and theory in contemporaneity, we open this issue in our present moment. On our first pages, the reader will find Kenneth David Jackson (Yale University) exploring João Almino’s allegorical engagement with modernist Brasília; Ieda Magri (UERJ) exploring Latin-American epistemologies of the contemporary in connection with the avant-garde; and Genevieve Abravanel (Franklin & Marshall College) exploring Zadie Smith’s *NW* as an implicit guide to the risks of reading the works of minority writers in search for modernist traits — a methodology that, as Abravanel affirms, usually reinforces the cultural capital of white European modernism.

This issue also includes two new modernist critical texts that continue to experiment with the very form of the academic essay. By reading Guimarães Rosa’s short story “Os chapéus transeuntes” as a self-fictional performance, David Lopes da Silva (UFAL) mobilizes the author’s critics, friends and family in order to produce a mosaic of voices, articulated by the biographemes that Silva collates. The result is a queered Rosa, whose name becomes a sign around which some form of productive gossip takes place. Saskia McCracken (University of Glasgow) and Greg Thomas (University of Edinburgh) draw from Virginia Woolf’s strategy of bracketing the episodes in the life of the Ramsays in “Time Passes”, *To the Lighthouse*, and intersperse the unbracketed figurations of Mrs McNab, one of the servants in Woolf’s novel, with bracketed critical commentary. By doing so, their text contributes to the ongoing debate on Woolf and class, creating their own prose intervention in the English author’s text.

One final question arose as we worked on this issue of MATRAGA: *what does “modernist” experimental prose look like in the 21st Century?* Though an answer is yet to be elaborated by the many researchers dedicated to the question, we are glad to publish award-winning author

⁴ See GILBERT, Geoff. **before modernism was**: modern history and the constituency of writing. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Kirsty Gunn’s original short story, “It is lonely being a young man sent abroad to fight’ she said”, in order to expose the relevance of the question itself. Gunn’s theme, focus, frame and strategy resonate many of the questions raised in this issue — which is not surprising, given that her connection to Katherine Mansfield has resulted in the publication of Gunn’s self-investigative “notebook” written under the rubric of her fellow countrywoman, *My Katherine Mansfield Project* (2015), among other projects on Mansfield and identity. Another cue we leave as a contribution to ongoing elaborations around our final guiding question may be found in Roberto Acízelo de Souza’s (UERJ) review of Maria Conceição Monteiro’s new prose-poetry collection, *Quando éramos todos vivos: e alguns poemas* (2019). The reviewer historicises the impulse to blur the lines across literary genres that he finds in Monteiro’s writing, which only reveals how the “modernist” desire to “chant the elegy” also emerges in the poetic prose of the Brazilian now.

The contributions we briefly presented above make this issue of MATRAGA a robust publication in this context of continuous revaluation and repositioning of modernism. The works we have collected here resume the several crises that modernist prose enunciated on a global scale, while also probing into their permanences and transformations in contemporary criticism, theory and fiction. We can only conclude, then, by thanking our authors, our referees and the editorial board of MATRAGA for committing to the publication of this collection of innovative and courageous works on/of prose, one that does not shy away from treading the unstable critical terrain around the term “modernism”.

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