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Editorial

Editorial Special Issue: "Nordic and European Modernisms"

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This Special Issue of *Humanities* explores the growth and development of Nordic modernisms in a European context. A truly international movement, modernism cuts across many boundaries—geographical, cultural and linguistic; cross-fertilization is a prerequisite for its very existence. Moreover, the diverse forms of modernism that emerged in the Nordic countries at widely differing moments are not limited to literature but also include other art forms such as the visual and performing arts. Indeed, there are few literary and cultural movements in which combinations of different, and often radically experimental, forms of artistic expression are as significant as in modernism.

Concentrating on and yet not limiting itself to the study of literary texts, this Special Issue shows that the emergence of modernism in the Nordic countries is linked to, and inspired by, the innovative works published in western Europe and the USA towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century. Presenting Nordic art as multi-dimensional and dynamic, it also shows that, while responding to original aspects of these modernizing texts, Nordic modernism itself contributed to modernism as a complex international trend. Five examples of this kind of impact, in the genres of the novel, drama and poetry respectively, are Knut Hamsun, August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, Edith Södergran and Tomas Tranströmer. Aspects of these authors' continuing impact are considered by several contributors to the Special Issue, but the articles also discuss modernist works written by other Nordic authors as well as translations of modernist texts into the Nordic languages. The plural form "modernisms" in the title of the Special Issue suggests that the contributors adopt an understanding of modernism that, while recognizing the importance of the modernist movement between circa 1890 and 1940, is sufficiently elastic to include various forms of extension and continuation of Nordic modernisms in the post-war period.

There is a link between the continuing importance of modernism and the movement's origins, including a strong experience of crisis at the turn of the twentieth century. Prompting a dissatisfaction with prevalent artistic forms of expression, this experience of crisis underlies modernist artists' search for, and invention of, radically new forms of expression. The crisis—cultural, political, moral, aesthetic—was by no means limited to just one country or one identifiable group of writers; nor was it, as modernisms' global relevance makes clear, restricted to just one continent. At the level of historical reality, the First World War represents the culmination of a crisis which had its beginnings several decades earlier. The Second World War, along with the Holocaust, represents a second culmination of the crisis, and there is a sense in which the feeling, and experience, of crisis has continued to influence and shape Nordic literature written in the post-war period. Over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the experience of crisis has increasingly been extended to include a growing uncertainty about the future prompted by the reality of climate change.

Starting from the premiss that the constituent aspects of art, aesthetics and language complicate an explanation of "the Nordic" as a concept that is either "self-evident" or "important", this Special Issue aims to provide a venue for sharing, elaborating and refining our understanding of the Nordic in relation to modernism as a complex international trend. Seen in this light, it comes as no surprise that literary studies as featured in this Special Issue include discussions of literary translation in the cultural and historical context of the Nordic

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countries, investigating the interdependence of and interrelationships between translation, literature, literary history and literary culture. A further premiss is that although the focus of the issue is on individual works and authors, we also need to pay attention to "translation" as an inevitable element in forms of writing and art. This includes not only the presence of the "foreign" in original writing but also the transnational element in any discussion of foreign literature and culture.

Displaying the originality, impact and range of Nordic and European modernisms, the 11 articles of this Special Issue are interestingly linked to each other. While eight of the articles deal primarily with aspects of Nordic modernism in the novel, in drama and in poetry, three of them discuss facets of modernism not limited to one particular genre.

In "Modernism—Borders and Crises", Ástráður Eysteinsson reflects on the concept and history of literary modernism in a way that is related to, and illuminates, the other contributions. Two important points of reference for Eysteinsson's reflective article on the borders and crises of modernism are Erich Auerbach's classic study, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (first published in German in 1946) and *Modernism: 1890–1930*, a volume (published in 1976) edited by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane. While the view of modernism expounded by Bradbury and McFarlane has proved influential, Eysteinsson notes that the revision of modernism undertaken in the early years of the twenty-first century involves a critique of the geography, canon and time frame of modernism as staged in their book. The Special Issue contributes to this ongoing revision, highlighting the contribution of Nordic modernism.

Modernist literature has a reputation for being difficult, in part even inaccessible. However, as Susan C. Brantly demonstrates in "Nordic Modernism for Beginners", it is perfectly possible to explain Nordic modernisms to an audience of beginners, including college students. Brantly notes that although the Modern Breakthrough (the phrase, coined by Danish critic Georg Brandes in 1883, constitutes an important moment in Nordic literary history) and modernism share some characteristic features, there are differences between the two movements. For example, a modernist writer tends to express a stronger belief in subjectivity and to see the world as more radically fragmented than does a representative of the Modern Breakthrough. Both the similarities and the differences are, as Brantly observes, significant.

In common with all contributors to the Special Issue, Annegret Heitmann considers modernism as a response to modernity: the progressive modernization of society (especially the societies of Western Europe and North America) since the Renaissance, and particularly after the French Revolution and the British Industrial Revolution. Heitmann's article, "Nordic Modernists in the Circus: On the Aesthetic Reflection of a Transcultural Institution", shows that the circus contributed to this complex response, as manifested by the ways in which the circus represents the fragile status of art in modernity. Figuring prominently in works by modernist authors and artists—including Kafka, Thomas Mann, Degas and Macke—the circus is also thematized in texts by Nordic authors such as Henrik Ibsen, Herman Bang, Ola Hansson and Johannes V. Jensen.

Associated with and characterized by mobility and innovation, the circus is linked to the rapid growth of cities over the course of the nineteenth century. In "Urban Space and Gender Performativity in Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* and Cora Sandel's *Alberta and Freedom*", Unni Langås discusses how life in the city and gender performativity are combined in these two classic Norwegian novels—*Sult* from 1890 and *Alberte og friheten* from 1931. Langås's discussion proceeds from the observation that gender norms of life in the city, be it Kristiania (the name of Oslo until 1925) or Paris, are critical premisses for the subject's negotiation of different options, obstacles and possibilities in his or her modern existence.

In the early twenty-first century, there is a growing realization that modernist texts in translation have played, and continue to play, a key role in the movement's development. Mats Jansson and Elisabeth Bladh address the topic of translation explicitly. Jansson's contribution, "In the Traces of Modernism: William Faulkner in Swedish Criticism 1932–1950", considers the reception of Faulkner in Sweden and Swedish Faulkner criticism from 1932

until the Nobel Prize announcement in 1950, arguing that both epitomize key features of the notion of "modernism". In "The Reception of the Swedish Retranslation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (2012)", Bladh discusses how the second Swedish translation of Joyce's modernist novel from 1922 was received by Swedish critics. Noting that the release of Erik Andersson's new translation was a major literary event, Bladh pays particular attention to the translation's paratextual features, including a lengthy postscript, and to reviews of the translation in the daily press.

While two of the three articles that consider aspects of modernist drama turn to Ibsen, Dean Krouk's "The Montage Rhetoric of Nordahl Grieg's Interwar Drama" discusses the modernist montage of Nordahl Grieg's 1935 drama *Vår ære og vår makt* (*Our Power and Our Glory*) in the context of Grieg's interest in Soviet theatre and his Communist sympathies. After having shown that Grieg's montage rhetoric consists of abrupt scene shifts as well as grotesque juxtapositions, Krouk concludes that *Vår ære og vår makt* is a notable example of Norwegian, and thus Nordic, appropriation of European modernist and avant-garde theatre.

In "Agents of Secularisation—Ibsen and the Narrative of Secular Modernity", Joachim Schiedermair asks: How can we analyse secularization in modernist texts around 1900? Conceptualizing secularization as a cultural narrative and using Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* as his main example, Schiedermair finds that, rather than reacting to secularization, modernist authors contributed to the formation of the interpretative category "secularization".

While Schiedermair draws on Albrecht Koschorke's theory of secularization as a narrative structure, Irina Ruppo's contribution is aided by reader response theory and theories of intertextuality. In "Exile, Pistols, and Promised Lands: Ibsen and Israeli Modernist Writers", Ruppo considers allusions to Ibsen in the works of two Israeli modernist writers, Amos Oz's autobiographical *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2004) and David Grossman's novel *The Zigzag Kid* (1994) in the context of the Israeli reception of Ibsen in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly that of a production of *Peer Gynt* in 1952 and one of *Hedda Gabler* in 1966. Ruppo concludes that in enlisting Ibsen's help and inspiration in their exploration of the myths of Israeli nationhood, Grossman and Oz expose facets of literary trajectories as they migrate, grow and metamorphose across physical and time-related borders.

Given the fact that poetry plays a key role in modernism, it is appropriate that two contributions highlight this genre. Louise Mønster begins her article, "Dream Poems: The Surreal Conditions of Modernism", by observing that many modernist poems either thematize dreams or try to adopt the form of dreams. She then proceeds to discuss three Swedish dream poems by three Swedish authors affiliated with modernism: Artur Lundkvist, Gunnar Ekelöf and Tomas Tranströmer. That Nordic modernism is not yet over is demonstrated, argues Per Thomas Andersen, by Norwegian poet Øyvind Rimbereid's "Solaris Corrected". In "The Future Modernism of No-Oil Norway: Øyvind Rimbereid's 'Solaris Corrected'", Andersen reads this poem as a poetical science fiction in which Rimbereid uses a future language to present the oil industry in the North Sea from a retrospective perspective. Andersen considers "Solaris Corrected" as a renewal of the heritage from Norwegian modernist poet Rolf Jacobsen and Swedish poet Harry Martinson, particularly Martinson's *Aniara. En revy om människan i tid och rum* ("Aniara: A Review of Man in Time and Space") (1956), a science fiction poem which Andersen regards as a precursor of Rimbereid's "Solaris Corrected".

An understanding of modernism as a complex, and in one sense continuing, international trend constituted by innovative works makes it virtually impossible to define the concept. However, in this Special Issue the concept of modernism works well as a critical tool. The main reason for this kind of critical achievement is that, whether they define modernism or not, the authors make the concept of modernism—and modernisms—work for them in a way that that proves critically productive. Identifying and discussing modernist features of texts written in the Nordic region, and of cultural phenomena such as the circus occurring within that same Nordic region, the authors augment the reader's understanding of Nordic and European modernisms.

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