INTRODUCTION

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The beginning of a new decade, the 2020s, led to a rising interest in the cultural, social or political realities that shaped the world a century ago. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in 2019, almost exactly a century after the Spanish flu had shaped post-World War I realities, led to further comparisons and analytical exercises. Indeed, both the years 1920 and 2020 were marked by waves of pandemics that would kill more people than many military conflicts. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the literature of the 1920s. As Chris Baldick has noted, "[t]he Twenties have become an almost invisible decade in British literary history" (2012, 1). Similarly, some years earlier, Thorp argued that: "Despite the fact that the Twenties became a name and a symbol even before the decade had completed its cycle, comparatively little which is substantial has been written about the authors who gave it distinction and a voice" (1955, 635). Possible exceptions to this severe judgment are Frederick Hoffman's monograph that looked at this period as "a bright interim" (O'Connor 1955, 691), a little American Renaissance, Malcom Bradbury and David Palmer's collection on the American novel in the 1920s, the study of the 1920s radicalism by John Lucas.

In an article published in 1983, Paul Lauter draws the attention of (professional) readerships that the canon (including the 1920s canon) must be re-considered. Of course, Lauter refers to American literature, but his considerations are applicable to other literary spaces as well: "The map of American literature which most of us have used was drawn fifty years ago. Its mountains, bumps and flats were charted; its deserts certified unfit for cultural habitation. Only during the past decade, in response to the movements for change of people of colour and of women, have we begun to face the task –not systematically undertaken since the 1920s– of resurveying the territory" (1983, 435). If we accept Lauter's definition that "[t]he literary canon is, in short, a means by which culture validates social power" (435), and social power validates culture, looking back at the novel written a century ago enriches our knowledge of a decade that should not be overlooked or oversimplied. Centennial anniversaries make us re-think, re-evaluate, juxtapose the evolutions that led to the world as it is today. For instance, studying the evolution of the detective

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story, Brazil (1981) realizes that "[t]he classic detective almost never was motivated by a burning sense of justice. More often he was answering a literal need to set things straight. Crime demanded attention because it represented an aberrant disruption in an otherwise wholesome, coherent social order" (169).

The 1920s deserve to be under special critical scrutiny. This period that marked an age of prosperity and joy after the sufferings of World War I was referred to as the "Roaring Twenties," the "Jazz Age," the "Golden Twenties" or "*les Années folles*" ("Crazy Years"), all these denominations emphasizing the dynamism, the buoyancy, the exhilaration that supposedly characterized the whole world. In fact, this fervour came mostly from the countries that had won World War I and from a capitalism that aimed at controlling the whole world.

It is during this period that American oil companies began to exploit oil in Venezuela, while the political influence of the USA was growing in Haiti, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. The USA was becoming more and more influential all over the world. At the same time, the 1924 Immigration Act limited immigration from Central and Eastern Europe or from Asia. America was suspicious of the "darkies" from these areas. Prohibition influenced radically American economy, lifestyles and culture. The Harlem Renaissance made visible an exceptional Afro-American cultural and artistic elite, whereas the writers of the Lost Generation showed that the scars of the Great War would not heal too quickly.

In Europe, the advent of extreme political ideologies, Fascism and Bolshevism, showed that the world was at a crossroads that could endanger democracy and lead to a new World War. The decade was also the last act in the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Egypt became independent, but under British influence, Saudi Arabia appeared on the map. In Iran, the Pahlavis, the last dynasty in the history of the country, took hold of power. The Irish War of Independence and the appearance of the Republic of Ireland foreshadowed the downfall of the British colonialism in spite of Britain's victory in World War I.

Ordinary people's lives were influenced more than at any other time in history by scientific discoveries and technology. The car, the telephone, the radio, household electricity, the airplane made communication much faster. The discovery of penicillin and insulin improved people's health. Diseases that had been considered fatal could be cured, or their evolution could be better understood. From the social point of view, the decade was characterized by a rising urban culture "in whose body survived the old ... spirit, its agrarian ... virtues (in short: the province)" (Ickstadt 1983, 128). In other words, change went hand in hand with continuity. The cinema became a wide spread entertainment and in the most developed countries of Europe or North America "mass culture reached across the boundaries between the rural and urban sections of society" (Rhodes 1996, 389). A significant year in this respect, is 1928, when the Walt Disney Studios created the first cartoons with Mickey Mouse.

From the social and political point of view, an important achievement of the 1920s was women's vote. In several countries women had achieved full political rights before 1920 (Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden), while in other countries they received unrestricted right to vote during the 1920s (Great Britain, Ireland, USA, Iceland). As Raub (1994)

has noted, "[o]ur image of the Twenties woman is that of the flapper, who has thrown off the conventions of her Victorian predecessors to crop her hair, shorten her skirt, and dance the Charleston" (109). The flapper was able to push the boundaries of her gender farther than any generation before her. On the other hand, domesticity was not completely abandoned. Getting married, having children and caring for a home was still a popular ideal especially among women from certain social milieus. Gender and the literature of the 1920s often meet in the studies of Gay Wachman (2001)[1], Jenny Glennon (2011)[2], or Melissa Homestead (2013)[3]. During this decade "the primary image of woman [was] psychological archetype rather than social being" (Hoffmann and Hoffmann 1979, 63) and clear proofs of this statement can be found in the greatest novels of the decade: *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (see Knuth 1974). The 1920s is not only a decade of very significant literary creations, the influence of the literary metadiscourse increased as it became "an academically sponsored activity" (Rovit 2014, 116).

The 1920s witnessed very radical developments in visual arts. Art Deco was fashionable at the beginning of the decade and it was followed by a clear evolution towards the non-figurative with such artists as Pablo Picasso or René Magritte. The definition of art and the relationship between the artist and the beholder changes thanks to such violent experimenters as Marcel Duchamp. The discovery of Pharaoh Tutankhamen's tomb by Howard Carter in 1922 spurs an overwhelming interest in Egypt and its civilization: The Egyptian craze. The irrationality of war, the horrendous human price paid during World War I by so many innocent people, led to the appearance of several trends, such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, which rely on an aggressive and powerful understanding of reality.

Art and science no longer pretended to be opposite fields of human creation as science offered hypothesis that surpassed the immediacy of the universe which is at our sensorial approach. New models of the universe that led to different

[1] Wachman (2001) dealt with lesbian writing, forbidden sexualities and silenced desires.

[2] Glennon authored an applied study on the significance of jewelry in Wharton's fiction of the 1920's: "American women continued to be financially dependent on men, even while considering themselves more liberated than previous generations. In accepting the big bribe, these women become depthless objects, indistinct from one another. This in turn reflects the novelist's concern that expense had become a substitute for taste in the post-war period, and that an affinity that conspicuous consumption would permeate the world, as she had seen it permeate the nation's social classes" (2011, 17).

[3] Homestead's study uncovers the hidden aspects of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis's collaboration and of their joint textual enterprise: "Cather and Lewis lived together openly for thirty-nine years, their partnership recognized and respected by family and friends" (2013, 410). On the other hand, she challenges the critics who "safely place Lewis outside the garret by assigning her quasi-wifely secretarial and domestic duties in support of Cather's solitary authorial labours. ... Cather gets a special pass to enter the masculine garret, where canonical geniuses write in solitude, but the (female) social remains safely outside (Homestead 2013, 436-37). The present collection responds to Homestead's invitation to renew our perspective on women writers: "It is time, then, to unlock the garret door in our scholarly imaginations to let in the woman with whom (rather than for whom) Cather wrote her fiction" (2013, 437).

understandings of space or time were offered by Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg. Niels Bohr constructed another atomic model; Edwin Powell Hubble went beyond the Milky Way and explored the entrails of the cosmic space reachable by our human instruments and discovered new nebulae and galaxies. Sigmund Freud overpassed prudish views about the human being and explored the innermost layers of human mind and psychology. The Freudian craze was followed by other psychological crazes less well remembered nowadays, such as Émile Coué and George Gurdjieff. Both relied on the cult of the self and non-hypnotic suggestion. The idea behind the popularity of Coué and Gurdjieff was that "the unconscious mind through autosuggestion could cure even organic disease" (Rapp 1987, 21).

It is generally accepted that this flamboyant, noisy age characterized by economic growth, increasing consumerism, fundamental changes in artistic and scientific outlooks ended on 29 October 1929, the day known as the Great Crash on Wall Street. The Great Depression would follow, a new age was about to begin.

Fiction responded to the challenges of this time and literary historians tried to keep up. The fiction of the twenties is the novels of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Joyce, or Willa Cather as well as the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf or Agatha Christie. Ronald Berman's study, for instance, "displays the relevant social and philosophical backgrounds informing the works" (Beuka 2001, 158) of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. The attention paid to Hemingway is more than justified: "More than John Dos Passos, more than Scott Fitzgerald, more than Thomas Wolfe, more than William Faulkner, all of whom published works of genuine distinction in the late 1920s, Hemingway was hailed at the beginning of his career by literary critics as the brightest star in American fiction and its best hope for the future" (Raeburn 1975, 118). Bruce Barnhart (2009) paid attention to the connection between the novel and jazz. In his opinion, they both perform "similar functions. Both respond to a "dissonance of existence" (216).

This collection enriches the extant bibliography with new perspectives. Scholars from Spain, Germany, and Romania, who are at different stages of their career and who rely on different methodologies, look at the 1920s and their echo in the fiction of the time. Sascha Klein and Anca Bădulescu analyse the novel of the 1920s taking a close look at the sonorous and the musical values in John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* and in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*. The former novelist dealt with the American metropolitan panopticon and its influence upon the human subject. The latter experimented with the musicalisation of fiction, starting from the "jungle of noise" metaphor. Loredana Bercuci deals with the intersection between class and race in *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay and with the writer's attraction to the Communist ideology. José María Díaz-Lage, for his part, delves into some manifestations of camp aesthetics, such as the reliance on dialogue and the tendency of using tableau-like plots, in Ronald Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* and Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Pastors and Masters.* As the 1920s marked a change in women's history by the appearance of two new female types, the woman voter and the flapper, several essays deal with women's novels and the gender constructs during this period. Iulia Andreea Milică tackles the representation of the flapper and her fashionable clothes in *The Offshore Pirate*

and *The Ice Palace*, two of Fitzgerald's earliest short stories. Mihaela Mudure deals with Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, a forgotten novelist of the 1920s, whom she tries to rescue from undeserved oblivion. Then Alina Preda focuses on lesbian love and desire in Radcliffe Hall's works written or published in the 1920s and the effect of external or self-inflicted censorship upon this writer. Also focusing on a woman novelist, Carmen María Fernández-Rodríguez's analysis on Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind West Wind* addresses the powerful winds of change coming from the West that were affecting China during the 1920s, particularly concerning women. During this decade children's literature gained momentum and was fully stablished as it is identified nowadays. Two of the essays of the volume examine very different facets of this genre: Begoña Lasa-Álvarez analyses *Just Jane*, the first of a series of books for girls by Evadne Price, concentrating specifically on the new suburban lifestyle showcased in the text, and in the final essay, Andrea Valeiras-Fernández and María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia offer an insightful study of the illustrations created for the new adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published for the 1920s generation.

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