

**Alberto Lázaro 2005: *El modernismo en la novela inglesa*. Madrid: Síntesis. 239 pp.
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It might be argued that, for the specialist, it is as difficult to write a book directed to a general readership as one addressed to a set of scholarly peers. In its quest for accessibility, the first sort of study veers toward simplification and imprecision, while the latter steers clear of these by developing argument open to dispute. Alberto Lázaro's *El modernismo en la novela inglesa* overcomes both sets of difficulties, for Lázaro's study, addressed to the specialist and non-specialist alike, sidesteps the traps of survey coverage and in so doing shapes an original synthesis of the modern British novel.

Writers of studies such as Lázaro's often begin with a set of disclaimers aimed at defusing the twin attacks on omission and simplification. In *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (2004), for instance, Ayers early expresses his hope "that no one will mistake omission for exclusion" and confesses to being "excruciatingly aware of the periodic loss of subtlety" (xi-xii). Matz seeks in like fashion to forestall censure of *The Modern Novel* (2004), a study acknowledged to be "*truly* introductory" (emphasis in the original), by setting out "to map in bold and plain lines a territory readers might later explore more fully" (2). Baldick's finely researched and capacious *The Modern Movement* (2004) similarly sees its "organization of material" as "designed to provide a broad view of the period's literature, not a series of intensive critical analyses of individual authors and works" (14). Such introductory moves aim to narrow the field – to delimit a time, space and guiding *Zeitgeist* in which multiple, often contradictory representations of existence converge – and to identify the angles from which the field is viewed.

Lázaro's solution to the need for delimitation first surfaces in the syntax of his title, where the period-specifying *El modernismo* gives way to the post-modifying *en la novela inglesa*. Narrowing its focus gradually on the period and genre named, the study enacts its title's large-scale approximation by adopting a fivefold structure. In reviewing Lázaro's book below, I follow this fivefold structure and seek to highlight the study's numerous strengths and few weaknesses.

El modernismo en la novela inglesa surveys the path it will chart in its introduction, where a further delimitation arises in the definition of *la novela inglesa*, taken to be that produced either by writers born in the British Isles or by others, such as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Wyndham Lewis, Jean Rhys and Lawrence Durrell, in contact with the former group. This clarification gives way to a summary description of each chapter to follow, thus allowing the reader to see the path that awaits. One also finds here a stated aim, namely to fill a gap in scholarship with an introduction in Spanish to the modern British novel, and one infers as well a primary audience, university students of English and comparative literature. This first part closes with a set of caveats not unlike those quoted above, particularly as regards the writers and texts selected. Faced with the obstacles of broad coverage, uneven authorial production and a disputed canon, Lázaro

admirably combines aesthetic concerns with social ones and helps to redress the eclipsing of writers excluded because they were women.

Examining the cultural contexts of the modernist period, the study's second part, 'Los nuevos caminos de la modernidad', subdivides along the lines of socio-historical and intellectual change, on the one hand, and aesthetic definition, on the other. Lázaro here ably sidesteps the traps of periodization, which Jameson identifies thus: "any rewarding use of the notion of a historical or cultural period tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalization, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, 'expresses' some unified inner truth" (1981: 27). Lázaro avoids facile simplification when delineating not only the modernist period's shifts in economic and industrial organization, but also its class strife, accelerating urbanization, waning imperial order, particularly as regards the Irish struggle for independence, and advocacy of women's rights. To these changes Lázaro adds shifts in the paradigms of philosophy, medicine and science, as well as the searing impact of the Great War (1914-1918), whose prolonged bloodshed and devastation belied any confident narrative of progress or of the nation as beneficent custodian of the common good. Throughout this discussion, Lázaro often points to the presence of socio-historical reality in modernist texts, thereby dismissing the misleading separation of the two. When facing the issue of aesthetic definition, Lázaro similarly avoids the tendency to place all fiction written in the period under the heading *modernist*. This decision accords with Stevenson's sense of *modernism* and *modernist*, "appropriately applied . . . to the work of writers sharing the belief that a modernizing of forms and the reshaping or abandonment of tradition were necessary conditions of their art" (1998: 3). Further discussion here of the period leaves out for the moment conceptions of language, deeply influential throughout the twentieth century and traced to varying degrees by Bradbury and McFarlane (1991: 48-49), Stevenson (1998: 170-99), Bell (1999: 16-18), Childs (2000: 61-65) and Baldick (2004: 57-71). There is also little explication of journalism, literacy and technological shifts in communication, which spawned "a palpable increase in intellectual traffic of all kinds, in ideological trade, in cultural exchange" (McFarlane 1991: 78), and enabled speedier internationalism. Despite these shortcomings, this second part clearly conveys the modernist call for a sharp break with the immediate past, surveys an array of artistic movements designed to open or deepen the break and sagely dismisses univocal claims for modernist aesthetics.

The study's third part, 'El espíritu modernista en la novela inglesa', identifies the call for a decisive break in the corpus of novels chosen for analysis. These novels evidence a modernist abandonment of realist conventions and of Victorian or Edwardian sensibility, the latter burlesqued – by analogy with the Hobbesian formula *nasty, brutish and short* – as haughty, priggish and mean, though these attributes survive on most spots on the globe. The procedures to take the former's place, as Lázaro portrays them, entail a fresh rendering of reality, one less tied to the surfaces of the external world or to the visible features, acts and audible speech of characters, less given to the recitation of attributes typically circulating in social life, and more focused on the characters' unfolding thought, particularly on its lightning leaps of perception, cognition, association and memory. This focus sought to reveal, as Trotter phrases it, "experience as it happens, not as it is subsequently conceptualized", in "the mimesis of individual acts of apprehension" (1999: 71, 84). The club-like complicity of narrator and reader

often elicited by the Victorian novel, in addition, gives way to the modernist narrator's frequently cool reluctance to take the reader's hand. As regards a set of narrative practices, this third part includes in its modernist repertoire the loosening of plot and closure, the loss of presumed infallibility and omniscience, a foregrounding of character in the terms mentioned above, a conceiving of time in ways that stray off and circle round a linear chronometric axis, subtle shifts in voice and point of view and a thickening of prose with figure and trope. A trend in recent literary historiography, adumbrated by Stevenson (1998) and repeatedly argued by Baldick (2004), tends to question the fault-line separating nineteenth-century realist precedent and modernist innovation, a division on which Lázaro's choice of corpus largely depends. Baldick, for instance, early avails himself of Cyril Connolly's "basic model [in *Enemies of Progress* (1938)] of a broad Modern Movement that includes puritan realists as well as 'modernist' Mandarins and at the same time acknowledges conflicts and compromises between these two tendencies" (2004: 394). Adopting this model at his study's close, Baldick concludes that much of "what we call modernism was indeed realism in a new manner, modulated by symbolist or expressionist devices, inflected by new psychological emphases. . . . Modernism did not abolish or supersede realism; it extended its possibilities" (2004: 401). Lázaro, though, has made it clear that his focus on writers of marked experimentation in no way negates the existence of abundant realist fiction in the period, nor does he take modernist novelists to be magicians pulling rabbits out of their hats. Rather, he skilfully balances the extension of realist precedent with the indisputable innovation in the period, an innovation arising, as Fletcher and Bradbury put it, "in a way that would have been incomprehensible a century or so previously" (1991: 396).

Two further sections in this third part address the issues of theme and influence, and each section is misleadingly brief. The explication of theme focuses on the ways in which the thought of characters caught on the wing reflects not only idiolects, subjective biases and isolation – particularly those of the artist – but also inevitably socio-cultural contexts. Lázaro likewise identifies thematic patterns that question epistemological certainty, introduce subject matter previously taboo and spotlight a metafictional awareness of formal artifice. This first section is deceptive in that the previous chapter has inventoried a broad expanse of new subject matter spawned by the thought and events of the period. The section on influence underscores the international dimensions of modernism and pays particular attention to nineteenth-century French and Russian literature, contemporary Scandinavian drama and the development of cinema, and it too is richly anticipated by discussion in the previous chapter.

Spanning five chapters and the bulk of the book, the fourth part of *El modernismo en la novela inglesa* interleaves the ordering principles of chronology and theme with discussion of seventeen novelists. For each writer, Lázaro adopts a procedure that leads a set of oeuvre-wide observations into the explication of a single text and marked contribution. Chapter 3, 'Los inicios', charts the emergence of modernist experimentation and feminist advocacy in the work of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, Sara Grand and Mona Caird, the latter two justly complementing well-rehearsed concentration elsewhere on the former three. Lázaro discusses James's pioneering contribution to narrative theory and gives specific attention to *The Portrait*

of a Lady (1881) in order to clarify its early experimentation with point of view. Conrad is cast as a revealer of rank corruption below the glossy surface of virtue, often through an allegorical inner journey superimposed upon an outer one to the unknown, and as a multiplier of the angles and circumstances of narration. Both roles – the former anticipating the period’s rejection of Victorian and Edwardian pieties – are evidenced in a study of *Heart of Darkness* (1902). A collaborator of Conrad’s and like James a significant theorist, Ford is seen, through attention to *The Good Soldier* (1915), to portray the inscrutability of experience, before which reportorial omniscience is a false witness to reality. Lázaro discusses Grand and Caird in the section ‘Las novelas de la “nueva mujer”’, which aligns the representation of women with feminist advocacy of equal rights in law and fact for half of humankind. Grand’s work as a novelist, essayist and activist is exemplified by *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), which depicts the pain caused by double-standards in the treatment of women, along with the necessity and difficulty of other options for existence, as does Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), which traces these in the life of an aspiring artist.

Chapters 4 – ‘Las grandes figuras’, identified as D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf – and 5 – ‘La mujer como tema narrativo’, largely traced in the work of Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Jean Rhys – compose a second cycle of study combining the analysis of modernist innovation with themes proper to female experience. Both chapters devote equal time to each writer, in a democracy of explication that is to Lázaro’s credit, and hold three purposes: to signal the specificity of each writer’s work, often in novels of education; to point out affinities and differences between writers; and to extend the lines of narrative evolution drawn in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 6, ‘De la vanguardia a lo político y social’, examines the work of E. M. Forster, Wyndham Lewis and Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Chapter 7, ‘La etapa final’, focuses on Samuel Beckett, Malcolm Lowry and Lawrence Durrell. These chapters trace the ways novelists in the period foreground socio-political issues and respond to the influence of their modernist peers and predecessors.

The study’s fifth and last part groups a selection of extracts, an index of names, a glossary of terms, a tripartite chronology and a brief bibliography. This part clearly acknowledges the book’s primary audience, university students of English and comparative literature. The selection of extracts – fragments of expository prose by James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Dorothy Richardson, T. S. Eliot, Leon Edel and Ezra Pound – facilitates discussion of the content of previous chapters, while the glossary of terms and index of names – the latter placing salient character descriptions alongside brief author biographies – permit speedy identification. The tripartite chronology correlates contemporaneous history and cultural life with the novels discussed; the bibliography is too brief and incomplete, in that several critical texts mentioned in the study are not duly catalogued.

The risks of composing a study such as Lázaro’s are manifold, chief among them the need to reduce a vast and complex span of literary and social history, encompassing countless texts, many of considerable length, along with a large body of existing scholarship, to the slender space of a medium-length single volume. The feat of doing so is akin to making a map of the stars, where acts of spatial transposition and reduction are “testimony to a phenomenal power of compression” (McKenzie 1999:

44). Herein lies the value of *El modernismo en la novela inglesa* to the specialist and non-specialist alike: its synthesis of the modern British novel, covering abundant ground in brief compass, avoiding the traps of survey coverage, maps new configurations with original insight, its prose graced by a clarity of expression for which the reader is grateful.

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