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The debate between Modernism and Postmodernism has been one of the most revisited topics in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century cultural and critical history ever since Jean-François Lyotard's *Le condition postmoderne* (1979) managed to trigger off an enduring interest in the large-scale evolution of Western culture and the nature of knowledge over the past century. Given its omnipresence, this debate has taken a variety of flavours, colonised many areas of intellectual activity, and informed a spate of books and papers either exclusively focused on it or using it as theoretical scaffolding to carry out critical analyses of texts, as happens in quite a few of the essays making up the volume under review here. The definition of Postmodernism against the backdrop of Modernism raises all-important questions, but, to my mind, the crux of the matter is whether the former can be conceived of as a logical evolution from the latter, as a kind of modulation or intensification along temporal lines of previously existing features, or else whether Postmodernism is an essentially different project that has been named after Modernism for merely chronological reasons and branded a sequel when it was constitutionally dissimilar—just as if we insisted on calling the Renaissance the Postmedieval period simply because one predates the other. The debate between Modernism and Postmodernism has been alive in the fields of philosophy, economics, politics, psychology, natural sciences, architecture, and, of course, literature and literary criticism at large. Now it seems to be the turn for the short story to act as an appropriate contending arena to prolong the debate a little longer, though, for me, it remains perfectly clear that the true worth of this collection of essays lies in its emphasis on the short story and its theorisation as a genre rather than on the debate itself, which results for the informed reader in an uneasy sense of intellectual déjà vu.

Apart from an editorial introduction and a final onomastic and conceptual index, *Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Short Story in English* comprises nine essays

thoughtfully organised into four parts, plus an initial discussion by the editor in which he summarily deals with the vast topics—the early theories of the genre, the Modernist notions of autonomy, subjectivity, and fragmentation, the anti-representational semiotics of Postmodernism, the reinstatement of political issues in the Postmodernist agenda, etc.—that are invoked time and again throughout the collection and make it into a reasonably cohesive enterprise. The first part contains two essays by Adrian Hunter and José María Díez aimed at redefining Modernism as against the hegemony of High Modernism, while the three essays by Tim Armstrong, Fred Botting, and Paul March-Russell collected in the second part enter full upon the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism from the angle of the short story and, more specifically, from that of the effacement and displacement of the subject in the subgenres of the ghost story and science fiction. In the third part, however, the subject is no longer pictured as hidden or diffracted in the formal intricacies of the text; it is rather foregrounded through the communal notions of race, culture, and nationality. This Postcolonial agenda is either compounded with attractive versions of the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism in the essays by Esther Sánchez Pardo or José Manuel Barbeito and María Lozano, or free from it as in Manuela Palacios' account of how contemporary Irish short fiction deals with a sympathetic brand of Englishness that can provide healing experiences to Irish men and women beset by nationalist prejudices and hatred. The book closes with a fourth part containing only one essay by José Francisco Fernández, in which he spells out the panorama of the British short story at the turn of the twenty-first century with an emphasis on its underground atmosphere, immediacy of representation, and troubling social concerns.

Prima facie, the four-part organisation of this volume seems natural enough, and the selected guiding threads—Modernism vs. High Modernism, the different modes of presence or absence of subjectivity in the short story, and the final, spirited *quo vadis* of the genre—tend to eschew randomness and promote in the reader a reassuring sense of clarity and achievement. On closer inspection, however, what seems to prevail is a criterion of a different type that divides essays into those deeply informed by the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism and those virtually unaffected by it. Apart from the opening discussion by the editor, which is unattached to any of the four parts, there is a core of five central essays—those by Armstrong, Botting, March-Russell, Sánchez Pardo, and Barbeito and Lozano—that feature this debate, or variations thereof, in its conceptual DNA. Curiously enough, these five essays are flanked by another four in which either Modernism is treated by Hunter and Díez in isolation from Postmodernism for chronological and thematic reasons or both trends are altogether ignored by Palacios and Fernández in what I believe is a successful attempt at a fresh, direct, declarative variety of criticism remote from the claustrophobic narcissism of more theoretical papers.

Having got to this point, a word is in order about the dialectic of theory and criticism in the collection. Generally speaking, the intertwining of both is satisfactory and the line separating theory-prone essays from more critical ones is finely drawn and rather unstable at

that. But it is also true that there are contributions such as those by Armstrong, Botting, and March-Russell in which the discussion of concrete short stories seems subservient to the making and illustration of theoretical points about the genre, points arrived at deductively from preconceptions rather than inductively from the examination of sufficiently wide corpora of texts. This lowly, confirmatory role attached to critical activity can be seen at work when authors state the aims of their papers. In this respect, for instance, opening abstracts and initial paragraphs tend to illustrate this *modus operandi*, a typical example being March-Russell's remark that J. G. Ballard's short fiction "can be seen as exemplifying Deleuze and Guattari's claim for writing to be considered as a machine" ([125]), though he later acknowledges the possibility that a confrontation with the text may prove the Deleuze-Guattari theory wrong. On the other side of the line, and with little or no aspiration to theoretical creativity, we have Hunter's essay, which makes a historiographic point about the short story and the origins of Modernism, and the essentially critical accounts by Palacios and Fernández just mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Also critical in their main purpose, though with a high awareness of the shaping power of theory, the chapters by Díez, Sánchez Pardo, and Barbeito and Lozano constitute a middle ground in the intersection of theoretical and critical concerns.

Being placed on the fringes of the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism seems, in principle, the only common ground of the four essays that, two by two, open and close the collection. But as soon as Hunter's "The Short Story and the Difficulty of Modernism" and Díez's "Allegory and Fragmentation in Wyndham Lewis's *The Wild Body* and Djuna Barnes's *A Book*" are subjected to careful perusal, a central analogy comes into full view—both try to redefine and enlarge the contours of Modernism, one chronologically by pushing the limit *a quo* as far back as the 1890s and the other conceptually by underlining that the current image of Modernism is biased and partial, and fails to account for creative modes outside the hegemonic mainstream of subjective experience represented by writers such as Joyce, Woolf, or Mansfield. Working in the specific field of the short story, Hunter convincingly claims that typical Modernist concerns such as elitist difficulty, plotlessness, incompleteness, and absence of traditional closure—as well as the effect of these on the marketability of the product—can be traced back to the 1890s. At that time, select circles of authors and readers, equating difficulty with literariness, began to develop around experimental nodes such as Henry James's late nineteenth-century short fiction and brought about the fragmentation of the market in highbrow and lowbrow sections well before High Modernism acquired full currency in the interwar period. Díez, for his part, emphasises the existence of a decently hidden branch of Modernism polarly opposed to the received image of this movement and adversarially working within it. Where hegemonic Modernism favours symbolism, impressionism, psychological depth, and organic form, its unruly sibling thrives on allegory, expressionism, external surfaces, and a mechanical approach to writing, as is revealed in Díez's discussion of two short fiction sequences by Lewis and Barnes. The

closing pair of essays contributed by Palacios and Fernández deal with very recent developments of the short story, a fact that roughly gives *Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Short Story in English* a temporal design on top of its thematic organisation. In “One anOther: Englishness in Contemporary Irish Short Fiction,” Palacios addresses a Postcolonial topic and combines national, cultural, and gender issues in her reading of three short stories of Irish, female authorship. Her point of departure is the notion of the “inspiring Other” proposed by Anna Triandafyllidou to divest the confrontation with otherness of the customary components of incomprehension, antagonism, or hatred. For Palacios, the three short stories under analysis—“The Wall Reader” (1985), “Five Notes after a Visit” (1985), and “Twentynine Palms” (2008) respectively by Fiona Barr, Anne Devlin, and Mary O’Donnell—manage to bring to the realm of domesticity the encounter between Irish, female characters and affable representations of Englishness “in a fulfilling experience that overcomes mutual mistrust and surrounding hostility” (221). Lastly, in an enticing coda to the whole collection titled “A Move against the Dinosaurs: The New Puritans and the Short Story,” Fernández discusses recent developments of the short story in Britain by looking at the anthology *All Hail the New Puritans* (2000) in the context of disturbing social issues—generally absent from the short story—and against the creative background of similar anthologies such as *Children of Albion Rovers* (1996), *Disco Biscuits* (1997), *britpulp!* (1999), and *Piece of Flesh* (2001). In his diagnosis of the present condition of the genre, Fernández underlines several distinctive features related to authorship, ideology, publishing outlets, and poetics. First, storytellers are irreverent young people who show themselves “disrespectful of tradition,” contemptuous of established authors (the “dinosaurs” of the chapter title), and who “expressly desired to remain provocative” (234); second, they adopt underground and countercultural attitudes indicative of a generational divide and of a poor fit into the social mainstream; and third, the marginal nature of publishing procedures—quite remote from traditional ones—confirms the transgressive status of the whole project. From the angle of topics and narrative techniques, these short stories are heavily committed to the representation of immediacy—they occur in the present time, mostly in the United Kingdom, and basically picture ordinary young people in dull, everyday situations. Narrative terseness predominates; there is no room for “epiphanic moments, psychological insights, subtlety or implication” (240), i.e. for the resources that have traditionally distinguished the genre. Everything is entrusted to the simple unadorned act of straightforward storytelling.

As stated above, other essays in this collection are considerably more responsive to the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism. Three in particular declare this purpose from the very outset, namely Armstrong’s “Man in Sidecar: Madness, Totality, and Narrative Drive in the Short Story,” Botting’s “Stories, Spectres, Screens,” and March-Russell’s “The Writing Machine: J. G. Ballard in Modern and Postmodern Short Story Theory.” All three expressly seek to pinpoint differences and continuities between Modernism and Postmodernism within the field of the short story. Armstrong draws attention to the dissimilar

ways in which modern and contemporary texts deal with the crucial relation between totality and fragmentation and illustrates his point with reference to Modernist works—James Joyce’s “The Dead” (1914) and Katherine Mansfield’s “The Stranger” (1921)—and Postmodernist short fiction collections—David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* (1999) and David Foster Wallace’s *Oblivion* (2004). Botting and March-Russell do likewise, but they respectively take the ghost story and science fiction as their touchstones. In a baroque, vehement style, the former relates the short story to defamiliarising effects and the uncanny as they are differently materialised in Modernism and Postmodernism. For him, the phantasmagorical contributes to the definition of the modern as much as to undermining its aesthetic principles in a movement that goes from Poe’s short fiction to Angela Carter’s recreation of him including the widely divergent attitudes of Virginia Woolf and May Sinclair to screens and magic lanterns. March-Russell, for his part, discusses the different ways in which the short story is theorised in Modernism and Postmodernism by reflecting on his own book *The Short Story: An Introduction* (2009) and with reference to J. G. Ballard’s science fiction and the Deleuze-Guattari related notions of minor literature and writing as a machine. He opposes the Modernist-New Critical paradigm of the short story, with its emphasis on the singleness of effect, epiphany, organicism, and subjective revelation, to the acknowledged insistence on “the strong story” as against “a literature of nuances” (qtd. 135) and the mechanical “manufacture of his fiction” (135)—an art of surfaces and artifice.

The two remaining chapters by Sánchez Pardo and Barbeito and Lozano seem to me successful syntheses of aspects of the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism and of Postcolonial concerns. In “Postmodernist Tales from the Couch,” one of the most commendable pieces of the whole collection, Sánchez Pardo makes a strong case for the essential continuity of Modernism and Postmodernism through the shared notion of *betweenness* and backs her opinion via a percipient intertextual reading of “Atlantis: Model 1924” (1995)—a short story by African-American author Samuel Delany—as a rewriting of Hart Crane’s Modernist poetic sequence *The Bridge* (1930) and especially of its last section “Atlantis.” Oddly enough, both works are intertextually indebted to two iconic texts of High Modernism, respectively *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, which contributes to consolidating the “deeper foundational similarity” (154) as advocated in this essay. While Sánchez Pardo detects Modernist features in a contemporary text such as Delany’s “Atlantis: Model 1924” and a Postmodernist view of American history in Crane’s *The Bridge*, Barbeito and Lozano somehow follow suit in “Mind the Gap: Modernism in Salman Rushdie’s Postmodern Short Stories.” Working against the grain of received notions, they unearth a silent Modernist poetics from Rushdie’s purportedly Postmodernist short fiction collection *East, West* (1994), laying emphasis on what they call “an aesthetics of the comma” (178), i.e. the constitutive fracture, a no-man’s-land of sorts, where the subjectivity of the migrant-citizen is placed and graphically represented in the title by an element of disjunction and antagonism—a comma—and not of addition or coordination. Having declared their aims and methods, Barbeito and

Lozano analyse the whole triadic collection—a sequence of nine stories split up in groups of three respectively called “East,” “West,” and “East, West”—in order to conclude that “a political reading of Rushdie’s work . . . cannot be separated from a modernist strategy” that highlights “the alienating experience both of being in the world and of being in language . . .” (204).

*Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Short Story in English* is a mature volume, full of complexity and insight. Apart from the academic reputation of its contributors, many of them recognised experts in short story theory and criticism and even authors of influential book-length monographs, their attempt at overhauling the genre against the backdrop of the debate between Modernism and Postmodernism must be judged as generally sound and well-timed, especially when specific theoretical and critical conclusions are drawn—as is the case here—and the debate in question remains more or less a catalytic element. In spite of ominous dicta, the demise of Postmodernism does not seem to be forthcoming and, on account of the continuity posited in chapters such as Sánchez Pardo’s, Modernism is with us as much as ever. But even if one lays aside issues of opportunity and timeliness, the collection has more assets than liabilities—its daring variety, its capacity to challenge hackneyed binary notions about Modernism and Postmodernism, and, above all, its critical perceptiveness turn it into profitable reading for all those who feel inclined to believe that the short story is a genre of and for the future.