

**MOVING ACROSS A CENTURY: WOMEN'S SHORT FICTION
FROM VIRGINIA WOOLF TO ALI SMITH**

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This recent book offers a theoretical approach to modernist and postmodernist short fiction studied from a psychoanalytical perspective. Scholars and students interested in modernism and postmodernism as well as in literature written by women should not miss the enjoyment of reading these essays which highlight the distinctive features of the short stories written by Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Elizabeth Bowen, Angela Carter and Ali Smith.

In the introduction Laura María Lojo Rodríguez and Jorge Sacido Romero describe this book as a manual containing analyses of the feminist canonical works which revisit Woolf's and Mansfield's modernist writing, the changing character of Bowen's short fiction and the postmodernist features in Carter and Smith. All the essays of the collection analyze the presence of the psychoanalytical perspective of philosopher Slavoj Žižek.

In Chapter one, "The Shape of Things to Come: Virginia Woolf's 'The Mark on the Wall'", by Julián Díaz Martínez and Lourdes E. Salgado Viñal offers a complete analysis of this short story from perspectives of famous modernist critics such as Slavoj Žižek, Hannah Arendt, Wilkie Collins, Terry Eagleton and Michael Whitworth. The defense of the feminist view of Woolf's short fiction in which there is strong criticism of patriarchy is clear and the expression of a modernist writing style which rejects Edwardian realist traditional writing is magnificently explained. The strongest part of this essay is the explanation of Virginia Woolf's

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feminist ideology. The famous essay “A Room of One’s Own” by Virginia Woolf is not even mentioned in the text and a brief analysis of it would have been useful to explain the situation of women who did not have the same freedom to write that exists in modern times. In Díaz and Salgado’s close reading of “The Mark on the Wall” the mock of established sexual politics of space is compared with Žižek’s idea that modernists are aware of cracks in the symbolic order. At the end of the chapter Eagleton’s connection of Woolf with phenomenology is used to explain Woolf’s exploration of identity and subjectivity in politics.

The second chapter is entitled: “‘Flying Off on Tangents’: Katherine Mansfield’s Short Stories” by María Casado Villanueva. She analyses three stories by Katherine Mansfield: “The Daughters of the dead Colonel”, “Bliss” and “The Garden Party” applying Slavoj Žižek’s approaches to modernist concepts. In the analysis of “The Daughters of the Late Colonel”, the “childish retardation” comes from the patriarchal attitude of the father of the protagonists who controls them to the point of preventing them from moving forwards. Casado states that this feeling corresponds to Žižek’s notion of the inaccessible transcendence which avoids movement. According to Casado in “Bliss” (1920) the protagonist, whose name is Bertha, is a sexually frustrated woman who desires to transgress the Law of the Father. Casado finishes the chapter with an analysis of Mansfield’s “The Garden Party” (1921) in which modernist aesthetics foreground forms of enjoyment depending upon the Symbolic. Casado concludes by emphasizing the subtle meaning of these stories in which the complexities of the symbolic are expressed through strategies which Žižek associates with modernism.

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In the following chapter Irene Iglesias Pena explores the modernist and postmodernist aspects of the transitional character of three short stories by Elizabeth Bowen: “The Happy Autumn Fields”, “Look At All Those Roses” and “The Cat Jumps”. Iglesias argues that Bowen’s short stories “The Happy Autumn Fields” and “Look At All Those Roses” weaken the authority of the father by inspecting the protagonists’ life as pre-subjects. In both stories the lost bond with the mother in infancy and the pre-self represent a modernist philosophy released from the symbolic order. However, “The Cat Jumps” anticipates the postmodernist discourse with the advent of the obscene father within the social sphere. Although the chapter deals with Elizabeth Bowen’s reflections on female sexuality there is a notable absence of feminist theory and criticism. A profound analysis of the woman condition in modernist fiction could include the theories from ‘écriture féminine’ by Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.

According to Iglesias Pena, in “The Happy Autumn Fields” the woman who dreams about love between two siblings symbolizes a desire to return to the Real. In “Look at All Those Roses” the figure of the ‘anal father’ is a sign of transcendence

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to postmodern aesthetics. Finally, in “The Cat Jumps” a group of intellectuals are having a conversation and their manifestations of *jouissance* are disguised by references to modern architecture and other topics. According to Iglesias these stories reflect the changes from modernist to postmodernist aesthetics.

Chapter four is entitled “‘In Me More Than Myself’: Enjoyment at the Heart of the Symbolic in Angela Carter’s Short Fiction”. In the first place, the author, Ana María Losada Pérez, considers that Carter’s “The Executioner’s Beautiful Daughter” is an example of the co-dependence between the Name-of-the-Father and its opponent, the anal father, played by the figure of the executioner. In the second place, she compares “The Bloody Chamber” to Charles Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (1697), which is a very accurate comparison, but there are another two clear intertextual relations which the author could have been added: the Marquis de Sade, because like the protagonist of the story it was a French marquis who tortured and murdered women; and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), in which Rochester’s ex-lover is also hidden in a secret room. In Carter’s story the protagonist is saved from the murderer husband by her mother who knows about her daughter’s danger by telepathy. Losada contrasts the opinions of some writers who consider the story as feminist with those of others who believe that it is antifeminist. The third story analyzed includes the figure of the anal father: “The Erl King”, which Losada compares to “Little Red Riding Hood”. The story is about a man who rapes two girls, they suffer a metamorphosis and become birds and at the end of the story they are imprisoned in cages. Losada comments again on Carter’s exploration of women’s masochistic complicity in becoming objects for men. In “Wolf-Alice” a pubescent girl is suckled by wolves but then is sent to a convent where they try to civilize her. But when Mother Superior tries to convince her to give thanks to God for having rescued her from the wolves she goes wild again. At the closure of the story Alice looks at herself on the mirror and cries when she sees that she is a monster. Losada celebrates Carter’s ability to express the postmodernist idea that there is no essential authority to dictate what form the mirror must reflect. In “The Fall River Axe Murders” women’s passivity is present as in other stories by Carter and the male character represents the figure of the anal father as described by Žižek. In “Lizzie’s Tiger” the protagonist escapes from The-Name-of-the-Father. In both “The Fall River Axe Murders” and “Lizzie’s Tiger” there is a malfunctioning order in which subjects either are submissive or become monsters. Carter’s stories are postmodernist in Losada’s reading because they describe enjoyment at the very heart of the symbolic and the characters in them render the Name-of-the-Father inconsistent and split into their selves within the symbolic and enjoyment.

In the last chapter of the book Celina Sánchez García examines Ali Smith’s collection *The Whole Story and Other Stories* (2003). She introduces her chapter

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by highlighting the Scottish writer's postmodernist stylistic characteristics: fragmentation of discourses and point of view as well as intertextual and metafictional devices which reflect on contemporary social and literary debates. In this chapter she analyzes Ali Smith's postmodernist poetics as a reflection of the culmination of a referentiality crisis which started in modernism. According to Sánchez García, in Smith's opening narrative, "The Universal Story", the speaker pays attention to the necessary process of revision and change of a text that a writer has to develop taking into account those "false starts" and the unconscious nature of the text. Prof. Sánchez García praises Smith's work for establishing a relationship between text and material reality with the use of intertextual references or spatial references for the process of writing, like bookshops or libraries. For her, in Smith's collection there is balance between artifice and fragmentation with writer's choice of natural patterns. Sánchez García understands that Smith's book reflects Žižek's theory that trying to escape from reality through language games only brings us closer to reality itself.

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This book inquires into fiction written by women from the beginning of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century. The contents of the chapters are homogeneous and solid because all the works are interpreted in the light of Slavoj Žižek's philosophical theories. The volume offers dynamic close readings of short fiction written by women in which patriarchal rules are criticized and women's desires of freedom are vindicated. To conclude, the volume contributes new critical essays of short fiction written by women which will help the readers of psychoanalytic literary criticism understand modernist and postmodernist concepts better and will complement their reading of the stories with psychoanalytical perspectives.

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