

Review

María Teresa Caneda Cabrera. *La estética modernista como práctica de resistencia en "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man"*. Vigo: Servicio de Publicacións da Universidade de Vigo, 2002, 259 pp.

This volume is the first full-length critical study of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in Spain. It aims to stimulate the debate on the nature of modernism and comes to enrich the already rich Spanish scholarship on Joyce. Over the last four decades, Joyce's oeuvre has been the focus of more than twenty monographs and collections of essays by distinguished Spanish scholars and writers. As could be expected, *Ulysses* has generated the most critical attention and is the most widely studied of Joyce's writings, with five books published on a wide range of themes and approaches, including the early discussion of epic conventions in Manuel Almagro's *James Joyce y la épica moderna: introducción a la lectura de "Ulysses"* (1985), the analysis of Judaeo-Christian traditions in Juventino Caminero's *El "Ulysses" de James Joyce: una interpretación desde la perspectiva hebraica* (1994), and the later study of characterization in María Isabel Porcel's *Interrelaciones de los personajes en "Ulysses" de James Joyce* (2003). Within this wealth of critical interest in Joyce's opus magnum *Ulysses*, Caneda's analysis of the *Portrait* is most appreciated as a fresh view of Joyce's fiction.

As its title suggests, this volume is not only a discussion of Joyce's novel but also offers an interesting revision of the traditional view of modernism. For many years, some critics have seen the modernist movement as a formalist aesthetic that turned away from engagement with the real world of social and political issues. Rather than looking at modernist authors as uncompromising intellectuals who are only concerned with experimental techniques, Caneda regards modernism as a rupture with either social forces or with the cultural traditions of its particular art forms. The implications of this tenet are demonstrated in her reading of Joyce's *Portrait*, which is seen as subversive of dominant aesthetic and political ideologies. In fact, Joyce's novel, it is argued, challenges the very same aesthetic principles that it apparently defends.

The author has designed a coherent structure, which allows her to develop the argument properly. The volume opens with a useful

introductory chapter of a broadly informative nature in which Caneda clearly establishes the aims of her research, describes her approach and summarizes the critical state of play, focusing mainly on the oblique concept of modernism and adopting a revisionist stance along the lines of Astradur Eysteinnsson's *The Concept of Modernism*. This is followed by two theoretical chapters which show, on the one hand, the links between modernism and postmodernism and, on the other, the reductionist nature of that formalist criticism which sees modernism simply as an experimental literary movement, unconcerned with history and politics. The discussion of the *Portrait* is carried out in three further chapters. One is dedicated to the enormously varied critical reception of the novel: from the traditional critics associated with New Criticism and poststructuralist theories, to more recent studies that focus their attention on the historical and political context of the text. In the other two chapters Caneda resorts to the latter kind of approach to offer a revision of Joyce's novel, exploring issues of literary genre, structure, character, narration, language and the relationship between art and reality. Finally, a concluding chapter summarizes the main points of the book and offers interesting perceptions about the affinity between Joyce and Stephen, both being presented as representatives of the modernist artist whose art involves formal concerns and a close connection with reality.

Caneda's is a well-documented book. A bibliography with well over two hundred titles is provided at the end, a detail that reflects the author's wide reading. The text is on the whole clear, meticulous and precise, with plenty of footnotes that refer the interested reader to particular critical sources and offer valuable comments or explanations that the main text cannot accommodate. It is true, however, that at times footnotes occupy half the page and make reading a disjointed experience. There are also many lengthy quotations from secondary sources, which are sometimes distracting and occlude the author's argument and voice. The practice of quoting can be legitimate in postgraduate dissertations, but in this kind of study, literal quotations should be used economically, and many of them would have been better incorporated into the narrative. Nevertheless, the book is well-written, demonstrating a flair for clarity and exposition.

Among the many valuable assets of Caneda's comprehensive and cohesive study are its painstaking research and important findings. Particularly interesting is, for instance, the analysis of Joyce's handling of irony in chapter five, or the discussion of the novel as the development of Stephen's individual identity within a particular Irish context in chapter

six. Sections like these are what make this book worthy of commendation. Overall, this volume makes a major contribution to Joyce studies in particular and to twentieth-century literary criticism in general. It also makes a significant contribution to the critical debate over the nature of modernism, a subject that has received much attention in academic circles, but still offers much to be explored.

Alberto Lázaro