Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY AND THE MODERNIST SUBJECT

FINITE, SINGULAR, EXPOSED

Edited by
Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas, Paula Martín-Salván
and María J. López

ROUTLEDGE

New Perspectives on Community and the Modernist Subject

New Perspectives on Community and the Modernist Subject: Finite, Singular, Exposed offers new approaches to the modernist subject and its relation to community. With a non-exclusive focus on narrative, the essays included provide innovative and theoretically informed readings of canonical modernist authors, including James, Conrad, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Mansfield, Stein, Barnes and Faulkner (instead of Eliot), as well as of non-canonical and late modernists Stapledon, Rhys, Beckett, Isherwood and Baldwin (instead of Marsden). This volume examines the context of new dialectico-metaphysical approaches to subjectivity and individuality and of recent philosophical debate on community encouraged by critics such as Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot, Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito and Jacques Derrida, among others, of which a fresh redefinition of the modernist subject and community remains to be made, one that is likely to enrich the field of "new Modernist studies." This volume will fill this gap, presenting a redefinition of the subject by complementing community-oriented approaches to modernist fiction through a dialectical counterweight that underlines a conception of the modernist subject as finite, singular and exposed, and its relation to inorganic and inoperative communities.

Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas is Associate Professor of English at the University of Granada (Spain). He has published on literary theory and twentieth-century women's fiction (Mansfield, Hurston, Stein, Frame, Carter, Bird) and is a specialist in New Zealand and Australian Literature. He is the author of three books on Katherine Mansfield (the latest by Edwin Mellen Press, 2012) and co-editor of *Community in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Palgrave, 2013). His most recent articles/chapters have appeared in *Continuum, Australian Literary Studies, FEMSPEC, JASAL, Bilingual Review, Atlantis* and *Meanjin*.

Paula Martín-Salván is Associate Professor of English at the University of Córdoba (Spain). Her current research focuses on the representation of communities in modernist and postmodernist fiction, in the light of

theorizations by Jean-Luc Nancy, Maurice Blanchot and J. Hillis Miller. Her recent publications include the edited volume *Community in Twentieth Century Fiction* (Palgrave 2013, co-eds. Julián Jiménez and Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas) and the monograph *The Language of Ethics and Community* in Graham Greene's Fiction (Palgrave, 2015).

María J. López teaches in the English Department at the University of Córdoba (Spain), where she received her PhD in English Literature in 2008. She has published *Acts of Visitation: The Narrative of J.M. Coetzee* (Rodopi, 2011), has co-edited the special number "J.M. Coetzee and the non-English Literary Traditions" in EJES (2016), and has published in journals such as the *Journal of Southern African Studies* (Terence Ranger Prize 2010), the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *English Studies* and *English in Africa*.

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Introduction

Who's Afraid of the Modernist Community?

Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas, Paula Martín-Salván and María J. López[1]

Community and the Modernist Subject

The debate on the commitments, directions and critical implications of modernist literature is far from over. In fact, as David James and Urmila Seshagiri have argued, the field of modernist studies is probably right now characterised by more self-scrutiny than ever (88), a critical phenomenon that obeys to two main reasons: on the one hand, the incredibly persistent legacy of the modernist mythos in contemporary arts and letters; on the other hand, its "unprecedented geographical, temporal, and cultural diffuseness" (88) – the term *modernism*, pluralised into *modernisms*, has come to embrace a wide range of cosmopolitan, transatlantic, regional and diasporic movements and names. In their coinage of the term "New Modernist Studies" (2008), Mao and Walkowitz already pointed to temporal, spatial and vertical expansion as the main transformation in recent modernist literary scholarship, in particular what they call "the transnational turn."

We would also like to claim the necessity to reread and reassess the meanings and methods of modernism. Yet, instead of endorsing the centrifugal and expansive fashion of most recent modernist studies, we intend to operate in a centripetal fashion, by revisiting one of the central concepts in traditional understandings of modernism: the individual. The old concern with the solipsistic and isolated modernist individual has been partly replaced and complemented by new scholarly approaches that put the emphasis on the different cultural, political and historical contexts out of which modernist works and their characters arise, many of them with a special focus on the relation between modernism and colonialism, imperialism and global transactions. The myth of the modernist individual is still operative in many ways, though. The reading of what we could call Anglo-American canonical modernism still depends, to a large extent, on the oppositions of self-versus-reality and self-versus-society, a reading that does not do justice to the dialectical and metaphysical complexities of the modernist individual and its communal affiliations.

In the context of inquiry into subjectivity and community by thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot – and others such as Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito, Jacques Derrida or Judith Butler – a fresh re-assessment of the modernist individual remains imperative. As the essays collected in this volume intend to prove, the categories of singularity, exposure and finitude may prove an appropriate lens through which to approach the modernist subject's agonistic exploration of interiority, together with its permeability to non-conventional and non-essentialised external forms of community.

The possibility of community understood as any form of collective affiliation was categorically ruled out by George Lukács in his interpretation of modernist fiction, which very much determined later critical readings. In the realistic novel, as seen by Lukács, the chasm between subject and world is replaced by the illusion of totality granted by narrative closure, thus keeping a principle of unity which seeks to re-establish in formal terms the totality of a lost identification. In modernism, according to Lukács, such totality becomes impossible, even in formal terms, with the illusion collapsing into a literature of the fragmentary and the dislocated. The negation of the outside world in favour of interiority as the only representable space takes place then. Whereas in realism, individual existence is inextricably linked to its social and historical context, in modernism the subject appears as naturally isolated and unable to fit into a community. In "all great realistic literature," Lukács argues, the "individual existence" of characters "cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created" (19). On the contrary, in modernist literature, "man is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (20).

Lukács's construal of the modernist novel as an anomalous form bound to stage the individual "confined within the limits of his own experience" (21) became an article of faith for various generations of critics, especially those belonging to a Marxist tradition, and even still today remains an implicit influence behind much of what is written and taught about writers such as Conrad, Joyce and Woolf. A case study is Terry Eagleton, for whom in modernist works, "the human subject is at once adrift, cast off, yet shaped to its roots by forces he can never quite control or summon entirely to the light of consciousness" ("Contradictions" 40). A critic like Raymond Williams, who explicitly engages with the concept of community, espouses a similar view. *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (1970) is a study of realism in terms of what Williams calls a "knowable community": "the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways" (14). As opposed to the nineteenth-century novelist's ability to articulate a full and meaningful range of social relations, the modernist writer – according to Williams's view in *Politics of Modernism*

(1989) – adopts a much more restricted world view. Modernist fiction is characterised by "isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss" and "the lonely, bitter, sardonic and sceptical hero" (35). Given the post-modernist appropriation of modernism's formulae, Williams can only hope for an alternative tradition that may address itself "to a modern *future* in which community may be imagined again" (ibid., emphasis in the original). These readings of modernist fiction depend on a series of Lukácsian dualities, explicitly embraced by Eagleton in his study of the English novel: "fact and value, objective and subjective, inner and outer, individual and society" (*English* 19). The modernist novel becomes, thus, the site of conflict and misalliance – emotional, moral, perceptive, cognitive, spiritual or epistemological – between the internal self and external reality, hence the associated themes of isolation, solipsism and self-destructiveness commonly identified as central to modernist fiction.

The rupture between the subject and his/her external reality is epitomised by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), who joins a long list of extreme individualities populating early twentieth-century novels, from Joris-Huysmans's Des Esseintes in *Against Nature* (1884) to Marcel in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1927) or Thomas Mann's Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* (1912). Certainly, Stephen Dedalus's desire to fly by the nets of "nationality, language, religion" (Joyce 203) in order to "forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (252–253) makes us see to what extent it was modernist writers themselves who promoted the idealistic-romantic version of the artist's conflict as one against not only established and conventional forms of community, but also against external reality in general. The movement away from the external world, both in sociological and epistemological terms, is substituted by an immersion into interiority that critics have repeatedly described as the modernist "inward turn" and that Virginia Woolf somehow formulated in her well-known essay "Modern Fiction" (1919), a sort of manifesto of literary modernism in general. In her opposition between Edwardian writers – "materialists" – and modern writers – "spiritualists" – Woolf is implicitly relying on an outside-inside opposition, rejecting the former term in favour of the latter. Materialist writers are concerned "not with the spirit but with the body" (7), whereas for the moderns, "the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology" (11). The task of the novelist, then, Woolf famously claimed, must be to convey the "myriad impressions" and the "incessant shower of innumerable atoms" as they fall on the mind (9). Harold Bloom has argued that in her perception of the self, "Woolf's sensibility essentially is Paterian" (2). In "Modern Fiction," Woolf's emphasis on the sensations and impressions received by the mind strongly recalls Walter Pater's celebrated conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1873), where he defines individual experience in very similar terms:

> Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.
> (119)

As numerous critics have argued, Paterian sensibility influenced not only Woolf, but also many other writers from Oscar Wilde to Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad or Ford Maddox Ford, being central for the configuration of the intellectual genealogy we are tracing: Pater's definition of each mind as a "solitary prisoner" makes clear that his aestheticism is one that concerns the isolated individual. As put by Robbins, the passage before is "virtually a statement of solipsism, the belief – or fear – that the world has no objective existence outside the mind of the individual" (14). According to Levenson, Pater was very much responsible for destroying the previous equilibrium between subjectivity and the large world beyond it, "acknowledging the primacy of the subjectivity but denying its necessary connection with extrasubjective concerns" (*Genealogy* 17).

The origin of modernist subjectivism and psychologism, however, cannot be located in a single source. Going back to "Modern Fiction," Woolf's defence of a new kind of fictional form that focuses on the "ordinary mind" (9) makes her part of a wider, early twentieth-century movement in which writers like Woolf herself, Joyce, Mann or Proust, and philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Henri Bergson and William James radically transformed the way we narrate and think of the workings of the human mind, giving place to the much-discussed "crisis of the subject." This dialogue between literature, psychology and psychoanalysis was central for the critical emphasis on the "inward turn" that Eric Kahler traced in his seminal 1970 study, which presents the history of the novel as a growing tendency to represent interiority: "an increasing displacement of outer space by what Rilke has called inner space, a stretching of consciousness" (5). As argued by Eysteinsson, this inward turn, which has become one of the modernist paradigms, is "widely held to have ruptured the conventional ties between the individual and society" (26). In the way it has been read and interpreted by thinkers like Lukács, Eysteinsson explains, "modernism is built on highly subjectivist premises: by directing its attention so predominantly toward individual or subjective experience, it elevates the ego in proportion to a diminishing awareness of objective or coherent outside reality" (27).

This shift in perception, from the objective to the subjective, entailed the transformation of narrative form, with the subsequent – at least partly – rejection of realism[2] and the use of techniques such as free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness. Herman summarises this

tendency by saying that "the modernist accent falls less on fictional worlds than on fictional-worlds-as-experienced" (243). Lewis also analyses the "Copernican revolution" that modernist writers carried out in the form of the novel, pointing to the modernist emphasis on the perceiving subject and the tendency to make the narrator into the character, with the aim of underlining the difficulty of arriving at a shared, intersubjective account of reality (213).

Our concern is with how this critical emphasis on modernist subjective experience and individual perception has entailed the negation of collective and communal projects or concerns. This is the case of Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane as they define modernist art as "art consequent on the disestablishing of communal reality": "The communal universe of reality and culture on which nineteenth-century art had depended was over" (27). There are critics, on the other hand, that focus on characters' resistance to collective forces and ultimately escape from them. Thus, according to Levenson, a repeated movement in many modernist novels is "the portrayal of a dense webs of social constraints followed by the effort to wrest an image of autonomous subjectivity from intractable communal forms" (*Fate* xii). Levenson's critical stance is close to a standard account of Anglo-American modernist fiction, according to which exteriority takes the particular form of rigidified and conventional social forms and collective affiliations, often dependent upon national identity, but also upon other inherited traits such as social class, ethnicity/race, gender, sexuality or language. In the face of such constraints, especially that of national culture, a common predicament is exile, one that we see in fictional characters, but again, also in modernist artists themselves: writers, as Steiner has argued, "unhoused," detached or alienated from a native language, a national identity or any form of established community[3] (14).

The critical negation of community in modernist fiction is, then, based on a particular communitarian conception. Lukácsian readings tend to oppose the modernist representation of self-absorbed subjectivities to earlier realist representations of a social totality for which the character metonymically stands. The modernist dissolution of reality and of personality is a symptom of the reactionary lack of commitment to the social and historical environment. This reading of modernism, then, assumes the pre-existence of an earlier stage – the realm of the realist novel – in which there is indeed coherence between the self and its environment, a harmonious experience of the individual in the world. The departure point for this view of modernism, therefore, is a state of loss, some nostalgia for totality and community, which is precisely what Jean-Luc Nancy describes in the first part of *The Inoperative Community*. According to Nancy, community in the modern era has always been thought in terms of loss: "always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious and infrangible bonds" (9).

The longing is for a community characterised by "its own immanent unity, intimacy, and autonomy," one in which there is not only "intimate communication between its members," but also "organic communion with its own essence" (9). This model of community is defined as institutionalised and transcendental, based on notions of shared identity and common purpose provided by stable discursive and ritual practices. It is the dreamed community – the *Gemeinschaft* in Tönnies's terms – humans have allegedly lost, the utopian community they seek to reconstruct, a cultural chimera that stems from the ideological saturation of human society – the *Gesellschaft*.

We certainly believe that modernist fiction repeatedly traces a movement away from organic and operative forms of community. Thus, we share with other critics, like Levenson, the perception that the modernist novel would come to express the exhaustion of traditional communal models as the satisfactory sources of social interpellation and of the articulation of individual identity – particularly the nation as a political horizon or institutionalized communities *qua* ideological state apparatuses, such as the church, family, school and others. Community, however, does not disappear. As Levenson argues, the diverse fortunes of individuality in modern English fiction – "its changing verbal aspect, its historical limits and symbolic resources, its political dispossession, cultural displacement and psychological self-estrangement, its uneasy accommodation of mind and body, its retreat from the world and its longing for community" (*Fate* xi) – are inseparable from the fate of community. Thus, exile in modernist novels frequently leads "not to an escape from the community, but to a withdrawal to its interstices" and to the "attempt to construct a figure of individuality from within the rigid confines of community" (xii). Our view, then, is distanced from the common perception that literary modernism only finds a way out of the failure of traditional communal projects in self-absorbed individualism. We hope to demonstrate that in the modernist self's quest of interiority, there is also a search for alternative collective bonds, which, as depicted in modernist fiction, very much resemble community as thought by Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot.[4]

An inoperative community is based on its members' constant recognition of otherness, finitude and death. Both Nancy and Blanchot take cue from Bataille's notion of "the community of those who have nothing in common" (Blanchot 1). This is proposed as a tentative, unstable model of community formulated as the momentary encounter of singular beings having nothing in common but their own mortality (Nancy, *Inoperative* 26–27). According to Blanchot, a community is what "exposes by exposing itself" (12) to an "exteriority" otherwise branded as "death, the relation to the other, or speech" (12). For Blanchot, this kind of community is defined by its spontaneity (30), all-inclusiveness (31) and the sense of its imminent dispersal (33). It is an eventual community,

which "happens" (32) only momentarily, without duration and without a projection or aim. It does not aspire to communal fusion, for it is "a being-together without assemblage" (Nancy, "Confronted" 32). A quick look at some of the best-known modernist depictions of the individual and its relation to others will reveal the striking similarity with Nancy's and Blanchot's communitarian model, which makes highly surprising that there has not been a more thorough application of this theoretical framework to the study of modernism. Modernist fiction is pervaded by situations in which the individual detaches him/herself from socially accepted functions, laws, determinations or exigencies (Blanchot 33), establishing instead an enigmatic communitarian bond, determined by the experience of death and finitude. That is the case of Gabriel in Joyce's "The Dead," Marlow's encounter with Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Mrs Dalloway's inexplicable identification with Septimus Warren Smith when she hears about his suicide or Laura's intense connection with her brother after having seen a dead man, in Mansfield's "The Garden Party."

Our contention, then, is that the distinction drawn by Nancy and Blanchot between operative and inoperative communities may prove useful to visibilise recurrent dynamics in modernist fiction, of opposition to some kinds of community and allegiance to or search for others. The essays included in this volume show that many modernist narratives are built on the tension between organic, traditional and essential communities, on the one hand, and precarious, intermittent and non-identitary ones, on the other. Thus, in his analysis of Faulkner's fiction, Greg Chase formulates the opposition between what he calls communities based on "narratives of knowledge" – stories used to define and control individuals – and communities based on "narratives of acknowledgement" – stories that enable a shared understanding of finitude, simultaneously inviting and thwarting acknowledgement. Modernist fiction may even depict a longing or nostalgia for traditional forms of community, associated with a lost age and a communal intimacy impossible in modern times. That is the case of Virginia Woolf, as analysed by María J. López, who focuses on Woolf's depictions of the (pre)medieval English village as a close-knit community, governed by natural cycles, ancient rites and Anon's storytelling.

In Woolf's concern with a communal linguistic expression that may last throughout English history, we see the nation as modernist communitarian reference, often with the aim of questioning an operative and organic conception of it. In this sense, we agree with Pericles Lewis's contention that modernist writers use the novel "to rethink the values and institutions associated with the sovereign nation-state" (3). In the hands of many critics, however, the ethnical, political and/or cultural nation has been hypostasised as the only realm of exteriority the individual may confront, thus precluding the functional mediation of

intervening communities such as the family, the church, a gendered collective, a social class, political party or subnational ethnical group. Thus, the concept of community has tended to suffer from neglect in critical and literary discourse. This has gone together with another tendency discernible in accounts of English fiction – manifest from Ian Watt through Nancy Armstrong – which places an inordinate emphasis on the somewhat synchronous emergence of individualism and the public sphere. The stress on the consolidation of the public sphere, and by extension society – an innovative critical trend largely bolstered by English versions of decisive studies by Habermas and Koselleck – has also had the negative effect of sidetracking the role of community, admittedly a more specific notion than *Öffentlichkeit* and/or *Gesellschaft*.

There are exceptions to this prevalent tendency, as is the case of Kim Worthington in *Self as Narrative* (1996), where she analyses the dialectic between subjectivity and community in the work of John Banville, J.M. Coetzee and Margaret Atwood. Worthington considers the modernist "division between self and others" as constituting "an impassable gulf" (4). She rightly traces the modernist tendency to solipsistic alienation back to the "Romantic celebration of inwardness," but she fails, in our view, to see how the possibility of self-construction via "intersubjective discursive processes" was already at work in modernist fiction. If we are right in our suggestion, the gap "between individual autonomy and communal constructivism" (10) is significantly narrowed not only in the postmodernist fiction she analyses, but also in that of its modernist precursors. Thus, Craig A. Gordon carries out an illuminating account of the relation between modernism, body and community. Examining the interrelation of literary and bioscientific cultures in early twentieth-century Britain, he focuses on "how the comprehension, representation, and manipulation of the human body becomes crucial to the imagination, formation, and maintenance of different forms of community" (3). Explicitly drawing on Nancy, Gordon sheds light on the different organic communities depicted by modernist texts, while in search for alternative subjective and communal forms focused on what he calls "impossibly material bodies" (16), bodies that resist intelligibility, discursive inscription and cognitive appropriation.

As it has already been mentioned, Michael Levenson is one of the scholars who has most strongly pointed at the problematic relation between individual and community in modernist fiction. In *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality*, Levenson points at the inescapable nature of community, here mostly understood in sociopolitical terms as either national community or the Althusserian ideological state apparatuses. His readings of the modernist novel persistently identify an understanding of subjectivity as communal, but his interpretation of it follows a sociological rather than an ontological line of argumentation. In *Modernism*, Levenson traces the development of the thought of collectivity

from realism to naturalism and then to modernism, pointing to the emergence of mass culture and the motives of masses, crowds and mobs as indexes of a shift in the writers' representation of the individual against the background of the collective (63–69). Using Zola's *Nana* as paradigmatic case, Levenson perceives the opening of a gap "between individual and society" (69) to be symptomatic of modernist narrative, in which "the extreme is true." The Lukácsian interpretation of modernism as the enactment of the rupture between individual and community is here identified with the choice between two extremes, the deviant individual or the irrational mass: "The attempt to comprehend modernity produces not merely the statistics of mass society but also, repeatedly, a portrait of the special case, the singular instance" (71). It is precisely the need to overcome this "either/or" understanding of the modernist novel that triggers our own articulation.

Jessica Berman is probably the critic who has most strongly defended the presence of community in modernist fiction. She contends in *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (2001) that "in much high modernist fiction we can already see community being imagined over and over again" (2). Dealing with the work of Henry James, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, Berman argues that these writers' texts "return again and again to issues of commonality, shared voice, and exchange of experience, especially in relation to dominant discourses of gender and nationality" (3). As she focuses on the relation between community, narrative and historical discourses of social identity and nationality, Berman opposes both liberal political theory and various trends of current communitarian thought, like Charles Taylor's or Amitai Etzioni's. She also critiques discourse-based theories of community, like Habermas's, which present utopian versions of affiliation in the public sphere. Berman argues that the discursive versions of modernist communities are "not predicated on direct communicative speech or the transparency of the intention of the speaker," but rather show the "difficulty" of "the constant making and un-making of human inter-connections" (6).

Berman also finds support in Nancy's theory of community, especially in the way it allows for the possibility of a political community that goes beyond the consensual public sphere, opening itself to marginal voices that seem to speak outside of politics in general (14–15). Her use of Nancy, then, is quite restrictive and is very much in the service of the social and political analysis she carries out. While we find Berman's and Levenson's ideas highly inspiring, this volume works in a different direction, with many of the chapters following much closer Nancy's – and Blanchot's – communitarian proposal, which makes a straight political reading problematic.[5] The individual's fate, furthermore, is fairly absent from Berman's analysis. Our aim, on the contrary, is to reassess the fate of the modernist individual in the light of new communitarian

approaches. Thus, López argues that, as opposed to traditional understandings of the modernist writer as an isolated and solipsistic figure, Woolf's understanding of literary creation is based on the necessary connection between writer and community.

In his analysis of the community of women artists in Katherine Mansfield, Gerardo Rodríguez-Salas makes a thorough revision of the modernist understanding of the artist in relation to an aesthetic and political community, drawing on Jacques Rancière's critical reappraisal of modernism in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2006). Rancière speaks of an "aesthetic revolution," a cultural transformation started at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which led to the emergence of what he calls an "aesthetic regime." He distinguishes the "representative regime of art" – corresponding to heavily regimented forms of cultural production – from "aesthetic art" – a historically contingent form of art with a political potential because of its ability to shift the aesthetics of politics, or what he calls "primary aesthetics" (13). The promise of political emancipation that Rancière detects in his "aesthetic art" is further developed in Levenson's conception of modernist writers not as solipsist, but as perceiving themselves to be engaged in forms of "creative violence" ("Introduction" 2). Levenson sees their narrative as strategic: rather than considering them as "elite purists," they can be painted as artists who were "sharply conscious of their historical entanglements" (ibid.).

Some chapters included in the book are more specifically focused on modernist individuality or subjectivity. That is the case of Doug Battersby's analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Ill Seen Ill Said*. In his emphasis on the narrator's desire to inhabit the enigmatic subjectivity of the text's old woman and on the readers' epistemological and affective engagement with fictive subjectivity, Battersby points to the importance of imaginative empathy in order to fully appreciate the complexities of the Beckettian subject. Battersby, then, shows the *inter*subjective nature of Beckettian fictional subjectivity, confirming Castle's contention that even in the case of modernist "radical solipsism," such as the one we find in Beckett, there is

> a vertiginous sense of time and space in which multiple voices create the din of a community – a confused sense of belonging … that, for all its failings, constitutes a new narrative dynamic for character development and the consideration of human action.
>
> (4)

Tram Nguyen, for her part, deals with the wandering body in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Stein's *Ida*, exploring the relation between dwelling, identity and sexuality. According to Nguyen, both Joyce and Stein construct an architectonics of bodily dwelling that is open and permeated by the world. Drawing upon the relational aspect of singularities, Nguyen

investigates a neuter ontology and its connection with corporeity – an aspect further developed in this collection by Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo. Nguyen focuses on Heidegger's formulation of ontological dwelling to examine the strategies employed by Joyce and Stein that germinate the possibility of a primordial being and its neuter sexuality and explores the characters of Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Ida in Stein's eponymous work as case studies to reconsider an alternative perception of singularities.

Bonnie Roos explicitly aims to overcome modernist solipsism in her study of Djuna Barnes. Roos's starting point is that Euro-American modernist criticism has implicitly favoured the individual over the communal. In *Nightwood*, Barnes highlights the contrast between the conflicted US American capitalist desire for individualism and the belief that true aid for the working classes only results from community, aligning with "red-breasted" or Communist leanings. Barnes's project, Roos suggests, is not only to underscore the way individualism/capitalism undermines a communal peace process and true security for the working classes, but also to critique even leftist journalism. Roos illuminates this tension between the communal and individual in Barnes's work by focusing on a character from *Nightwood*, Jenny Petherbridge, and her real-life Parisian counterpart, Marthe Hanau.

In the case of those chapters with a more clearly communitarian approach, Mercedes Díaz Dueñas's and Brian Willems's contributions delve into the cosmopolitan and transnational concern traversing Berman's analysis.[6] Díaz Dueñas explores how the notions of elitism, classism and cosmopolitanism combine in D.H. Lawrence's novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* to expose different kinds of (operative and inoperative) communities, as defined by Nancy. This approach shares Berman's argument that "community becomes linked to a cosmopolitan perspective" in response to "the threat of totalitarian models of national community" and that community must be seen as a narrative process (*Modernist Fiction* 3). Díaz Dueñas highlights the tension of Berman's and Appiah's cosmopolitanism and Friedman's notion of planetary modernisms with Nancy's communitarian revision, which proves illuminating in the analysis of Lawrence's novels.

Willems explores Berman's and Levenson's cosmopolitanism in Olaf Stapledon's novels, which challenge assumptions about the way modernist subjectivity is created through the tension between individuality and community. The community is not a passive tapestry on which individual identity is weaved; rather, it actively participates in the formation of subjectivity. In a modernist context, this view challenges the ways in which the individual is seen as a reaction or abstraction in relation to cosmopolitan communities. Willems contends that individual subjectivity is actively involved in the cosmic community in a way that Blanchot denies.

Other contributions deal with an openly communitarian approach that materialises in a community of two, having as reference Blanchot's community of lovers or friends, which he offers as example of the unavowable community: "the strangeness of that antisocial society or association, always ready to dissolve itself" (33). As pointed out before, Rodríguez-Salas's focus is on the dual community of women artists. His starting point is Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of the artistic community in its relation to modernism, as developed in *Rules of Art* (1992). Bourdieu contends that the artistic autonomy of the modernist ghetto was a mirage, since it never fully separated from the "field of power" (215). Rodríguez-Salas argues that, unlike Woolf, Katherine Mansfield never belonged formally to any artistic community. Her dissatisfaction with the strict "Order of the Artists" but simultaneous need for artistic rapport might have led her to become a "resistance figure" (Badiou 6) against the bourgeois dominant field and the self-appointed modernist groups of artists. Rodríguez-Salas investigates Mansfield's artistic resistance, an idea further developed by Haffen in her chapter for this collection.

Paula Martín-Salván deals with the importance of the pair of male characters in Joseph Conrad's fiction, arguing that the relationship established among them is never sanctioned by institutionalised forms of community and is not based on the sharing of identitarian individual traces, but rather established against the will of the characters themselves, who are thrown together in asymmetrical relations of non-reciprocal confidence and forced hospitality, invoking the logics of host-parasite relations.

Singular, Exposed, Finite

In the final passage of "The Dead," Gabriel Conroy conveys an enigmatic communitarian vision, according to which "the living and the dead" are joined together by the falling of the snow. After contemplating the body of a dead man, in Mansfield's "The Garden Party," Laura experiences an intense connection with her brother Laurie, based on something "she couldn't explain," but that "[h]e quite understood" (261). In Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*, it is the threat of the Second World War, the threat of death, that creates a bond between characters. As William Dodge puts it, it is "the doom of sudden death hanging over us" (103).

In all these texts, what emerges is a community that "differs from a social cell in that it does not allow itself to create a work and has no production value as aim" (Blanchot 11). It is traversed by the experiences of death and otherness. Like the kind of community envisioned by Nancy and Blanchot, it does not have as a goal the establishment of an identity, communal or individual, for its members. Other thinkers, such as Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, have also insisted on an idea of community that is free from demands of commonality and is based on

the identity of its members. Agamben talks about "an *inessential* commonality, a solidarity that in no way concerns an essence" (*Coming* 18), whereas Esposito defines community as "the totality of persons united not by a 'property' but precisely by an obligation or a debt" (*Communitas* 6). In all cases, they are going back to Bataille's "community of those who have nothing in common."

In our view, the modernist self *unworks* the existing relations of operative communities so as to authorise a mode of communal life based on the recognition of and exposure to finitude, contingency and singularity. The tentative expression of this inoperative community, therefore, involves the abandonment of a conception of the subject as rational agent, in possession of a self-constructed identity, in favour of a notion of singularity whose precondition is an exposure to the outside: "*communitas* is that relation, which in binding its members to an obligation of reciprocal donation, jeopardizes individual identity" (Esposito, *Bios* 50). As mentioned by Julián Jiménez Heffernan in his chapter for this volume, the intellectual dialogue established around Nancy's philosophical ideas on individuality and community has reinvigorated a vocabulary inherited mostly, although not exclusively, from Martin Heidegger. Thus, the terms singular, exposed and finite refer to metaphysical and ontological realms as readapted by Nancy.

Singularity. The inoperative community is not made up of individuals or subjects, but of singularities: "singular existences that are not subjects and whose relation – the sharing itself – is not a communion, nor the appropriation of an object, nor a self-recognition, nor even a communication" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 25).

The common meaning of "singularity" refers to a single instance of something or a separate being. The etymology of the term, however, already contains the inevitability of the plural, according to Nancy:

> In Latin, the term *singuli* already says the plural, because it designates the "one" as belonging to "one by one." The singular is primarily *each* one and, therefore, also *with* and *among* all the others. The singular is a plural
>
> (*Being* 32)

This is the key aspect of Nancy's take on the concept: "An immanent totality, without an other, would be a perfect individual" (32). The singular, by contrast, "is indissociable from a plurality" (ibid.) in the sense that the term marks a separation, a bringing apart from what was previously together: "The concept of the singular implies its singularization and, therefore, its distinction from other singularities" (ibid.). Singularity is always "plural singularity": being towards death with others (88). Nancy develops a social ontology inherited from Heidegger: being

is being with others in that one's being is only in as far as it is not other beings, a separateness that refashions the Cartesian relation between the self and the *res extensa* and turns the relational (being with) into the essence of being: "if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the 'with' that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition" (Nancy, *Being* 30). Nancy insists that the relational – the being-with – is the primary category of existence, rather than a secondary or additional one springing from Being (as individual subject).[7]

It is precisely this relational aspect that Aude Haffen highlights in her chapter for this collection. She claims that, in his Berlin novels, Christopher Isherwood reshapes the personal, the subjective and the communal into fluid, loosely relational communities of characters, a new approach matched and authorised by unartistic narratives foregrounding the singular, the idiosyncratic and the contingent. Haffen largely relies on Nancy, for whom literature suspends and interrupts the completion of its message or representation – it does not "work" or "operates," it "plays." What literature – or "the singular voice of interruption" – communicates (i.e., offers to the community) is "*an infinite reserve of common and singular meanings*" (*Inoperative* 193). As Haffen aptly argues, Isherwood's Berlin novels are only committed to the relational and the singular and detached from sociological or political use.

Nancy thus traces a distinction between singular being and subject that points to the former's lack of self-presence in a Cartesian sense: "The singular is an *ego* that is not a 'subject' in the sense of the relation of a self to itself" (Nancy, *Being* 32). In Blanchot's articulation, the traditional understanding of individuality as independent consciousness in a romantic sense and the subject as a "full being," then, is replaced by a "principle of incompleteness" at the root of being (5). Bataille's "principle of insufficiency" (ibid.) is precisely what allows the unavowable community to emerge: the "impossibility" of being "a separate individual … summons the other or a plurality of others" (6). "Insufficiency" and "incompleteness," then, do not disappear in the inoperative or unavowable community. On the contrary, as we are exposed to the "incompleteness" of the other, we recognise the "incompleteness" in us. In such a community, there is "neither the Hegelian desire for recognition, nor the calculated operation of mastery" (34), but the interruption of self-consciousness and mastery (19). Nancy's take on the notion of singularity couples it inextricably to the plural: "There is no singular that is not placed in plurality and reciprocally, no plurality that is not always singular" (Devisch 103). In Nancy's own words: "Existence *is with*: otherwise nothing exists" (*Being* 4).

The interruption and suspension of singularity prevents "production" and "completion" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 31), and hence the permanent links of a *society*: "Whatever singularities cannot form a *societas* because they do not possess any identity to vindicate any bond of belonging for

which they seek recognition" (Agamben, *Coming* 86). The temporary nature of inoperative communities has been particularly highlighted by Blanchot: "Inert, immobile, less a gathering than the always imminent dispersal of a presence occupying the whole space and nevertheless without a place (utopia), a kind of messianism announcing nothing but its autonomy and its unworking" (33). The Cartesian subject is replaced by the exposed singularity: "*Ego sum expositus*" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 31).

Exposure. Community is nothing, except exposure: exposure to an excess, exposure to an outside and ultimately to death. In the first chapter included in this collection, Jiménez Heffernan carries out a thorough analysis of the omnipresence of exposure as an attribute of existence not only in twentieth-century, but also in nineteenth-century fiction, tracing the intellectual archaeology of this concept in ontology and metaphysics and linking it to Heideggerian and Sartrean frameworks. Exposure is, in Blanchot's terms, "what puts me beside myself" (9). In Agamben's articulation of the *homo sacer*, "life exposed to death" is the crucial element for the political. Exposure of singularities to an outside constitutes a central concept for the understanding of the communal and the political. For Agamben, the space of the community is "the experience of the limit itself, the experience of being-*within* an *outside*" (*Coming* 68). Exposure replaces fusion and communion. It is the sharing and dislocation characterising singular beings:

> Sharing comes does to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself. … *Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition*
>
> (Nancy, *Inoperative* 26; emphasis in the original)

Blanchot links this conception of exposure to "the possibility of a major communication" (25) and depicts it in the following terms: "Now, the 'basis of communication' is not necessarily speech, or even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but the *exposure to death*" (25, our emphasis). This conception of the singular being as ontologically exposed to the other is very far from the Paterian conception of each of us as locked up within ourselves. It is probably this paradoxical state that many modernist characters inhabit. On the one hand, they are entrapped by their intense inner life and individual perceptions. On the other hand, they are exposed to the otherness of the world and of other others.

By virtue of being exposed, singularities become vulnerable. Agamben coins his notion of "bare life" to refer to the vulnerable condition of those singularities who are exposed to the extent of losing rights and protection (*Homo* 133). In her analysis of Jean Rhys's heroines, Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo certainly shows these instances of "bare life"

as presided by patterns of vulnerability – starvation, alcoholism, exile, prostitution, homelessness – and by their very exposure to the limits of (in)humanity. Following Judith Butler's idea of vulnerability in *Precarious Life* (20) – and in line with Blanchot's perception that exposure leads to communication – Sánchez-Palencia Carazo states that vulnerability in Rhys' characters reveals the condition of interdependence that lays the foundations for reimagining the possibility of empathy and community. Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, in turn, links vulnerability with corporeity in the understanding of exposure. For Kristeva, the primary source of the abject reaction is death – because it traumatically reminds us of our own materiality and dissolves the boundaries between subject and object (4). Hence, the connection with our third term in this collection: finitude. In Nancy's words, the state of being-alongside affirms the fundamental nature of existing

> as finitude itself: at the end (or at the beginning), with the contact of the skin (or the heart) of another singular being, at the confines of the same singularity that is, as such, always other, always shared, always exposed
>
> (*Inoperative* 28)

Finitude. According to Devisch, Nancy thinks of finitude from the position of finitude itself, in opposition to a Christian thought that would define the human being as finite in opposition to the infinite divinity (29–30). "According to the Cartesian schema," Anne O'Byrne writes,

> infinity forms a pair with finitude: there is the infinite thinking substance (God) and the finite thinking substance (the ego). Finitude on this model is a state of lacking the scope of the infinite; it is the state of having boundaries beyond which lies all that infinity has and finitude lacks
>
> (86–87)

In this sense, Nancy leaves behind the negative quality of the term as a limitation set on infinitude: "it does not consist in a limitation (sensible, empirical, individual, as one would like) which sets itself up dependent upon infinity and in an imminent relation of sublimation or of recovery in this infinity" ("Sharing" 246). Moreover, he claims that it "does not mean a limitation which would relate to man – negatively, positively or dialectically – to another authority from which he would derive his sense, or his lack of sense" (Nancy, "Heidegger" 70).

This is the point of departure for Nancy's thinking on community as *unworked* and on the individual as no longer self-present – a singularity rather than a subject. His understanding of finitude connects but also

differs from Jean Paul Sartre's, who made it a central element in his understanding of ethics and freedom by pointing to how "freedom is interiorization of finitude" (60) in as far as "choice is choice of what I am to the exclusion of all the rest" (60). It connects with the Heideggerian articulation of Being-towards-death as "a prior orientation to temporality govern[ing] any attempt to understand being" (Schalow 30). In Nancy's articulation, then, finitude indicates an opening, an exteriority or otherness in being, precluding it from self-presence or immanence to itself. The ultimate experience of exteriority for human beings is death, which is omnipresent in modernist fiction. Whereas it is hard to sustain a sense of community based on death from a sociological or political point of view, modernist writers again and again suggest an enigmatic bond between characters whose origin is their shared mortality. It is here, then, that the critical value of Blanchot's, Nancy's and Agamben's communitarian proposal for our understanding of modernist fiction emerges most strongly, given the surprisingly similar terms in which they present the relation between subjectivity and death. Agamben considers death as the negation of "petty bourgeois" individuality: "In death the petty bourgeois confront the ultimate expropriation, the ultimate frustration of individuality: life in all its nakedness, the pure incommunicable" (*Coming* 64).

A common point in Blanchot, Nancy and Agamben is the contention that death is at the centre of the inoperative community, as the ultimate expression of inassimilable experience: "Death is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself .... A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 14–15). This death, however, is not transfigured into "some substance or subject – be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, a delivered or fulfilled humanity, absolute phalanstery, family, or mystical body" (Ibid.). Death remains unassimilable alterity.

Greg Forter's chapter revolves around the notion of finitude. His essay focuses on James Baldwin as a late modernist whose internationalism and cross-ethnic identifications enable an especially trenchant critique of the psychosexuality of white racism. By placing Baldwin in dialogue with Faulkner on one hand and contemporary theories of transnationalism on the other, Forter pays particular attention to Baldwin's exilic consciousness – his experience of the black-modern self as intrinsically homeless and inhabited by other people's ghosts – and shows how this estrangement is, for Baldwin, an echo of the foundational estrangements and intimations of finitude so central to poststructuralist theories of the subject. Yet, he is also concerned with historically "surplus" forms of alienation, estrangement and finitude – those that are produced by specific social organizations of power. His attentiveness to the interplay between these enables a unique kind of modernist "knowledge" about racism and desire.

The writers selected for this volume respond to the recent kaleidoscopic vision of modernism and its cosmopolitan impulse, as theorised by Berman or Levenson. Canonical – and not so canonical – names in British modernism (Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Stapledon) are interlaced with central writers in American modernism (Faulkner, Barnes), as well as others who, also canonical, reflect mixed geographical origins (Mansfield, Rhys, Isherwood). Our focus is on the period of high modernism, but we stretch the movement to consider its evolution to late modernism (Beckett, Baldwin). The present selection of writers aims at exploring modernism from different angles, including gender, class, race and nation. We believe that the ongoing field of modernist studies can profit from communitarian theory, particularly if we focus the lens on the three terms that vertebrate our volume – singular, exposed, finite. It is from this standpoint that the present collection aims to offer its contribution.

Notes

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2 See Herman (252–253) for a review of the different critical accounts of the purported modernist break with realism.

3 See Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism and the Politics of Community* for an analysis of the contradictions and complications of modernist detachment (16, 27).

4 Our theoretical inspiration, then, comes from the so-called "Nancy debate," the set of theoretical interventions and responses around a seminal essay, "The Inoperative Community," published by Nancy in 1983. Both Nancy and Blanchot were very much influenced by Bataille, working in a post-Nietzschean and post-phenomenological tradition. Roberto Esposito, Alphonso Lingis and Giorgio Agamben are some of the authors who have also contributed to this intellectual debate. Since the early 1980s, these thinkers engaged in an intellectual dialogue – Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* (1983), followed by Agamben's *The Coming Community* (1990), Lingis's *The Community of those who have nothing in common* (1994) and Esposito's *Communitas* (1998) – which has greatly energised the theoretical status of the notion of community. For a detailed account of communitarian thought, see Heffernan's "Introduction: Togetherness and its Discontents."

5 On the difficulties for articulating a political theory out of Nancy's philosophical ideas, see Esposito ("Community": 84): "By removing community from the horizon of subjectivity, Nancy made its political ramifications extremely difficult to articulate – starting from the obvious difficulty of imagining a politics that stands entirely outside subjectivity – thus retaining it in a necessarily impolitical dimension."

6 In her more recent work, *Modernist Commitments*, Berman further explores modernist transnational and communitarian aspects, focusing on the interrelationship between ethics and politics.

7 On the Heideggerian origin of this idea, see Nancy (*Being* 26): "Heidegger clearly states that being-with (*Mitsein, Miteinandersein*, and *Mitdasein*) is essential to the constitution of *Dasein* itself. Given this, it needs to be made