

Public Abstract

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MA

English

“Thundering Out of the Shadow”: Modernism and Identity in the Novels of Felipe Alfau

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Felipe Alfau (1902-1999) is a Spanish novelist who lived in the United States. Alfau's two novels, *Locos* (1928, publ. 1936) and *Chromos* (1948, publ. 1990), were undeservedly forgotten for many years. Critics who wrote on Alfau in the late 1980s and early 1990s often argued that his novels were important because of their affinities with the works of postmodern authors like Calvino and Nabokov, Garcia Marquez and Borges. However, reading Alfau as an author of his time allows us to understand his place in the canon in a more balanced way. Thus, in this work I have attempted to demonstrate Alfau's similarities with such modernist authors as Luigi Pirandello, Ernest Hemingway and Wyndham Lewis and his differences from the elements of postmodern thought as described by theorists like Judith Butler and Homi K. Bhabha.

In Alfau's novels, identity is shown to be socially constructed. While this would seem to be a postmodernist, rather than a modernist, concern, Alfau's characters construct identity in ways that differ from postmodernism's egalitarian tendencies. In *Locos*, individual identity is so fluid that it challenges imperialist notions of identity as determined by race and class, yet this fluidity also creates a meritocracy in which some characters succeed in establishing their own identities while others fail. In *Chromos*, Alfau ironically manipulates ethnic stereotypes in order to simultaneously construct and question a Spanish national identity. Ultimately, reading Alfau as a modernist may lead us to a clearer understanding not only of his novels, but of modernism and postmodernism as well.