

---

Patricia E. Chu. *Race, Nationalism and the State in British and American Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. vii, 196. \$91.00.

Patricia Chu's fascinating book engages with the current attempts in modernist studies to open up the field and account for works that have been excluded from the canon because they do not seem to accommodate the dominant aesthetic and or cultural definitions. Adopting a postcolonial perspective and analyzing an interesting and disparate array of texts, she focuses on state governance and its effects on Anglo-American modernist writers. Chu argues that twentieth-century technologies and state bureaucracy allowed for an unprecedented tracking of populations: the franchise, passports, conscription, marriage and mandated heterosexuality, colonial governance, mapping, revamped treason laws, and the centralization of agricultural production increasingly managed and controlled national subjects even as these initiatives promised protection, mobility, and liberty. The alienated, atomized, automata that populate modernist literature are symptomatic of this reorientation of the subject's relationship to the state: T.S. Eliot's commuters on London Bridge are cogs in a wheel—"administrators of society's institutions rather than independent agents influencing those institutions" (2).

Modernist writers, argues Chu, engage with this anxiety about these new methods of regulating citizens, and the zombie (replacing the vampire) thus becomes the monstrous figure of the twentieth-century. In her first chapter, she analyses Bela Lugosi's 1932 film *White Zombie*, released in the seventeenth year of the US occupation of Haiti. Bringing together the figure of the bride who "agrees" to her subordinate position in the social contract, the "consenting" colonized national in the "democratically" occupied island, and the modern twentieth-century laborer who "freely" participates in mechanized and regulated work, she analyses the connections between these three subject positions. Sharing the twentieth-century anxieties about a model of consent that sets up a governing system with few alternatives and then invites "voluntary" participation in it, the film foregrounds, Chu suggests, the inherent anxieties of the modern citizen who, like the zombie, is seemingly unaware and unconcerned about his/her lack of free will and subjugation to state systems. The chapter concludes with the reasons for including this popular film under the rubric of modernism that is made by way of a discussion of T.S. Eliot's changing view in Rudyard Kipling's writing. While originally preoccupied by the lack of aesthetic innovation of Kipling's work, Chu argues that Eliot later comes to see Kipling's brilliance in terms

of his understanding of the geopolitics that informs cultural authority and literary production.

The question of literary innovation as the measure of a work's modernism is also challenged by Chu in her second chapter. Comparing the works of Joseph Conrad, Sarah Jeannette Duncan, and Katherine Mansfield, she rejects the idea that realism is a naïve and dated style that cannot be accommodated by modernism. Rather than accepting realism as form limited by its attempts to render the world transparent and to accurately depict it, Chu argues that Mansfield and Duncan use realism reflexively to suggest the ways it functions as an extension of state authority that manages and shape populations and individual consciousness. For instance, Mansfield's work considers the failure of imperial rhetoric to produce proper imperial subjects amongst poor white settlers in New Zealand. Further, Chu argues, that while Conrad privileges the imperial adventurer who transcends bureaucracy and realism as he retreats into the unutterable, Duncan demonstrates in her descriptions of Empire the ways in which realism contributes to the newly proliferating and largely unacknowledged tentacles of governmentalization.

In another chapter on Rebecca West, Chu challenges the assumption that modernism/modernity produces a fluid and mobile subject. In her analysis of the *The Return of the Soldier* and the *Meaning of Treason*, she argues that these works instead are about the increasing fixity of identity as states work to secure and stabilize national populations during the World Wars. The imaginative renegotiations of a subject's relation to history were thus increasingly being foreclosed by the legitimization of national boundaries. Chu then turns to the American South and considers Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925) and the question of marriage, which is often considered an outdated contract under modernism; however she demonstrates that in Glasgow's work it serves to foreground governance.

Chu's version of modernism doesn't just expand the cannon, it also de-centers it as she locates the "native" as the subject of history. Hence she argues that the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), where slaves revolted against their unsuspecting French plantation owners and established their own flag and their own Republic, disrupts the idea that liberty, freedom and equality are disseminated from the West to the rest, from enlightened whites to pre-modern blacks. Further, she argues, in Europe, the autonomous agent and free citizen—male, property owning and white—was dependent on plantations, the slave trade, and the expansion of the empire. White freedom, then, was inextricably tied to black exploitation and domination, which was rationalized by the argument that blacks were not capable (or at least were not yet capable) of understanding freedom. The black nation and Caribbean modernity thus

challenges the whole premise of western modernity. It is this argument that informs her penultimate chapter on primitivism, which, she argues, stems, in part, from envy of the “imagined ability to rebel projected on the racial other” (147). Focusing on Zora Neale Hurston’s ethnographic work on the anti-state “primitive” in Haiti, for instance, Chu considers that while the state produces the nation, the “natives” are hyperaware of the paradox of western modernity that on the one hand offers them the promise of freedom and on the hand blatantly ignores their interests. The “self-determination” of Haiti as a nation is, thus, always undermined by its need to serve the financial and political interests of the United States.

Chu’s book is dense and covers a wide range of material. At times I found some of her general comments on “standard” approaches to modernism reductive, and some of her readings of canonical works, like Conrad, were given short shrift, while others too easily collapsed modernism with modernity (the first often displaying an exhaustion with a progress narrative while the latter firmly invested in it). Neither was I convinced that metaphysical concerns and political concerns are necessarily exclusive—either/or—categories, and I would have appreciated more attempts to consider the crossover between the two. Her close readings, however, are superb and her attention to state management and its relationship to modernism is a very welcome addition to the field.

Teresa Heffernan