
John Marx. *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2005. ii + 226 pp. \$80.00 USD.

This book draws multifarious connections between the modern rise of the professional service industry, the decline of British imperialism, and changes in the modern British novel. The literary phenomena that John Marx discusses are united by their engagement with the modern binary that, he argues, replaced Victorian hegemony's core and periphery: the ascendancy of alienated, connoisseurial "English-speaking experts" (1) in contrast to narrow-minded provincials. Along with other professional discourses (anthropology, economics), the modern British novel (and novelist) reflected and reinforced the would-be replacement of Imperial domination with global English-speaking expertise. Further, Marx argues that the novel's heterogeneous cultural detail and much-touted difficulty (of production and consumption) established its niche in increasingly specialized disciplines. Modern authors claimed professionalism by affirming the specialized nature of their craft and the hard-won knowledge of particularity and difference that it entailed. The ways that they associated difference and alienation with professionalism, both within and without the novel, are demonstrated, for Marx, by the linkage of the work of writing to illness (Joseph Conrad), by changing gender roles and relationship models in the novel (E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence), and by new styles, widely exemplified, of expertise and aesthetics both abroad and at home.

In Chapter 1, Marx focuses on Conrad's letters as evidence for the modern construction of the novelist as professional service-provider. Conrad's exhaustive detailing of the illness and suffering that his work exacerbated links his product to his person, securing his role as a unique service-provider rather than a mere producer. He and others (Marx mentions Virginia Woolf) aligned physical suffering and alienation with the discernment and hard labour that novel-writing, as a specialized endeavour, demanded. For the appreciation of difference that great art requires, Conrad's letters imply, one must *be* different, or specialized, which entails bodily suffering. Marx makes a strong argument: the possibility that some of his readers may themselves naturalize the link between professional authorship and physical suffering, and feel like enervated "victim[s] of the book-production process" (47) can, by today's logic, only add to its persuasiveness by providing further examples of it.

In Chapters Two and Three Marx reads Conrad and E. M. Forster alongside anthropologists and other observers of foreign cultures to demonstrate the giving way of colonial models of knowledge/power to globalizing ones, which involve particularly a growth of reciprocal sentiment between Englishmen

abroad and the not-English. For instance, in *Lord Jim*, overseas romance and deep friendship allows Jim to lend his quiet expertise to the foreign tribe, which he now understands as if from within. His administrative role remains successful because, unlike Conrad's Kurtz, he "shows no signs of the degeneration that typically accompanied such behavior" (74). Marx also examines modern administrative and professional models in terms of the revision of Victorian gender roles. While Victorian novels and travel-writing assigned the domestication of the foreign to Englishwomen, who assimilated strange vistas or objects into "picturesque," therefore English, tableaux, Forster in *Passage to India* figures a feminized male connoisseur with a thoroughgoing appreciation of the different and strange. Marx reads Fielding and Aziz's sexualized affinity as exemplary of the English trajectory towards a global professional network, and interprets even Aziz's most violently anti-colonial sentiments as a "promise" to "lead ... India and Britain to reconciliation" (119). Thus, in *Passage*, connoisseurship operates both as an aesthetic principle (the appreciation of heterogeneous and chaotic cultural detail) and as a social strategy, akin to other discursive (economic, anthropological) articulations of Britain's agenda to establish itself as a sympathetic provider of useful services in its former colonies. The modern novel celebrates the inassimilable strangeness of foreign locales, or if set "at home," emphasizes the hybridity and foreignness of English culture.

Chapters Four and Five examine novels by D. H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, and Mary Webb, among others, which are set primarily in England. In Chapter Four, Marx discusses modern literary responses to the degeneration anxiety associated with foreign influence and the malfunction of natural selection in conditions of modernity. He persuasively reads Lawrence's *Women in Love* as revising the terms of this discourse by depicting the exotic and primitive as the essence of English identity. The exoticized yet virile Rupert and primitively libidinous yet thoroughly English Ursula eclipse the industry-happy Gudrun and Gerald, as well as the domesticating Jane (of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*) as modernity's paradigmatic English people. The ranging studies in Chapter Five demonstrate the flexibility of Marx's conceptual model in reading the construction of "authority." He explores the interpenetration of the foreign and the domestic in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and argues that the diverse jumble of objects and perspectives they catalogue calls for new type of critical faculty, "an analytic process capable of ascribing verifiable worth" (177), capable of understanding value and particularity within a cosmopolitan context. He argues, very intriguingly and saliently to the aesthetic and professional discourses of today, that the shift of the core-periphery model into the connoisseur-native model

gave rise to a general and novelistic concern with the boundary between connoisseurship, with its cross-cultural perspective, and complete assimilation. Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Rose Macaulay's *Pleasure of Ruins* suggest the loss of perspective and discernment that "going native," even in England, entails. Marx ends by gesturing towards the potential political uses of novelistic renderings of local culture or the disappearance thereof. For instance, Mary Webb's *Precious Bane* provided one politician with "evidence" of the viability of the massive development plan that he championed: her exquisite detailing of a very fey and custom-steeped Shropshire "demonstrated" that rural English culture was "sufficiently well-established and durable that electricity and new roadways could never wipe [it] out" (193). This chapter exemplifies something of the heterogeneity that it describes in modern novels, and favours the reader whose perspective has been enriched by the preceding chapters.

Marx's many examples of the changes in the model of English-speaking influence and authority are generally very compelling. The book has a few typographical errors, but its overall style is so elegant that they come across as intriguing alternative spellings. In spite of the sophisticated maneuvering by which Marx applies his argument to a broad range of texts, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* is a pleasure to read: fluid, restful, and extremely intelligent.

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