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Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, Columbia University Press, 2015, 472 pp., \$55.00 US (hbk), ISBN 9780231170901.

Susan Stanford Friedman's sweeping book sets the groundwork for a project to expand the study of modernity and modernism beyond the narrow confines of the terms as they are conventionally understood in English departments. This involves what she calls a paradigm shift, not merely adding new texts to the modernist pile but rethinking what modernity and modernism are in light of a new planetary consciousness. Inspired by the anti-universalist interventions of postcolonial studies, the new world literature studies, and the anthropology of travel (6), she seeks to invigorate modernist studies to foreground the world's vast modernities rather than relegating them to the margins of the field.

The book begins by offering renewed definitions of its two key terms, "modernity" and "modernism," and also of linking the two via a decisive slash, producing *modernity/modernism*, a concept marked, as Friedman writes, by both "connection" and "disconnection" (185, 188). She strongly wants to avoid nominal definitions which, she says, attribute to modernity characteristics that were exclusive to the west after A.D. 1500 (such as capitalism, Cartesian rationality, the nation-state, secularization, and so on). Rather, she advocates a relational definition of the term, which would foreground an intensification of change and a sensibility of newness in relation to a previous era (155)—a redefinition that unmoors modernity from any particular time or place. Thus she finds a sensibility of rapid transformation in the Tang and Song empires of seventh to thirteenth century China and in the Mongol empire of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that make them exempla of modernity. These societies, although existing before what is conventionally understood as modernity, saw such developments as print culture, industry, and the arts. The Mongols, though nomadic, and thus considered manifestly non-modern, made possible new technological and intellectual developments as they travelled, traded, and conquered over a vast expanse of space (106). This release from conventional periodization is a key epistemological shift for Friedman: "We need to begin by abandoning the notion of modernity as a *period*, instead considering modernity as a loosely configured set of conditions that share a core meaning of accelerated change but articulate differently on the global map of human history" (93).

Modernism, then, as the literary form that accompanies, reflects, and engenders modernity, also has many faces. It is not only found in certain aesthetics specific to Europe in the inter-war years, but rather appears under a range of modern conditions. Friedman is especially critical of the date many scholars of modernism use to delimit the field, 1940, arguing that this endpoint precludes emergent national forms in the decolonizing countries

from being recognized as modernism. She argues that such limitations on a potentially expansive field contribute to an inherent Eurocentrism. Thus if the Tang-Song and Mongol empires were her primary examples for rethinking modernity, her examples for modernism are similarly vast: Du Fu's eighth century poetry, which was "abandoning the conventions of [its] immediate predecessors and seeking new forms to represent the historical ruptures that dislocate their lives" (198), the transnational circulation of cobalt blue to create "a ceramic modernism" in late eighth century Basra, and the "improvisational, continually reinvented, vernacular, and communal" (212) poetics of Muslim/low-caste weaver Kabir in fifteenth century north India. In a chapter she subtitled "Collages of Empire," we also see a set of intertextual and non-chronological readings of better known works that attempt to decenter western modernism and refute the idea that postcolonial texts can do little else but write back to empire. Far from it, she argues; texts from the so-called peripheries have generative ideas of their own that then return to the metropole to produce new aesthetic forms. Thus she reads *Heart of Darkness* in relation to Tayeb Salih's *A Season of Migration to the North*, not as origin and response texts respectively, but as multinodal modernisms that reflect and refract one another and illuminate each other in reciprocal ways. She reads *A Passage to India* and *The God of Small Things* similarly in relation to one another, showing not only how Arundhati Roy transposes some elements from E. M. Forster—such as the trope of the false rape accusation—but also how Roy's intimate politics can shed light on the repressed homosexuality of *A Passage to India*. The highlight of the chapter is an intertextual reading of feminist modernisms through the trope of "Shakespeare's sister," popularized by Virginia Woolf but as Friedman shows, part of a significantly longer transnational history. Her reading of Swarnakumari Devi's relationship with her brother Rabindranath Tagore is particularly compelling: "Far from suggesting that the West invents feminism and spreads it to the Rest, this mobile collage attests to the complex network of circulating, affiliative, and enmeshed ideas that the gendered dimensions of modernity generated in the long twentieth century" (278).

Planetary Modernisms is also formally inventive in its attempt to "ruptur[e] familiar pathways of thought" (141)—ruptures which, Friedman admits, are inspired by the aesthetic characteristics of the very high modernism she seeks to provincialize. Thus Chapter 1 on "Definitional Excursions" is told in the form of snippets of stories headed by questions and capped with a moral, as well as seven paratactic blurbs and "a psychoanalytic detour." There is a playful element to this structure, but it is also suggestive, putting pressure on the rarefied language by which certain institutionalized models of academic scholarship perpetuate their authority. Chapter 2's structure is inspired by Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," with half-page sections such as "Eurocentrism's Hold" (54) and "The Multiple, Polycentric, and Recurrent" (59) that offer multiple instantiations of the vision of the book. The overall aesthetic is that of collage, fragments and pastiche, which Friedman uses deliberately to signal the proliferations of modernities and modernisms across time and space, and to reject the impulse to tell one, definitive story. She thus suggests, after Stevens, "that seeing is multifaceted, that what is seen must be seen from multiple points of view. Hold it up. Walk around it" (52).

In parts of the book, Friedman seems to hearken back to a period in the 1990s when terms like "multiplicity," "fragmentation," "hybridity," "polycentrism," "polyvalence," "fluidity," "flexibility," and "contact zones" signaled a new world in which boundaries were on the verge of completely breaking down—epitomized, for instance, by Arjun Appadurai's

Modernity at Large.¹ Friedman is careful to point out that modernities have their violent undersides, nonetheless she demonstrates a certain hope that the undoing of categories and periods will expose a new globality that will democratize academic scholarship: “Planetarity is not a threat,” she writes, “it’s an opportunity” (80). Such globally-scaled thinking is certainly noble and desirable, but there is the possibility that these concepts, once so cutting-edge, have become somewhat sedimented into keywords that reflect largely shared values rather than radical new imaginaries. Friedman suggests, for instance, that “contact zones” should replace “comfort zones” (80) but—to invoke Rita Felski’s recent book, *The Limits of Critique*,² which warns against the institutionalization of what were once radical critical methodologies—what if contact zones have already become comfort zones for many in the academy?

Friedman’s attempt to decolonize modernism is well-intentioned and has the potential to draw much-needed attention to the inherent Eurocentrism of what for so long has been seen as a self-evident field of expertise in English departments. For readers of this journal, it is likely that some of her insights will feel like truisms; the problem of modernism’s Eurocentrism, while endemic to many scholars of Anglo-American high modernism, is less of an issue in fields such as religious studies or area studies, where modernism might always be seen as multiple and globally inflected. But it is clear that the book is directed to English department scholars, for whom it will no doubt prove insightful and provocative. The book is also brave, as the author goes beyond her areas of knowledge to model a form of globally-minded scholarship that is driven by democratic ideals rather than a narrow definition of expertise or academic rigor. In doing so, she allows us to renew faith that despite what we see in the news and in the world around us, a better, borderless world might still be on the horizon.

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¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

² Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

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