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Review

***Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature*. Juliana Chang. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2012. 241 pages. $25. paper**

Inhuman figures such as "the living dead, the animal, the antifetish, the death drive" (183), "a cyborg-vagina-television, an aroused animated house" (3), and the "Merciless" populate, echo, and penetrate through *Inhuman Citizenship: Traumatic Enjoyment and Asian American Literature.* In this monograph, Juliana Chang incorporates a unique lens of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Asian American cultural critique, and posthuman scholarship. By doing so, Chang offers compelling new directions within the field of Asian American literary studies by focusing on "ugly" feelings, dynamics, and affects such as suffering, shame, and sadomasochism. Specifically, Chang examines four novels— Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, Brian Ascalon Roley's *American Son*, Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, and Suki Kim's *The Interpreter*—to demonstrate Asian American protagonists are not only subjects but are inhuman objects that complicate the fantasy of assimilation.

In *Inhuman Citizenship*, Chang troubles the boundaries of the human through cherishing the "inhuman:" the "alien at the core of the nation, and indeed at the core of the human" (183). Chang does not disavow the Asian American "inhuman" but instead reclaims it as a pleasurable site for inquiry and the "core" of what it means to be human. Chang draws from a Lacanian term "jouissance" that signifies a "violent yet blissful shattering of self" (1). Chang translates Lacan's jouissance as "traumatic enjoyment" and both terms are utilized within the text's heavy emphasis on psychoanalytic theory. Chang argues second-generation Asian Americans' citizenship "is mediated by his or her role in family business and is permeated by traumatic enjoyment" (5). *Inhuman Citizenship* focuses on the terms citizenship, traumatic enjoyment, and "family business" as alternative epistemologies for Asian American negotiation with national power. All four novels feature the domestic—immigrant labor and home—as a fertile and necessary site for analysis. Chang's core argument centers on how "inhuman citizenship" is "the ethical practice of assuming responsibility for the racial symptoms, fantasies, and unconscious of the U.S. nation-state" (4), and explicates how second-generation Asian American characters' citizenship is mediated and permeated by "traumatic enjoyment." Throughout the book, Chang illuminates how Asian American domestic formations may be symptoms of American national fantasies and the "traumatic enjoyment" or jouissance that uphold and threaten these national fantasies.

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Through incisive analysis, Chang rereads the four novels which all explore a different configuration of inhumanity, jouissance, and citizenship. In "Melancholic Citizenship: The Living Dead and Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*" Chang explores the idea of melancholy and how the Chinese American characters of *Bone* are "the living dead: the living who are left for dead as well as the dead who should be living" (29). In "Melancholic Citizenship" Chang analyzes how melancholia connotes excess and loss. Through a critique of neoliberalism, Chang demonstrates how the second generation of *Bone* repeats the historical "impossibility of life for bachelors" (25) In her analysis of Brian Ascalon Roley's novel *American Son*, Chang traces the relations between human, animal, and shame. Chang argues that in *American Son*, "racial shame is produced for the enjoyment of the hegemonic gaze of the nation" (25). Drawing from animal studies, Chang provides an insightful take on Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming-animal" through *American Son*'s Filipino narrator Gabe Sullivan. While the Filipino characters are excluded from legitimate citizenship, Chang argues that shameful citizenship serves and at the same time threatens the legitimacy of U.S. citizenship capital. Conversely, the third chapter on Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* is analyzed within the framework of romance. *Inhuman Citizenship* argues that *Native Speaker* relies on immigrant romance for national identification. In particular, Chang provides an analysis of the main character Henry Park's domestic worker Ahjuma breaking human boundaries. Although, all the novels focus on the "domestic," the last chapter "Perverse Citizenship" focuses on Suki Kim's *The Interpreter*. Chang demonstrates how *The Interpreter*'s main character Suzi Park's sexual transgressions destroy domestic bonds. In "Perverse Citizenship" Chang illuminates *The Interpreter* as an "antidomestic" novel as the characters experience "death drive"—"tendencies toward destruction that produce race not as lack but as surplus" (27).

Additionally, Chang's creative and personal incorporation illuminate her unique contributions to Asian American cultural critique. For example, each chapter provides a creative allusion to a heart or kernel symbol such as: the "reanimating heart, the alien heart, the sacrificial heart, and the dissolving heart" (180) which conclude each chapter. Moreover, Chang's own personal testimony offers a unique introduction to her psychoanalytic study. Specifically, Chang shares her own sadistic enjoyment and intimate pleasure when reading the famous 'torture" scene in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. In the scene, the narrator humiliates and assaults another Chinese American girl for not speaking. Chang offers: "I was disturbed but strangely exhilarated—disturbed because I was exhilarated—by these characters who were indeed objects of racism, and yet I also inhumanly enjoyed their suffering and the suffering of others" (6). Her own reflexive observations and theorization of inhuman pleasure and sadism deconstructs the fantasy of binaristic identifications of a hero or villain, for example. Instead, Chang complicates our identification with violence, nobility, and pain. Additionally, Chang shares her personal reading practice which illuminates the characters and novels within the study: "I was drawn to characters who were grappling with profound voids in their lives, and with the disarray that such holes generated " (6).

These "holes" and "voids" illuminate Chang's commitment to take on the dark shadows of inhumanity in Asian American cultural critique and signifies a new turn within the field and corresponding disciplines such as posthumanist

scholarship. These "holes" and "voids" offer insight into alternative modes of resistance to neoliberal citizenship and upholding "humanism." Specifically, Chang's intervention includes developing a substantial analysis of race along with "posthumanist study" (11). By embracing the "inhuman" as a "powerful trope and force of counter hegemony," Chang's study interrogates the boundaries of the human through focusing on racialization. By embracing the inhuman, Chang argues: "in contrast to the hegemonic belief that racial subjects should counter racist dehumanization by assimilating into normative humanity, the second-generation protagonists of these novels assume the role of the racial inhuman" (183). Instead of upholding the figure of the human, the suffering, the "void," Chang outlines inhuman characters that provide counter-resistance through refusal and destruction of "normative humanity."

In particular, Chang's rereading of Roley's *American Son* and Lee's *Native Speaker* offers provocative insights into the inhumanity within Asian American literature. In her study of Roley's *American Son,* Chang provides a compelling analysis of how the main characters, brothers Gabe and Tomas, enter into an "animal jouissance." Chang demonstrates "animal jouissance" emerges from a legacy of U.S. imperial relations with the Philippines as Filipinos were "degraded by some as bestial savages" (64). Chang's analysis of shame within Tomas, Gabe, and their mother's experiences in the "family business" selling attack dogs and Gabe's later "inhuman" fate of enacting physical harm to Ben, whose upper-class "yoga mother" shamed and harassed Gabe's mom due to a small car accident, illuminates the explosion of "animal jouissance" and offers a provocative reading of the novel.

Moreover, Chang's embracement of "the inhuman" offers new insights on the frequently analyzed novel *Native Speaker*. Through Chang's rereading, the character Ahjuma offers us a critical lens in understanding the figure. Chang illuminates how the Parks' domestic worker, Ahjuma, is rendered as monstrous and inhuman with a "deviant visibility" that is "grotesque" and "perverse." Chang signals a critical moment in *Native Speaker* when Leila, the main protagonist Henry Park's white partner, attempts to humanize Ahjuma by helping her with laundry. The effort ends in a moment where Ahjuma "cried madly in Korean, You cat! You nasty American cat!" (126/71) While Leila attempted to "humanize" Ahjuma, her refusal to accept her non-normativity as the narrative figures Ahjuma as "not quite human grunting, emitting a shill whine, trundling" (127). Chang points out how the migrant women worker refuses to "be incorporated into Leila's liberal humanist regime of visibility" (127). Instead, the figure of Ahjuma works in her denigration to critique the privileged "fantasy of a mutual recognition" (127). Chang demonstrates that "liberal subjecthood" and "citizenship" is not always an option for marginalized subjects such as Asian Americans. Through focusing on the "inhuman" and characters that embrace the "inhuman," Chang points out how "liberal subjecthood constitutes, in fact, an oppressive and dissimulating fantasy" (128).

While Chang provides a vital intervention in her focus on the inhuman, further illustration of the theoretical lineages and boundaries within "inhuman" or posthuman would add to the study and place her particular interventions in context. While Chang cites Carey Wolfe's work on animal studies in the chapter on *American Son*, Wolfe's posthumanist mappings are not included in *Inhuman Citizenship*. Further engagement with theorists such as Donna Harraway's

formative work on the human-animal divides and Jean-François Lyotard's theorization on the inhuman would place further context on Chang's vital interventions within Asian American and "posthumanist" scholarship.

Moreover, further explication on the construction of "inhuman" demarcations would shed light on the implications of incorporating race and ethnicity within the study of the "inhuman." For example, while Chang provides a vital reading of the boundaries of the inhuman in all four novels, yet the scene in *Native Speaker* with Ahjuma and Leila also prompts questions on how white femininity may be gendered and racialized as "animal-like" as well. Additionally, Chang cites Filipinos were rendered as "beast-like" while historian Ronald Takaki historicized Chinese laborers in the 19th century were rendered machine-like. Understanding the comparative racialization through the lens of inhumanity would add insight to the boundaries of the inhuman/human/animal in *Inhuman Citizenship.*

While incredibly complex in its intersectional engagement of psychoanalytic theory and Asian American critical frameworks, *Inhuman Citizenship* may prove challenging for those scholars not well versed in psychoanalytic theory. Further explication of Chang's use of "jouissance" and her corresponding term "traumatic enjoyment" may aid readers of the cross-disciplinary study. Chang does provide a critical intervention by her intersectional analysis of psychoanalytic thought and Asian American literature. By her contribution, scholars and students in both fields mutually learn to recognize the power of "voids."

Inhuman Citizenship offers a passionate, personal, and critical response to the denigration of Asian Americans through embracing the inhuman. By not shying away from suffering, fetishization, and subjugation, Chang provides an evocative and needed study of Asian American literature. By way of the inhuman, Chang offers how we must resist upholding the fantasy of normative human subjectivity. Through the inhuman heart, Chang offers us how suffering can be pleasurable, healing, and resistant. Chang teaches us how Asian American literature is an echo and kernel that resides within our inhuman hearts.

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