

Utopian Generations

The Political Horizon of Twentieth-Century Literature

Utopian Generations develops a powerful interpretive matrix for understanding world literature--one that renders modernism and postcolonial African literature comprehensible in a single framework, within which neither will ever look the same. African literature has commonly been seen as representationally naïve vis-à-vis modernism, and canonical modernism as reactionary vis-à-vis postcolonial literature. What brings these two bodies of work together, argues Nicholas Brown, is their disposition toward Utopia or "the horizon of a radical reconfiguration of social relations." Grounded in a profound rethinking of the Hegelian Marxist tradition, this fluently written book takes as its point of departure the partial displacement during the twentieth century of capitalism's "internal limit" (classically conceived as the conflict between labor and capital) onto a geographic division of labor and wealth. Dispensing with whole genres of commonplace contemporary pieties, Brown examines works from both sides of this division to create a dialectical mapping of different modes of Utopian aesthetic practice. The theory of world literature developed in the introduction grounds the subtle and powerful readings at the heart of the book--focusing on works by James Joyce, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Ford Madox Ford, Chinua Achebe, Wyndham Lewis, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Pepetela. A final chapter, arguing that this literary dialectic has reached a point of exhaustion, suggests that a radically reconceived notion of musical practice may be required to discern the Utopian desire immanent in the products of contemporary culture.

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