

16 Fiction: The 1960s to the 1980s

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There is no god except crisis, and Billy Joel is his prophet. Some version of this sentiment is prevalent in much of the scholarship on late modern and contemporary American fiction. Despite the fatalism of a fire that is always burning, scholars try to fight it by examining a range of concerns that have persisted from the 1960s to the present: poverty, pesticides, environmental suicide, the rise of debt, the Internet, racism, speculative fiction. A number of journals this year have published special issues and articles devoted to the global pandemic, drawing on the work of late-20th-century writers like Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Philip K. Dick to better understand the crises of the present. The categories of utopia and dystopia are an especially prominent emphasis in the year's monographs and articles.

While some scholars look to speculative fiction to interrogate and reimagine the present, others propose readings that attempt either to move past critique and into reparative or surface readings or to find ethical and existential resources in literary texts. Still others examine the cultural figure of the child, the relation between music and literature, print culture, and representations of thingness. Yet close readings of individual works and authors remain the primary form of scholarship on this period. Work by writers like Cecil Brown, Fran Ross, and Louis Chu, and the cultural influence of the scientist Lynn Margulis receive much deserved attention. Toni Morrison, Samuel R. Delany, William S. Burroughs, Joan Didion, and Don DeLillo are among the

writers to receive focused attention in the year's monographs, articles, and interdisciplinary projects.

i Speculative Futures, Inc.

A striking number of studies focus on speculative fiction in both its dystopian and utopian varieties. Dystopia in particular seems to get most of the action. One exception is Douglas Mao's *Inventions of Nemesis: Utopia, Indignation, and Justice* (Princeton). Mao ranges across languages, genres, and periods, putting Thomas More in conversation with the Bolsheviks and Octavia Butler, Ernst Bloch alongside George Schuyler and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. His third chapter considers the work of Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany, examining the relation between labor, mobility, and utopian political theory. Mao argues that Delany's fiction "looks somewhat beyond, or askance at, the hopes that [Robert] Nozick and [Fredric] Jameson pin to border crossing." The fact that Mao reads two political theorists alongside Delany's *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* (1976) suggests some of the ambitious philosophical stakes of his project. The coda to *Inventions of Nemesis*, however, turns to two short stories by Butler, who contemplates the possibility that "utopia might only be available in isolation from others—and hence not utopia in the fullest, most longed-for sense." Mao's book is a careful, comprehensive, and significant theorization of the many longings named in the desire for utopia.

A number of journals were nimble enough to publish scholarly reactions to the coronavirus pandemic, and it is not surprising that such reactions draw on fiction by Butler and Le Guin. For example, a cluster of essays in *American Literature* (92, iv) respond directly to the pandemic, among which Michael Bérubé's "Giving Up" (pp. 791–98) contemplates the idea of abandoning hope for the human species in several novels of speculative fiction. Bérubé notes that Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) is full of ambiguities and despair, such that the novel's protagonist, Rick Deckard, regularly contemplates the inevitability that "in the long run we're all dead" and "his job, and therefore his existence, is worse than pointless." Although Bérubé offers no answer to this conclusion, he does suggest that because we live in a world less immediately confronted with nuclear apocalypse he is "not ready to give up quite yet." Instead, he goes on to say, our existential crises are environmental, a problem that leads him to Butler's

Parable series (1993, 1998) and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974). Butler, according to Bérubé, offers "an extraordinary, brutal account of social disintegration and racialized violence that nevertheless refuses to abjure the audacity of hope."

In contrast to Bérubé's move away from the nuclear toward the environmental, Jessica Hurley's *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex* (Minnesota) unites these concerns in a study of multiethnic American literature. Hurley considers the question, "What does apocalypse *do* for people whose futures are already impossibly threatened or foreclosed?" The nuclear age rather than being the beginning of the end becomes in Hurley's literary history a moment that proliferates what she calls transfiguration—that is, the possibility that "different realities [may] become imaginable in the present." She also engages with recent scholarly debates about futurity, arguing that certain conceptions of apocalyptic futures effectively foreclose "the kinds of presents that feel acceptable, unfailed, with the result that only the past's futures become worth fighting for." To oppose a conservative and nostalgic futurity, Hurley looks to postwar literary history to find Black, queer, ethnic, female, and Indigenous writers who imagine what Hurley calls "radical afuturity." She examines as an example of this futurelessness James Baldwin's *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) and Delany's *Dhalgren* (1975), novels foregrounding the infrastructures of civil defense as predicated on Black futurelessness. Yet Hurley contends that the novels also respond to this desperate situation by imagining ways of living in the "nuclear city."

Bruce Clarke's *Gaian Systems: Lynn Margulis, Neocybernetics, and the End of the Anthropocene* (Minnesota) attends less to race and other social identities, yet intriguingly makes an important connection between speculative fiction and environmental catastrophe. Clarke discusses William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), novels that Clarke routes through the history of the Gaia hypothesis, which was formulated by the scientists Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock. This hypothesis views the earth as a self-regulating system, and Clarke notes that such an idea shares many affinities with postwar cyberneticist discourse. In fact, Margulis's collaboration with Carl Sagan produced a "neocyberneticist" view of the "interpenetration of the technosphere with the biosphere." Books like *Dune* take up these intersecting ideas of technology and biology, imagining "mind expansion and alternative communities in a context of planetary environmental concerns."

The intersection of speculative fiction and technology is the primary focus of the 37 essays collected into *The Palgrave Handbook of Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Literature and Science*, ed. the Triangle Collective (Palgrave). Joseph Fitzpatrick's "Linguistic Relativity and Cryptographic Translation in Samuel Delany's *Babel-17*" (pp. 263–81) examines the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis about linguistic relativism and Warren Weaver's proposal that digital computers would one day translate between languages. According to Fitzpatrick the "entangling" of these theories informs Delany's novel. In another particularly strong essay, "The Sciences of Mind and Fictional Pharmaceuticals in *White Noise* and *The Corrections*" (pp. 415–32), Natalie Roxburgh explores psychiatry's market logic in the 20th century.

Jonathan R. Eller's *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* (Illinois) explains how space travel was influenced by but also was an influence on Bradbury's fiction. The scientists exploring the craters of the moon during the Apollo 15 mission named a small crater to the south of the landing zone "Dandelion," after Bradbury's *Dandelion Wine* (1957). Beginning with this honor Eller connects Bradbury's fiction to space travel, culminating in a poignant scene near the end of the writer's life when in February 2009 he visits the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. As Eller explains, "Fatigue led him to misremember some dates in his anecdotes, but no one cared—this man shaped their dreams, and his book was already *on Mars*." Eller's book is primarily a biographical movement through the fiction and Bradbury's influence on space flight. Trent Masiki's "'Any Place Is Better than Here': Afro-Zionism in the Science Fiction of Ray Bradbury and Derrick Bell" (*College Language Association Journal [CLAJ]* 63: 25–49) puts Bradbury's fiction in conversation with Derrick A. Bell's *The Space Traders* (1992). Highlighting the tension in their views of ethnocentrism, racial pluralism, and the Pan-African aesthetic of Afrofuturism, Masiki argues that Afrofuturism is a cultural technology for the speculative production of an antiracist future.

Brandon Jones's "Between Earth and Sky: Atmospheric Ambiguity in Octavia E. Butler's *Parable Series*" (*ISLE* 27: 690–714) riffs off the multiple meanings of *atmosphere* to discuss the notion of a commons in Butler's *Parable series*. According to Jones the return of the commons and the thematics of atmosphere are signifiers of utopian potential. Among the steps in the argument is an extended examination of the unpublished manuscripts of Butler's third novel in the series, which she planned to title "Parable of the Trickster." That material is in fact

less a manuscript than a collection of manuscript ideas, leading one scholar to remark how “the possible plots begin to multiply beyond all reason” (Gerry Canavan, “‘There’s Nothing New / Under the Sun, / But There Are New Suns’: Recovering Octavia E. Butler’s Lost Parables,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 9 June 2014). Despite this incompleteness Jones argues for a measure of coherence among the notes and drafts by exploring the thematics of atmosphere, concluding that the “imaginary engines” of utopianism and science fiction “run on cultural uncertainty.”

ii The Child

The figure of the child became an object of scrutiny in queer theory in the early 2000s, particularly after Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) and Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s edited volume *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004). These studies interrogated the demand, burden, and normative assumption that children represent our future. Scholarly interest in the child has not really gone away since these debates; it returns periodically, as though it were a repetition compulsion. For Freud such a repetition is a sign of our desire to return to an earlier state of things. To what do scholars long to return? What leads writers and scholars alike to take up the child again and again as a representational object? These questions are in the background of Golan Y. Moskowitz’s *Wild Visionary: Maurice Sendak in Queer Jewish Context* (Stanford). This remarkable monograph is a biographical study of the writer and illustrator, but Moskowitz takes Sendak’s queerness and his conflicted relationship with his Yiddish-speaking immigrant family as occasions for broaching larger issues about children’s publishing in the postwar period and the nature of childhood as Sendak understood it. Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), for example, explores childhood as a social and psychological construction, rather than a fixed state or object of commercial nostalgia. Yet the irony of Sendak’s commercial success is not lost on either the writer-illustrator or Moskowitz, who observes that fame only drove Sendak further into misanthropy and skepticism about the publishing industry. Moskowitz notes that many of the artists and writers of postwar children’s literature were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or allies within queer artistic circles. The nonnormative sexuality of these writers and artists was closeted for all the familiar reasons, but Moskowitz takes this vexed queer identity as a key to Sendak’s work, one that unlocks the door to the queer status of children’s publishing.

Another study interested in Sendak and other postwar children's fiction is Robin Bernstein's "You Do It!": Going-to-Bed Books and the Scripts of Children's Literature" (*PMLA* 135: 877–94). Bernstein identifies a distinct postwar genre—the going-to-bed book—based on its rhetorical invitation for readers to do things with their whole bodies, and she argues that this genre developed to manage the anxiety about sleep in industrialized societies. The discussion begins with Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* (1947), a book illustrated by Clement Hurd, but leads into the genre of going-to-bed books that Bernstein distinguishes from Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* because the latter "has as much potential to excite as to tranquilize child readers." Other texts and writers discussed include Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen*, *Dr. Seuss's Sleep Book* (Theodore Geisel), Jan Ormerod's *Moonlight*, and Mercer Mayer's *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*, familiar examples of mass-market children's literature. Other scholars examine children's books by writers known better for their work in other literary genres. Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, wrote two children's books, *Friends from the Other Side / Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993) and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman / Prietita y la Llorona* (1995). In "Processes of Transformation: Theorizing Activism and Change Through Gloria Anzaldúa's Picture Books" (*Children's Literature in Education* 51: 1–14) Cristina Rhodes reads Anzaldúa's fiction for children *as* theory rather than *through* theory, arguing that these works present a theory of the activism that first requires the transformation of the self. Much like Rhodes's attention to a writer not known for her work in children's literature, Kelly McDevitt's "Childhood Sexuality as Posthuman Subjectivity in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*" (*Science Fiction Studies* 47: 219–40) considers how theories of childhood sexuality relate to the "posthuman politics" of Butler's 2005 novel. Shori, the child protagonist, discovers she is a vampire as she encounters social discourses about sexual reproduction. These encounters become a means for exploring themes of agency and race.

As a kind of inversion of this scholarly interest in the child, Debra Shostak's *Fictive Fathers in the Contemporary American Novel* (Bloomsbury) looks to the father as a figure of white middle-class anxiety that Shostak shows to be a symbolic key to an impressive range of fiction. She discusses the father in more than two dozen novels, such as Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* and John Irving's *The World According to Garp*. The fictiveness of fatherhood "constitutes a myth, on the social plane, and a fantasy, on the personal plane." Yet if fatherhood is often the

inverted image of fantasies about the child, so too is the father a figure of racially unmarked authority. In a chapter of *Growing Up with America: Youth, Myth, and National Identity, 1945 to Present* (Georgia) Emily A. Murphy argues that Russell Banks's *Rule of the Bone* (1995) challenges white supremacy and US imperialism by staging a father-son conflict as a proxy for these racial and political power struggles. And in "Structural Maladies in Family Systems: Fusion, Parentification, and Coalition in Joyce Carol Oates's *Expensive People*" (*Style* 54: 441–56) Yue Gu, drawing on a form of psychotherapy called family systems theory, examines how the parents in Oates's *Expensive People* (1968) elevate their young child Richard to a kind of parental status—a process that Gu describes as "parentification."

iii What Comes after Critique?

Some researchers look to critics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Rita Felski to develop forms of scholarly inquiry not modeled on high theory or critique, often taking texts and other aesthetic artifacts as rehabilitative or reparative tools, resources for ethical content, or theorizations in their own right rather than as objects of interrogation or scrutiny. For example, Pamela B. June's *Solidarity with the Other Beings on the Planet: Alice Walker, Ecofeminism, and Animals in Literature* (Northwestern) documents Walker's equivocations about the eating of meat and animal products, her complicated politics of food and animal advocacy, and her use of religious mythology. In June's reading these strands in Walker's work form a posture of advocacy for a more compassionate treatment of animals. We might think of such a study as moving past critique and instead finding in literature what Kenneth Burke once called "equipment for living." Similarly, Angelyn Mitchell's "Surviving the Pandemic: Necessary Lessons from Morrison's *Beloved*" (*CLAJ* 63: 152–56) explores themes of resilience and perseverance from Morrison's *Beloved*. Mitchell finds in these themes specific strategies and tools for Black women, readers who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Many of the articles in a special issue of *CEA Critic* (82, ii) on peace studies are animated by postcritique sensibilities. Erin R. McCoy's "Peace Through Suffering: Human Resilience and Viet Nam War Literature" (pp. 155–59) provides a concise introduction to American writing about the Vietnam War, from O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* (1975), Philip Caputo's *Rumor of War* (1977), and Larry Heinemann's *Paco's*

Story (1987) to more recent engagements, like Viet Than Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2016). Bernard A. Miller's "Composition, Decomposition, and the Rhetoric of the War Story" (pp. 107–17) considers the rhetoric of war stories. Miller examines O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, among other works, and examines writerly strategies for "put[ting] things back together" after they have been "broken by war."

Joseph Litvak's "Black Comedy and the *Bildungsroman*: Fran Ross's *Oreo*" (*Textual Practice [TexP]* 34: 2003–20) argues that Ross's neglected novel offers lessons for "how to live in hard times." According to Litvak, *Oreo* (1974) formulates a substantial politics of laughter for the racist, misogynistic, and homophobic present. In "The Comedy of Survivance in James Welch's *Fools Crow*" (*Studies in American Humor* 6: 285–300) John Wharton Lowe shows how humor traditions central to Blackfeet culture play an important role in Welch's 1986 novel, a point not recognized in previous scholarship. In Lowe's view Welch's use of these humor traditions is "restorative," thus reinforcing other features of the novel's hopeful search for an Indigenous future. He notes how the trickster figure in particular functions as a source of renewal in tribal culture.

Dorothy J. Hale's *The Novel and the New Ethics* (Stanford) might be understood as a history of the assumptions behind the studies so far mentioned in this section. Hale's larger project is to demonstrate how Henry James's theory of the novel became the source for a "new ethics" about alterity and achieved otherness. The second chapter of Hale's monograph examines Toni Morrison's view of the ethical value of the novel. In Hale's reading Morrison participates in a tradition of novelistic aesthetics first formulated by James. Yet Hale is only rarely explicit in critiquing this new ethics; hers is primarily a descriptive project. *The Novel and the New Ethics* is an important contribution to recent debates about what novels *do* and how critics ought to theorize *reading*, tracing the lines of influence that have allowed the "new ethics" to become normative.

Lavelle Porter's *The Blackademic Life: Academic Fiction, Higher Education, and the Black Intellectual* (Northwestern) is an interesting juxtaposition to Hale's study. Whereas Hale takes James and moves into more contemporary terrain to understand an ethics of alterity, Porter examines academic fiction written by Black writers from the 19th century to the present to understand how fiction offers resources for understanding and navigating the marginalized position of Blackness in higher education. The fourth chapter of *The Blackademic Life* surveys Gil Scott-Heron's *The Nigger Factory* (1972), Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place*,

the Timeless People (1969), Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976), and *The Black Flame* trilogy of novels written by W. E. B. Du Bois. Porter notes how these books participate in a longstanding literary tradition of positioning the Black artist and intellectual against conservative Black institutions. Scott-Heron's novel has what Porter describes as a "patriarchal view of black protest," while Walker's *Meridian* complicates this picture of activism through its eponymous character. Marshall's novel about a group of white anthropologists further illustrates how the "campus novel" has been an inadequate term for academic fiction in the postwar era, since so much of the work of higher education has been to assert university power within a system of geopolitics.

Nick Earhart's "'When Apparent Stability Disintegrates': Speculative Theology in Octavia Butler's *Parable Series*" (*ISLE*, advance article, doi.org/10.1093/isle/isaa173) poses the question, "How do we comprehend a problem that affects 'all of us' without shortchanging issues of geographic and cultural difference?" He finds an answer in the "speculative religion" of Lauren Olamina in *Parable of the Sower*. The nesting of speculation within speculation (i.e., theology within science fiction) offers a way of rethinking the seemingly unthinkable, which is one way of describing a planet of environmental scarcity and widespread land-use cascades. Olamina calls her belief system "Earthseed," and Earhart shows how these beliefs sustain a tension between "immanence and transcendence," which he also maps onto the demand for a "space where universality and difference can be thought simultaneously."

In *The Metamorphoses of Myth in Fiction since 1960* (Bloomsbury), Kathryn Hume's ambitious task recalls—perhaps updates—the likes of Northrop Frye and Leslie Fiedler. Hume begins with the observation that William Gibson, Ishmael Reed, E. L. Doctorow, Cormac McCarthy, and Gloria Naylor adopt myth as a literary tool. But as she asks, "[Why] would writers find myths useful, given the dominant scientific materialism of our culture and the postmodern outlook of many serious readers, neither of which is very compatible with mythic thought?" There are many answers to this question; for example, myth is cultural capital. Yet one of Hume's most compelling answers centers on how myths and gods in contemporary fiction model social and existential problems. We might describe the literary use of myth as the synecdoche of a *feeling*, a sense that *connotes* without requiring dogmatic commitment.

Eric Meljac and Alex Hunt's excellent "Strange Country: Sexuality and the Feminine in Robert Coover's *Ghost Town*," pp. 67–91 in Kerry

Fine et al., eds., *Weird Westerns* (Nebraska), considers Robert Coover's parody of the western as "making explicit a feminine power that was always latent in the western." As the authors explain, "Coover's weird western thus uses literary form as a vehicle for critiquing the oppressive violence that is part and parcel of the myth of the American West, forcing a reckoning with the genre's covert language of desire and sexuality." Even as Meljac and Hunt queer Coover's western, Josette Lorig's "'Just a Couple of Queer Fish': The Queer Possibilities of Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*" (*Contemporary Women's Writing* 14: 315–32) revises the standard reading of Brown's 1973 novel that is often held up as a celebratory queer text. Lorig challenges this view through a subtle reading of queer figures in the novel, yet also draws on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's model of reparative reading to recuperate queer sexuality in ways that Brown could not account for at the time of writing the novel.

Other noteworthy studies that practice forms of criticism not modeled on critique include Mark Eaton's *Religion and American Literature since 1950* (Bloomsbury), which includes a chapter on "secular theodicy" that explores the problem of evil in work by Saul Bellow, E. L. Doctorow, and Philip Roth; and Laurie A. Rodrigues's *The American Novel after Ideology, 1961–2000* (Bloomsbury), which positions a series of texts in relation to the dawn of the "post-ideological age," including chapters on Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Roth's *The Human Stain* (2001).

Finally, Jesse Zuba's "Raymond Carver and the Modern Career Imaginary" (*Journal of Modern Literature* [JML] 44, i: 148–64) is a major rethinking of a critical truism about Carver's *Cathedral* (1983). Zuba's argument about Carver's work opens onto a broader theory of "reading for career," which Zuba explains as an imagined continuity across an author's work, structuring those texts according to a "progression." Many critics view Carver's short story collection as lacking the "meanness and nihilism" characteristic of his earlier work. This view is a product of a bias toward positive development that Zuba calls the "modern career imaginary." The notion of development operates as a "governing fiction that determines the scope of interpretation in advance." Zuba provides compelling evidence for the argument about *Cathedral* and contributes in substantial ways to the critical evaluation of "career" as a critical fiction. My only reservation about this excellent essay is its alignment with Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus's "surface reading." This method bases interpretation on "what is evident, perceptible, [and] apprehensible in

texts,” rather than seeing *through* or *behind* them. Zuba offers a surface reading of the collection’s titular story, yet to pair this analysis of “the story’s surface” with a critique of “reading for career” exemplifies some of the tensions that inhere within Best and Marcus’s approach. That is to say, Zuba examines a master trope in Carver criticism, one that is abetted by Carver himself, all of which illustrates how there is in fact more to the act of interpretation than the text and its surface. To unmask the critics is not all that different from unmasking the text; both forms of criticism show how what has not yet been apprehended nonetheless structures the apprehensible.

iv Theory, Race, Critical

If a postcritique orientation leads some scholars to find reparative and ethical uses for texts, critical and theoretical assessments of race remind us why critique nonetheless remains a major force in literary studies. For example, James B. Haile’s *The Buck, the Black, and the Existential Hero: Refiguring the Black Male Literary Canon, 1850 to Present* (Northwestern) examines the hypervisibility and invisibility of Black maleness in fiction, most of it American, from the late 19th century onward. Haile’s fourth chapter situates Cecil Brown’s *The Life and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger* (1969) within a literary tradition that extends back to James Weldon Johnson and Richard Wright, continues with Brown’s contemporaries, including Amiri Baraka, and is transformed by later writers like Colson Whitehead, Marlon James, and Percival Everett. The subtlety of Haile’s insight centers on the claim that “so much of black male literature is subtextual—that is, utilizes style as a mode of concealing and revealing content.” Haile links this aesthetic and stylistic feature with the hypervisibility-invisibility dynamic that is a familiar trope in midcentury African American literature (the canonical example being Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*).

William Merrill Decker’s *Geographies of Flight: Phillis Wheatley to Octavia Butler* (Northwestern) examines how Toni Morrison and Butler represent Black displacement in the geographies and communities of their fiction. Morrison, for instance, depicts “the slave heritage as it informs unincorporated black communities.” Morrison’s and Butler’s novels take up an issue that has been a longstanding but recently urgent concern in criticism on race in the United States—the idea of fugitivity. According to Decker, Morrison and Butler address “the complications

that pregnancy and motherhood impose on the fugitive condition. Both authors differentiate a comparatively light-footed male nomadism from a typically burdened female embarkation, and both create female characters who seek necessary stasis.”

Richard Jean So’s *Redlining Culture: A Data History of Racial Inequality and Postwar Fiction* (Columbia) includes a chapter on Morrison’s affiliation with Random House, where she was the first Black acquisitions editor. Contending that racial exclusion was the publisher’s default position, So proceeds to quantify the effects of Morrison’s work, showing an uptick in the number of Black writers published by Random House during her tenure (1967–83). She helped publish Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. Taking Morrison’s tenure as a case study, So then numerically quantifies the default whiteness of postwar publishing.

The fifth chapter of Jordan J. Dominy’s *Southern Literature, Cold War Culture, and the Making of Modern America* (Mississippi) examines Southern fiction written during the civil rights movement, focusing primarily on Alice Walker’s *Meridian* (1976). Eric Meljac’s “Beloved as Symbolic Bridge: An Examination of the Symbolism of Connected Spaces in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” (*CEA Critic* 82: 38–51) examines an underappreciated architectural feature in Morrison’s novel, “the bridge” across which *Beloved* says she comes. Meljac examines the symbolism of the bridge by reference to Georg Simmel’s 1909 essay “Bridge and Door.” This theorization of race and space also makes a contribution to narrative studies. The upshot of Meljac’s reading is that *Beloved* functions narratively as a bridge even as the space she traverses links time and space.

Long Le-Khac’s *Giving Form to an Asian and Latinx America* (Stanford) shows how fiction became a site for imagining solidarity between the two communities, a social and political project that in Le-Khac’s view begins after the U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War in March 1965. This geopolitical event shaped the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, and this linkage prepares the grounds for comparative studies of the aesthetic forms of immigrant communities. For example, Le-Khac’s first chapter compares the figuration of reading practices in Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* (1984), and selections from Gloria Naylor. Here the bildungsroman genre operates as a formal and political project, one these writers variously decenter as they take advantage of its emphasis on mobility.

Finally, Siobhan Senier's *Sovereignty and Sustainability: Indigenous Literary Stewardship in New England* (Nebraska) discusses Indigenous writing from the Dawnland, the name of a confederation of Algonquian nations located in the northeast region of what is now the United States. Senier describes Joseph Bruchac, author of *The Road to Black Mountain* (1976), as "the first and by far the most prolific Dawnland novelist." Senier's study is an important contribution to expanding the archive of regional and Indigenous literature.

v Sound Opinions

Another recent direction in scholarship is the exchange between music and literature. One fascinating, compact example is Christian Hänggi's *Pynchon's Sound of Music* (Chicago). Hänggi's first chapter is an inventory with labels such as "Works of Music as a Plot Device" and "Geeking Out: Musciological Discussions" cataloging Thomas Pynchon's musical references, allusions, techniques, and effects of music. Other aspects of the study are quantitative. The second chapter, for instance, begins with a table that enumerates the most frequent references to different instrument families across Pynchon's work (the percussion family ranks first with 115 references across ten books, while the lonely kazoo ranks last with 20 references across six books) and proceeds to an extended discussion of the harmonica as a comic device that traverses high and low culture while also signifying political ridicule.

Another major scholarly study that frequently takes up the intersection of music and literature is Emily J. Lordi's *The Meaning of Soul: Black Music and Resilience since the 1960s* (Duke). Lordi argues that the "misremembering" of the history of soul "is linked to a broader misremembering of the civil rights and Black Power movements." Amiri Baraka's "blues people," for example, illustrates a sentiment common in the middle decades of the 20th century that "soul was something that . . . all black people had." Lordi interrogates and historicizes this notion, offering insight into music and literary history by reference to an impressive range of artists and writers, including James Brown, Sam Cooke, Al Green, Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Morrison, and Walker.

James Smethurst's *Brick City Vanguard: Amiri Baraka, Black Music, Black Modernity* (Massachusetts) covers the span of Baraka's life, beginning and ending in the soundscape of Newark, New Jersey, and emphasizes Baraka's music criticism, plays, and recorded performances.

Smethurst's first chapter includes discussions of *The System of Dante's Hell* and *Tales of the Out and Gone*. Many previous studies have considered the influence of jazz and the blues on Baraka's work, particularly his poetry and plays. Yet Smethurst focuses on how Baraka writes on and performs music to model Black and working-class solidarity. His study doesn't paper over the many stages or variations across Baraka's career; rather, he takes Baraka's music criticism as a reference point for those variations. Baraka's turn to Marxism, in Smethurst's view, allows the writer to come to political and aesthetic positions that were present in embryonic form in Baraka's work before the Black Arts movement. Smethurst also discusses Baraka's musical performances, including the recording *I Plan to Stay a Believer: The Inside Songs of Curtis Mayfield*, performed by William Parker and his band.

vi Data and Other Things

Heather Houser's *Infowhelm: Environmental Art and Literature in an Age of Data* (Columbia) is an ambitious, innovative study that moves across disciplines. Houser demonstrates that contemporary literature and visual culture experiment with epistemological frames of understanding that emerged under the auspices of positivist science but became entangled with emotion, uncertainty, speculation, and ambiguity. "Infowhelm" names a new aesthetic in this age of data, but the book does so much more, for it locates many dispersed meeting posts at which the digital and the environmental find one another. Houser's second chapter, for example, analyzes how novels by Michael Crichton, Barbara Kingsolver, and Charles Wohlforth depict "protagonists' encounters with data and to narrate the entangled epistemologies of climate change connect them across these generic differences." Houser describes these confrontations as a "coming-of-mind," a phrase that alludes to the bildungsroman. Protagonists develop not within nation time, as is the case with the bildungsroman, but in the geological timescale of the Anthropocene. Houser's sixth chapter looks to the speculative New York of Kim Stanley Robinson's writing to understand how data contributes to the market faith of certain characters. But the heart of the book is Houser's claim that contemporary "environmental identity" has been informed by the information culture that structures the present. In her view literature and art enable us to better understand this information culture and by extension our patterns of thought and aesthetic identifications.

Sarah Wasserman's *The Death of Things: Ephemera and the American Novel* (Minnesota) begins from the observation that post-1945 fiction regularly depicts the death, or intermediate passing-away, of things. Wasserman theorizes the abstract term "things" by reference to Martin Heidegger's distinction between *objects* and *things* but also engages with other approaches that center on thingness, including actor network theory and object-oriented ontology. Things are relational, yet Wasserman discusses a class of things that curiously "vanish in principle and yet so often remain with us." They are in other words ephemera, and Wasserman connects the strange presence and absence of ephemera in post-1945 literature to among other things the failed promises of consumer culture. This premise leads into insightful readings of several canonical writers from the postwar period, among them Don DeLillo, Pynchon, Marilynne Robinson, Doctorow, and Dick. All of them recognize the sense of melancholy associated with vanishing things, but more pointedly they "show that loss, like possession, is often only partial." Rather than lamenting that things flee as we try to grasp them, Wasserman argues that many postwar writers maintain a zen kind of accommodation to the fact that "we cannot legitimately claim to constitute ourselves independently of chaotic and unequal regimes of production, consumption, and disposal," as she remarks of Roth. Wasserman also considers the materiality, siting, and exhibition of ephemera. For example, she reflects on the 1939 New York World's Fair by examining Doctorow's *World's Fair* (1989) and Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000), which critique how the fair put nationalism and progress on display.

vii Counter-takes on the Counterculture

Several studies reconsider the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Steven Belletto's *The Beats: A Literary History* (Cambridge) offers an expansive account of the eponymous literary movement, delving into an archive that moves beyond the familiar figures William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg. Belletto makes a case for understanding the Beats as a diffuse literary and cultural movement, and he recuperates the importance of writers like Lenore Kandel, Sheri Martinelli, and Janine Pommy Vega, women who have been neglected or entirely overlooked in many other discussions of the Beats.

In *Ideal Minds: Raising Consciousness in the Antisocial Seventies* (Cornell) Michael Trask traces an adaptation of Kantian philosophy, which

he dubs “neo-idealism.” This philosophical orientation developed during the 1970s as a way of combating the behaviorist sociology and philosophy of preceding decades. Trask contends that a “dramatic inflation in the value of consciousness and autonomy in the seventies accompanied a recognition of the state’s refusal to safeguard such values.” In short, revised forms of subjectivity came to stand in as “alternatives to statism.” Trask advances this claim by reference to many of the period’s writers, among them Dick, Burroughs, and Edward Abbey, in addition to a range of poets, philosophers, and other public figures. The upshot of the argument is a redescription of the moral terrain of what was once called “postmodern society.” Trask moves across the social field with an enviable fluency, from rapture-ready evangelicals and the proponents of radical ecology to postwar speculative fiction and the retooling of IQ pseudoscience. Trask discusses Paddy Chayefsky’s *Altered States* (1978), Abbey’s *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), and Burroughs’s *Cities of the Red Night* (1980), among many other novels. He argues that this sweep of literary history and social discourses reveals the 1970s to be a turning point out of which an “energetic antisocialism” and “the centrality of the mind” became influential.

Len Gutkin’s *Dandyism: Forming Fiction from Modernism to the Present* (Virginia) likewise features Burroughs among the cast of writers who invoke the key concept named in his title. Gutkin examines being a “junky” and being hypermasculine as versions of dandyism in Burroughs’s work, and he transfigures Burroughs through this concept, finding that it offered “an idiom not of rebellion but of artful quietism among the tapestries, the marmalade, the Fortnum & Mason’s tea.”

viii Studies of Individual Works and Authors

Several monographs and articles offered fresh readings of individual works and writers. In the historically rich and sophisticated essay “Minimalism’s Attention Deficit: Distraction, Description, and Mary Robison’s *Why Did I Ever*” (*American Literary History* [AmLH] 32: 301–27) Sophie A. Jones draws on the resources of critical disability studies to consider the notion of an attention deficit disorder (ADD) literary aesthetics, an aesthetics that Jones associates with literary minimalism. Robison, whose novel is the case study for this exploration, has not received the same level of scholarly attention as other minimalists like Raymond Carver, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Tobias Wolff. Her first

novel, *Oh!*, appeared in 1981, and her literary career maps nicely onto the development of ADD, a condition first introduced in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980. According to Jones contemporaneous descriptions do not treat "minimalism's attention deficit" as a cognitive condition elevated to the level of culture. Instead, Jones links minimalism and the category of ADD to 20th-century anxieties "about objects understood as resisting interpretation." Robison's *Why Did I Ever* provides a compelling set of examples for rejecting the idea that minimalist literature is oriented around an aesthetics of deficit. The novel questions the structuring assumptions of ADD as a diagnostic tool, including a common emphasis on "economic productivity" that pharmaceuticals can restore to the "attention deficit." In effect, Robison's novel rejects "deficit" as a figuration for either attention or its lack.

Jones's emphasis on the neglected Robison can be constructively positioned alongside Jonathan Pountney's *The Literary Afterlife of Raymond Carver: Influence and Craftsmanship in the Neoliberal Era* (Edinburgh), which follows the extensive but sometimes divergent influence of Carver's minimalist fiction on subsequent fiction and film. This is a tall order, of course, because Carver's prose became one of the prevailing models for late-20th-century fiction. Pountney takes familiar touchstones in scholarship on Carver's work—class, alcoholism, shame, authenticity—and traces how they resurface in surprising ways in the films of Alejandro G. Iñárritu and fiction by Chuck Kinder, Jay McInerney, Willy Vlautin, Haruki Murakami, and others. Pountney's anatomy of influence is primarily biographical in approach, with intermittent but insightful readings of the fiction. The term *neoliberal era* seems more like an obligatory nod to political history than a historically specific frame of analysis.

The essays collected in *Mockingbird Grows Up: Re-reading Harper Lee since Watchman*, ed. Cheli Reutter and Jonathan S. Cullick (Tennessee), return to Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and the subsequent filmic life of the novel in light of the publication of *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), all of them beginning from the position, advanced by the editors in their introduction (pp. 1–18), that "*Go Set a Watchman* was not simply a failed first draft" of *To Kill a Mockingbird* nor was Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "a mere literary prequel." What exactly either novel is in relation to the other, though, is not tidily explained in either the introduction or the essays. Jonathan S. Cullick's "Mockingbird's

First Draft: How *Go Set a Watchman* Was Made to Come Out” (pp. 21–38) is more like a second introduction, overviewing the publication history of the two books and some of the recent scholarly and readerly debates about the 2015 publication of *Go Set a Watchman*. But among the strengths of *Mockingbird Grows Up* are essays that situate *Watchman* in relation to previous literary history. Holly Blackford’s “*Go Set a Watchman* as Southern Pastoral: American Literature, ‘My Atticus,’ and the Past that Never Was” (pp. 39–52) discusses Lee’s work in relation to Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, arguing that Atticus in *Watchman* refuses to be idealized by Jean Louise just as Ántonia refuses to be Jim’s pastoral goddess in Cather’s novel. Jericho Williams’s “In Spite of Watchful Men: Harper Lee, Zora Neale Hurston, the Limits of Orderly Regionalism, and Feminist Hope” (pp. 225–40) reads both of Lee’s novels as symptoms of the author’s divided consciousness. Williams also connects *Watchman* and Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), suggesting how both books refuse to be ideologically “tidy” while at the same time foregrounding the domestic and social violence that is too often an everyday experience for women.

Michael LeMahieu’s “The Self-Erasing Word: Tautology and Unspeakability in DeLillo’s *End Zone*” (*Poetics Today* 41: 117–39) considers how DeLillo’s early novels explore the relationship between formal logic and literary form. LeMahieu finds aesthetic strategies of *repleteness* in *End Zone*; in LeMahieu’s telling phrase, “The novel says less to show more.” Unspeakability thus becomes ground shared by DeLillo’s fiction and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s early philosophy in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

In *The Big Somewhere: Essays on James Ellroy’s Noir World* (Bloomsbury), Steven Powell assembles one of the first studies to focus on this crime writer. The unsolved murder of Ellroy’s mother provides a starting point for this collection, which considers how Ellroy’s work has influenced global perceptions of Los Angeles, his home city. Powell’s first chapter situates Ellroy’s work in relation to earlier noir writers Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, while other chapters trace Ellroy’s influence on subsequent writers like David Peace and Megan Abbott.

Philip K. Dick: Essays of the Here and Now, ed. David Sandner (McFarland), is a major collection of essays. The first of the volume’s two sections of essays emphasizes ecology, although the term has a more versatile usage than its meaning among environmental scientists. What Sandner terms “future ecologies” refers more to speculative

relations than to interdependent biological systems. For example, Ursula Heise's "Philip K. Dick's Futuristic Ecologies" (pp. 14–31) and Richard Feist's "Voices, Consciousness and the Bicameral Mind" (pp. 46–60) both broach ideas of distributed selfhood. The second section of essays includes interviews and panel discussions with scholars and writers as well as an "archaeology" of the Philip K. Dick Society by the novelist Jonathan Lethem.

In "The 'Problem' of Beckett in Postmodern American Fiction" (*TexP* 34: 1103–21) James Baxter investigates Samuel Beckett's reception and legacy among American writers, focusing primarily on the fiction and essays of John Barth and Donald Barthelme. Privileging Beckett as a generative "problem," Barthelme and other "postmodern" authors exhibit a kind of double consciousness in relation to Beckett, both resisting and accommodating his legacy. I place Baxter's use of *postmodern* in quotation marks because many critics have turned away from the term. As an example of this trend, Sean Metzger's "DeLillo and Mass Hysteria," pp. 147–66 in Johanna Braun, ed., *Performing Hysteria: Images and Imaginations of Hysteria* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press), examines DeLillo's depictions of mass hysteria. Metzger's essay is a smart analysis of the theatrical features of hysteria, but it also directs suspicion toward postmodernism as a periodizing term and ideological category. His invocation of DeLillo to understand and move past the term has affinities with earlier scholarship, such as Amy Hungerford's "On the Period Formerly Known as Contemporary" (*AmLH* 20 [2008]: 410–19), an essay that also invokes DeLillo to think about periodization. What is novel about Metzger's analysis, though, is that it downplays periodicity while still being historical, a critical balancing act that is possible through attention to the "expressive gestures" and "surface theatricality" in DeLillo's fiction. These gestures in turn generate performances, such as Jody McAuliffe's 2002 stage adaptation of *Mao II*. The essay's movements between performance, text, and theory yield a rich form of historical thinking.

In "Unstate: Disarticulating State Knowledge and Joan Didion's *Democracy*" (*JML* 43, iii: 116–31) Seth McKelvey describes Joan Didion's *Democracy* (1984) as the "paradigmatic postmodernist novel" that imagines an escape from representation within the state. Like most assessments of the postmodern, McKelvey's article finds a kind of infinite regress in Didion's political philosophy, for *Democracy* "rejects the fantasy of escaping narrative" while at the same time finding some recourse

in the *idea* of “the very impossibility of escape.” If Didion considers fantasies of escaping postwar political authority, Hannibal Lecter wants to punish those authorities by murderous consumption. At least this is the central insight of Korine Powers’s “Hannibal Lecter as Avenging War Orphan in Thomas Harris’s *Hannibal Rising*” (*Twentieth Century Literature* 66: 125–46), which reads varieties of consumption in Harris’s 2006 novel as both explicit and implicit matrices. According to Powers, Harris’s prequel humanizes the eponymous murderer by showing how Hannibal enacts revenge upon a postwar society that allows war criminals to rejoin the consumer milieu.

Mikkel Krause Frantzen’s “William Gaddis’s *J R* and the Many Faces of Junk Bonds” (*differences* 31, iii: 91–116) reads Gaddis’s 1975 novel as a way of probing the relation between finance and fiction in the 1970s, particularly involving the revolution of the junk bond market. Readers may balk at the idea that junk bonds say much about the economy as a whole, but Frantzen proposes that junk bonds were a key ingredient in the development of a debt-driven finance economy, and he argues that Gaddis’s novel documents and helps explain this convoluted transformation of American economic and social life.

Recent appraisals of Burroughs’s fiction include Gerald Alva Miller Jr.’s *Understanding William S. Burroughs* (So. Car.) and a special issue of *American Book Review* (41, iii) titled “Burroughs Now,” in which several essays discuss the significance of Burroughs’s “cut-up method,” including Alex Wermer-Colan’s excellent media-specific argument, “The Order and the Material is the Message” (pp. 6–8), and S. E. Gontarski’s “William S. Burroughs and the Posthuman” (pp. 8–9), which theorizes the cut-up method as a posthuman archive. These critics share a sense that Burroughs’s literary work has as its backdrop a dystopian social field, one satirically described in the recently published *The Revised Boy Scout Manual* (Ohio State, 2018), which reads like a pastiche of the anarchism and libertarianism that Burroughs held for most of his life.

ix Anthologies and Retrospectives

The University of North Carolina Press has published *The Essential Clarence Major: Prose and Poetry*, featuring more than 50 selections from Major’s work, including generous excerpts from the early novels *Reflex and Bone Structure* (1975), *My Amputations* (1986), *Such Was the Season* (1987), and *Painted Turtle: Woman with Guitar* (1988), as well as short

fiction, including several pieces that seem newly resonant today, such as “Bourbon for Breakfast.” Another important anthology is *Writing Appalachia*, ed. Katherine Ledford et al. (Kentucky), which includes a section titled “The Appalachian Renaissance” and fiction by such writers as Gurney Norman, Lisa Alther, Jayne Anne Phillips, Lee Smith, and Fred Chappell.

The University of Washington Press has reissued Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (1961) with a new foreword by Fae Myenne Ng (pp. vii–xiv). Chu’s novel intriguingly echoes the postwar concern with the child and biological reproductivity, but unlike other writers from the period Chu resists the existentialist gloss and nuclear-genetic anxieties that shape so much of this thematic in postwar fiction. Instead, as Fae Myenne Ng points out, Ben Loy’s impotence and his relationship with the bachelor society of his New York neighborhood are situated in an important historical context. The bachelor societies of Chinatowns throughout postwar America were created by racist immigration laws that prevented large populations of Chinese immigrants from marrying. These societies placed significant pressure on younger men to reproduce, and Chu explores this reproductive anxiety through the marriage of Ben Loy and Mei Oi. After their marriage Ben Loy becomes impotent, a source of frustration for Mei Oi and shame for Ben Loy among the older bachelors.

Even as scholars are beginning to recuperate understudied texts and writers from the second half of the 20th century, many writers from this generation are now offering retrospective accounts of their own. In “The Polyphonic Past,” pp. 228–29 in Michael Wutz and Julian Murphet, eds., *E. L. Doctorow: A Reconsideration* (Edinburgh), Don DeLillo praises his contemporary, centering that praise on the following insight about genre and history: “That great and shaky institution, the social novel, still wants to live. And this is precisely where Doctorow’s work is situated, in the grain of American possibility, in the clash of voices and forces, and in the way in which plain lives can take on the cadences of history.”

University of the South

