

THE
CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
AMERICAN
LITERATURE

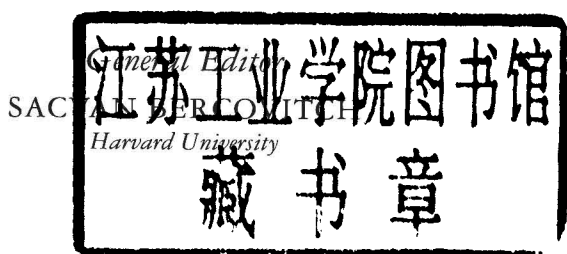
GENERAL EDITOR, SACVAN BERCOVITCH



VOLUME SEVEN:
PROSE WRITING, 1940-1990

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Volume 7
Prose Writing
1940-1990



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface 11/13 Garamond 3 *System* QuarkXPress™ [HT]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Cambridge history of American Literature.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: v. 1. 1590–1820 — v. 2. 1820–1865 — v. 7. Prose Writing 1940–1990

I. American literature—History and criticism. I. Bercovitch, Sacvan. II. Patell, Cyrus R. K.

III. History of American literature.

PS92.C34 1994 810.9 92-42479

ISBN 0-521-49732-9 hardback

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR

My thanks to Harvard University for its continuing support of this project. I am grateful for the assistance of Anne Sanow of Cambridge University Press and for the steady support of Eytan Bercovitch and Susan L. Mizruchi. Finally, it is my great pleasure, personal and professional, to register the contributions in this volume of three scholars of a new academic generation – three outstanding young Americanists trained in the eighties who bring to our common venture the particular concerns, perspectives, and insights of the past decade of literary and cultural criticism: John Burt, author of “After the Southern Renaissance”; Cyrus R. K. Patell, author of “Emergent Literatures”; and Margaret Reid, who wrote most of the second part of the Introduction, summarizing the connections between the different sections of this volume.

Sacvan Bercovitch

FICTION AND SOCIETY, 1940–1970

I am grateful for the patient encouragement and valuable comments of the editor, Sacvan Bercovitch, and the collaborative efforts of fellow contributors, John Burt, Cyrus R. K. Patell, and Wendy Steiner, whose own fine work enabled me to concentrate on the writers who most engaged me. I profited from the insights of numerous critics of postwar fiction, including John W. Aldridge, Leo Braudy, Robert Bone, Malcolm Cowley, Chester E. Eisinger, Josephine Hendin, Irving Howe, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Peter G. Jones, Frederick Karl, Alfred Kazin, Thomas Hill Schaub, Mark Shechner, Ted Solotaroff, and Gore Vidal, and from broad historical studies of postwar American life by William H. Chafe, John Patrick Diggins, Godfrey Hodgson, Kenneth T. Jackson, William E. Leuchtenburg, William L. O'Neill, and James T. Patterson. I learned much from graduate students in my courses on postwar fiction, among them, Peter Mascuch and Bill Mullen. As usual, Lore Dickstein's enthusiastic support made all the difference.

Morris Dickstein

AFTER THE SOUTHERN RENASCENCE

My first acknowledgment is to Sacvan Bercovitch, who helped me with this project from the beginning and whose conversations with me show through many of my readings in this text. Morris Dickstein also helped me a great deal in sorting out my thoughts and in getting a sense of this project as a whole. He, like Sacvan Bercovitch, also read my section carefully and provided thoughtful criticism and advice. Rosanna Warren, James A. Grimshaw, and William Bedford Clark have enlightened me tremendously. I have also had the benefit of conversing with wonderful colleagues and students at Brandeis University about this project, most especially Eugene Goodheart, George Franklin, Susan Staves, William Flesch, and Laura Quinney. The astute and discerning criticism of Jo Anne Preston has stood me in good stead here and everywhere, as always.

John Burt

POSTMODERN FICTIONS, 1970-1990

It is seldom the case that an encyclopedia entry has changed its author's life as decisively as this account of contemporary American fiction has affected mine. Its scope coincides with my adulthood, and thus the fateful assignment that came to me from out of the blue in a telephone call from a stranger, Sacvan Bercovitch, was nothing short of the imperative to learn my world. The stranger soon became a generous friend and advisor, so that by now, *gratitude* is far too limited a word to describe what I feel toward him. Part of his gift to me was an introduction to the most talented Americanists of my generation who, with the erudition of literary historians and the courage of liberal reformers, have reconstructed the canon of American literature in these volumes. I feel privileged to be included among them. Over the years, discussing the ideas of "Postmodern Fictions" in my courses at the University of Pennsylvania, I have learned much from my students, both graduate and undergraduate. I am grateful for their stimulation, and for the unfailing support of the institution itself, which provided leave time and research funds for me to carry out my work – most particularly, the Richard L. Fisher Chair in English. Finally, I would acknowledge with much love my children, Emma and Emil, who grew into life as I grew into my intellectual inheritance. It has not always been easy for us to tolerate each other's stalls and spurts, but who of us three would have it any other way?

Wendy Steiner

EMERGENT LITERATURES

My interest in the dynamics of emergent literatures began to take shape during my tenure as President's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California (UC) at Berkeley from 1991 to 1993. I am grateful both to the UC president's office and to the Department of English at Berkeley for providing me with the resources necessary to begin the research published here. I am also grateful to New York University's (NYU) Research Challenge Fund, which provided a summer grant that enabled me to complete the final draft of my contribution to the *Cambridge History*.

I want to thank the various editors at Cambridge University Press with whom I have worked on this and other volumes of the *History*: Andrew Brown, Julie Greenblatt, T. Susan Chang, and Anne Sanow. Their belief in the importance of this project has helped its contributors get through many moments of doubt and frustration.

One of the lessons that I have learned while working on this project is that scholarship at its best is a collaborative enterprise. My account of emergent American literatures would simply not have been possible without the foundations laid by the work of the following scholars, some of whom I have had the good fortune to meet personally, others of whom I know only through their superb writings: Rodolfo Acuña, Barry D. Adam, Paula Gunn Allen, David Bergman, Homi K. Bhabha, William Boelhower, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Joseph Bruchac, Hector Calderón, Sucheng Chan, George Chauncey, King-Kok Cheung, Stephen Cornell, John D'Emilio, Roger Daniels, Mary V. Dearborn, Martin Duberman, Thomas J. Ferraro, Phillip Brian Harper, Marlon K. Hom, Frederick Hoxie, Abdul JanMohamed, Jonathan Katz, Elaine Kim, Arnold Krupat, Paul Lauter, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Kenneth Lincoln, Amy Ling, David Lloyd, Lisa Lowe, Francis Mark Mondimore, Nancy J. Peterson, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, José David Saldívar, Ramón Saldívar, Catharine Stimpson, Claude J. Summers, Dana Takagi, Ronald Takaki, Bonnie TuSmith, Andrew Wiget, Hertha D. Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, and Robert J. Young. Where possible, I have included their works in the bibliography for this volume.

Elizabeth Fowler encouraged me to take up this project when the opportunity first presented itself and helped me to refine its conception in its crucial early stages. Her devotion to intellectual rigor remains an inspiration for me. The following colleagues and friends generously took time out to read drafts of the manuscript and offered suggestions that have proven to be invaluable: Nancy Bentley, Una Chaudhuri, Josephine Hendin, Suzanne Keen, Ellyn Lem, and Blakey Vermeule. I am particu-

larly indebted to Werner Sollors, who not only read and critiqued a complete draft of the manuscript but also invited me to test my ideas in his undergraduate seminar on ethnicity.

My colleagues at NYU have supported my interest in emergent American literatures at every step of the way: I am grateful to Anthony Low, Josephine Hendin, and Jeffrey Spear for enabling me to shift my graduate teaching into this area. The students in my courses on emergent contemporary American literatures have been a joy to teach: their enthusiasm has been infectious and they have consistently challenged me to articulate and defend my evolving views. Among the many students whose conversation and papers have influenced the account presented here, I would like to cite in particular Bridget Brown, Loretta Mijares, Jae Roe, and Deanna Turner.

I have been fortunate enough to have had inspirational teachers at every stage of my life. My deepest gratitude is owed to Mary Evelyn Bruce, Thomas Squire, Gregory Lombardo, Gilbert Smith, Donald Hull, John V. Kelleher, Warner Berthoff, Leo Marx, and Philip Fisher for schooling me in the joys of learning and scholarship.

I have also been fortunate in my friends. Cabot and Mollie Brown, Joseph Hershenson, Jonathan and Irit Kolber, Anne Corbett, and Andrew Whitney – far flung though they may be – are never far from my thoughts. It's heartening to know that old friendships can survive divergent career paths and professional interests.

My family, both near and far, have always been a source of inspiration to me. My aunts Banoo Patell and the late Frainy Patell and my uncle Noshir Patell have provided me with models of perseverance, dedication, and faith. I am deeply grateful to my aunt Diana M. Patell, who has supplemented love with financial assistance, including the gift of the laptop on which the early drafts of this project were written. I cherish the memory of her husband, my late uncle Minocher K. N. Patell, fellow scholar and professor. My sister, Shireen, a fellow literary scholar, has read this manuscript as it evolved, offering guidance and encouragement; her belief in my abilities keeps me strong in moments of doubt. My parents, Rusi and Estrella Patell, instilled in me the importance of education at an early age and sacrificed much to provide me with the best education imaginable; they continue to be my safe harbor when the seas get rough. My wife, Deborah L. Williams, challenges me every day to be the best that I can be: intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally, she completes my world.

Sacvan Bercovitch has been both teacher and friend to me and has shown me the kind of unconditional support that one expects only from family. Fourteen years ago, he gave me a new lease on intellectual life. For

that, and for countless other moments of scholarly inspiration, I will always be in his debt.

Finally, my contribution to this volume of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* is dedicated to my grandmother Francisca D. Raña, who emigrated to the United States from the Philippines in 1971 and who became an American citizen twenty-five years later at the age of 92.

Cyrus R. K. Patell

CHRONOLOGY

Christopher Bigsby, Wendy Steiner, Adam Weisman, and especially Morris Dickstein and Cyrus Patell made valuable suggestions and corrections to the literary chronology. I thank them all. I owe particular thanks to Sacvan Bercovitch; my work here and elsewhere has benefited greatly from his sage and patient counsel. Finally, I thank Elizabeth Miller for her constant support and companionship.

Jonathan Fortescue

INTRODUCTION

THIS MULTIVOLUME HISTORY marks a new beginning in the study of American literature. The first *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917) helped introduce a new branch of English writing. *The Literary History of the United States*, assembled thirty years later under the aegis of Robert E. Spiller, helped establish a new field of academic study. This *History* embodies the work of a generation of Americanists who have redrawn the boundaries of the field. Trained mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s, representing the broad spectrum of both new and established directions in all branches of American writing, these scholars and critics have shaped, and continue to shape, what has become a major area of modern literary scholarship.

Over the past three decades, Americanist literary criticism has expanded from a border province into a center of humanist studies. The vitality of the field is reflected in the rising interest in American literature nationally and globally, in the scope of scholarly activity, and in the polemical intensity of debate. Significantly, American texts have come to provide a major focus for inter- and cross-disciplinary investigation. Gender studies, ethnic studies, and popular-culture studies, among others, have penetrated to all corners of the profession, but perhaps their single largest base is American literature. The same is true with regard to controversies over multiculturalism and canon formation: the issues are transhistorical and transcultural, but the debates themselves have often turned on American books.

However we situate ourselves in these debates, it seems clear that the activity they have generated has provided a source of intellectual revitalization and new research, involving a massive recovery of neglected and undervalued bodies of writing. We know far more than ever about what some have termed (in the plural) *American literatures*, a term grounded in the persistence in the United States of different traditions, different kinds of aesthetics, even different notions of the literary.

These developments have enlarged the meanings as well as the materials of American literature. For this generation of critics and scholars, American literary history is no longer the history of a certain agreed-on group of American masterworks, nor is it any longer based on a certain

agreed-on historical perspective on American writing. The quests for certainty and agreement continue, as they should, but they proceed now within a climate of critical decentralization – of controversy, sectarianism, and, at best, dialogue among different schools of explanation.

This scene of conflict signals a shift in structures of academic authority. The practice of all literary history hitherto, from its inception in the eighteenth century, has depended on an established consensus about the essence or nature of its subject. Today the invocation of consensus sounds rather like an appeal for compromise, or like nostalgia. The study of American literary history now defines itself in the plural, as a multivocal, multifaceted scholarly, critical, and pedagogic enterprise. Authority in this context is a function of disparate but connected bodies of knowledge. We might call it the authority of difference. It resides in part in the energies of heterogeneity: a variety of contending constituencies, bodies of materials, and sets of authorities. In part it resides in the critic's capacity to connect: to turn the particularity of his or her approach into a form of challenge and engagement, so that it actually gains substance and depth in relation to other, sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting modes of explanation.

This new *Cambridge History of American Literature* claims authority on both counts, contentious and collaborative. In a sense, this makes it representative of the culture it describes. Our *History* is fundamentally pluralist – a federated histories of American literatures – but it is a pluralism divided against itself, the vivid expression of ongoing debates within the profession and the society at large about cultural values, beliefs, and patterns of thought. Some of these narratives may be termed celebratory, insofar as they uncover correlations between social and aesthetic achievement, between technological and stylistic innovation. Others are explicitly oppositional, sometimes to the point of turning literary analysis into a critique of (even attacks on) pluralism itself. Ironically, however, the oppositional outlook here marks the *History's* most traditional aspect. The high moral stance it assumes – literary analysis as the occasion for resistance and alternative vision – is grounded in the Romantic reverence of Art and the genteel view of High Literature. That view insisted on the universality of ideals embodied in great books. By implication, therefore, and often by direct assault on social norms and practices, especially those of Western capitalism, it fostered a broad ethical-aesthetic antinomianism. The result was a celebration of literature as a world of its own, a sphere of higher laws that thus provided (in Matthew Arnold's words) a standing criticism of life. By mid-twentieth century, that approach had issued, on the one hand, in the New Critics' assault on industrial society, and, on the other hand, in the neo-Marxists'

utopian theory of art. The new oppositionalism, including that of the counterculture critics, is inextricably bound up with these legacies.

The complex relationship this makes between advocacy and critique speaks directly to the problem of nationality. This has become a defining problem of our time, and it may be best to clarify what for earlier historians was too obvious to mention: that in these volumes, *America* designates the United States, or the territories that were to become part of the United States. Although several of our authors adopt a comparatist trans-Atlantic or pan-American framework, although several of them discuss works in other languages, and although still others argue for a postnational (even post-American) perspective, as a rule their concerns center on writing in English in the United States – “American literature” as it has been (and still is) commonly understood in its linguistic and national implications.

This restriction is a deliberate choice on our part. To some extent, no doubt, it reflects limitations of time, space, training, and available materials; but it must be added that our contributors have made the most of their limitations. They have taken advantage of time, space, training, and newly available materials to turn nationality itself into a *question* of literary history. Precisely because of their focus on English-language literatures in the United States, the term *America* for them is neither a narrative donnée – an assumed or inevitable or natural premise – nor an objective background (*the* national history). Quite the contrary: it is the contested site of many sorts of literary-historical inquiries. What had presented itself as a neutral territory, hospitable to all authorized parties, turns out on examination to be, and to have always been, a volatile combat zone.

America in these volumes is a historical entity, the United States of America. It is also a declaration of community, a people constituted and sustained by verbal fiat, a set of universal principles, a strategy of social cohesion, a summons to social protest, a prophecy, a dream, an aesthetic ideal, a trope of the modern (*progress, opportunity, the new*), a semiotics of inclusion (*melting pot, patchwork quilt, nation of nations*), and a semiotics of exclusion, closing out not only the Old World but all other countries of the Americas, North and South, as well as large groups within the United States. A nationality so conceived is a rhetorical battleground. *America* in these volumes is a shifting, many-sided focal point for exploring the historicity of the text and the textuality of history.

Not coincidentally, these are the two most vexed issues today in literary studies. At no time in literary studies has theorizing about history been more acute and pervasive. It is hardly too much to say that what joins all the special interests in the field, all factions in our current dissensus, is an overriding interest in history: as the ground and texture of ideas,

metaphors, and myths; as the substance of the texts we read and the spirit in which we interpret them. Even if we acknowledge that great books – a few configurations of language raised to an extraordinary pitch of intensity – have transcended their time and place (and even if we believe that their enduring power offers a recurrent source of opposition), it is evident on reflection that concepts of aesthetic transcendence are themselves time bound. Like other claims to the absolute, from the hermeneutics of faith to scientific objectivity, aesthetic claims about high art are shaped by history. We grasp their particular forms of beyondness (the aesthetics of divine inspiration; the aesthetics of ambiguity, subversion, and indeterminacy) through an identifiably historical consciousness.

The same recognition of contingency extends to the writing of history. Some histories are truer than others; a few histories are invested for a time with the grandeur of being “definitive” and “comprehensive”; but all are narratives conditioned by their historical moments. So are these. Our intention here is to make limitations a source of open-endedness. All previous histories of American literature have been either totalizing or encyclopedic. They have offered either the magisterial sweep of a single vision or a multitude of terse accounts that come to seem just as totalizing, if only because the genre of the brief, expert synthesis precludes the development of authorial voice. Here, in contrast, American literary history unfolds through a polyphony of large-scale narratives. Because the number of contributors is limited, each of them has the scope to elaborate distinctive views (premises, arguments, analyses); each of their narratives, therefore, is persuasive by demonstration, rather than by assertion; and each is related to the others (in spite of difference) through themes and concerns, anxieties and aspirations, that are common to *this* generation of Americanists.

The authors were selected first for the excellence of their scholarship and then for the significance of the critical communities informing their work. Together, they demonstrate the achievements of Americanist literary criticism over the past three decades. Their contributions to these volumes show links as well as gaps between generations. They give voice to the extraordinary range of materials now subsumed under the heading of American literature. They express the distinctive sorts of excitement and commitment that have led to the remarkable expansion of the field. Finally, they reflect the diversity of interests that constitutes literary studies in our time as well as the ethnographic diversity that has come to characterize our universities, faculty and students alike, since World War II, and especially since the 1960s.

The same qualities inform this *History's* organizational principles. Its flexibility of structure is meant to accommodate the varieties of American literary history. Some major writers appear in more than one volume

because they belong to more than one age. Some texts are discussed in several narratives within a volume because they are important to different realms of cultural experience. Sometimes the story of a certain movement is retold from different perspectives because the story requires a plural focus: as pertaining, for example, to the margins as well as to the mainstream, or as being equally the culmination of one era and the beginning of another. Such overlap was not planned, but it was encouraged from the start, and the resulting diversity of perspectives corresponds to the sheer plenitude of literary and historical materials. It also makes for a richer, more intricate account of particulars (writers, texts, movements) than that available in any previous history of American literature.

Sacvan Bercovitch



Every volume in this *History* displays these strengths in its own way. This volume does so through its engagement with a particular challenge in contemporary literary studies. In addressing the historical dimensions of modern and postmodern American literature, the five authors of this volume confront a resistant subject. History seems to be elusive in the literature of these decades. Critics have often discussed post–World War II writing as a sequence of stylistic changes – innovations in form, experiments in language and genre. Yet the authors in this volume reveal that every writer responds in some deep sense to surrounding cultural conditions even when espousing self-conscious detachment from society. Thus they may be said to write history in its richest sense – dense with layers, resonant with voices. In their readings of some of American literature’s most deliberate statements of isolation and withdrawal, they demonstrate that the value of literary history goes far beyond its capacity to uncover parallels and commonalities between art and society. The declared distance between literature and society is here read as a cultural myth of its own accord. As a result, we see here how, from 1940 to 1990, the dynamics of anxiety and protest – drawn from the *incongruities* between mainstream America and its literary cultures and subcultures – have provided perhaps the richest dialogues on record in this century between literature and society.

Christopher Bigsby’s discussion of drama deals with these dialogues directly. His narrative centers on a literature that avoids the general historical trends of postwar national optimism. In his study of American dramatists from Tennessee Williams to August Wilson, Bigsby shows how innovations in theater – such as repetitions in dialogue, constraints in set design, and representations of the materiality of memory – provided the country with an alternative view of contemporary life. Amidst widespread

celebrations of American democracy and its promises for the future, mid-century drama turns to anxious inquiries into the past – in all of its horror – including the Holocaust. These voices of anxiety anticipate a world of emerging countercultures. Morris Dickstein registers this development in the growing awareness of social and communal identity belonging to the solitary wanderer – both author and character. Here, that ostensibly autonomous self is not emptied of connection; rather, it is so inflected with varieties of the social past as to drive one into a denial of fundamental connections. Here cultural *disengagement* bears witness to the powers of history on the individual consciousness. The burdens of memory that this entails consistently have been a major preoccupation of the literature of the American South. John Burt's analysis adds a new layer of interpretive complexity to this dilemma of representation. For Burt, recent Southern literature is a mythic descendant both of the post-Civil War era and of a later generation of scholars who established the terms of Southern regionalism. Mid-twentieth-century issues such as Cold War politics and the growing civil rights movement become central contexts for fictions experimenting with new freedoms from old prejudices. Wendy Steiner, too, takes as her subject both literature and the influence of its critical reception. Whereas formalist concerns have generally shaped critical discussions of postmodernism, Steiner emphasizes the need for a new vocabulary consistent with the social dynamics implicit in postmodern aesthetics. Steiner addresses the limited, and limiting, terms through which the postmodern era has been remembered. Her narrative revives a sense of the interplay (rather than the opposition) between such formal categories as traditionalism and experimentalism. Cyrus R. K. Patell's subject is the fitting complement to Steiner's revaluation. His critical reflections bring new vitality to alternative writings, hitherto considered regional, parochial, or otherwise marginal. As he profiles the strong voices of resistance in America that have come from the emergence of Native American, Asian American, Chicano, and gay and lesbian authors, Patell finds a mandate for the revision of the categories in which they have been set apart from American traditions for so long. Together these five narratives compel us to consider the dynamics of history in literary traditions grounded in an imagined flight from history.

Christopher Bigsby approaches his subject through in-depth analyses of major American dramatists. In Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller, Bigsby presents the writer as a social critic whose public art form conveys messages of private discontent. His analysis reveals that changes in theater during the 1940s–50s reflect not the traditionally remembered American values but bleak suspicions about American experi-

ence. By discussing drama as a ritual replaying of experience, Bigsby draws attention to the values embedded in these staged representations of cultural history, the movement (or stagnation) of time and place. The isolation of Tennessee Williams's tragic women (Laura of *The Glass Menagerie*, Blanche of *A Streetcar Named Desire*) epitomizes the dangerous fragility of a world enamored of beauty but repelled by time. The plays of this era are filled with characters whose lives are caught within preordained plots. Their histories, often unlearned but ever present, are solidly material in form. This material representation of history holds true as well in later plays, and Bigsby addresses its changing forms in the works of Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, and David Mamet (whose *American Buffalo* is performed on the cluttered stage of a Chicago junk dealer's store). American drama since World War II is a literature craving connections to history. This is most palpable in works of socially committed dramatists, drawing upon the traditional political power of the theater. Bigsby's history includes discussion of radical experiments in authority, context, and of boundary-crossings that characterized Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre and Richard Schechner's Performance Group. Not relegated only to performance issues, political concerns also dominate the challenges to ethnic identities and race relations in the work of African American dramatists (Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*). Bigsby details the emergence of black drama through the works of LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) and those influenced by him, particularly August Wilson. He explores the politics of gender through women's theater groups of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly the work of Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, and Wendy Wasserstein. Throughout, Bigsby's method is to emphasize the broad scope of theater in America – its growing decentralization and multiplicity of voices, from the radical plays of Cuban-born Maria Irene Fornes to Asian American explorations of history and identity.

For both Bigsby and Morris Dickstein, literature provides a rich subtext from which to reread the rapidly paced story of national development to review a time marked by extraordinary violence and haunted by threats of apocalyptic change. Dickstein's narrative establishes surprising parallels in the fiction of two American cultures shaped by war: America after World War II and America after involvement in Vietnam. The literary voices of these cultures are deepened and complicated by Dickstein's coverage of fiction of the home front as well as of the battlefield; in both cases, the specter of war is the spirit of the text. Between these two periods, Dickstein finds the "road novel" to be among the strongest achievements in American fiction, and with this common center, he connects writers as diverse as Jack Kerouac, John Barth, and J. D. Salinger. In one of his most

richly detailed sections, Dickstein elucidates history through incisive close readings of some of the country's most defiant literary outsiders, drawing particularly upon African American and Jewish American writers, whose ethnicities highlight a double conflict. These authors tell of internal struggles resulting from both the social marginality of the group and the psychic stress of constructing a particular individualized identity within the group. In James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Saul Bellow, Dickstein finds a paradox of social reflection built on self-examination. The condition of rebellion, implicit or explicit, takes form here in the inward turn – a movement away from a world of violence into the traumatic issues of individual identity – where historical forces are internalized in the troubled memories of authors and characters. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a key work here, presenting as it does the vast and multiple dimensions of African American life in the context of the larger American culture. Ellison, Dickstein argues, presents both African American experience and American identity as fundamentally improvisational constructions of the personal intertwined with the cultural. Dickstein shows that the results of such tensions in establishing identity prompt a variety of major shifts in literary representation. In the works of Truman Capote, Vladimir Nabokov, and John Updike, among others, the idea of a strong individual self based on old standards of active heroism becomes a figure of nostalgia and familiar hero tales are obsolete. The alternative to such tales is the psychological parable, whereby even a form as familiar as the war novel centers on entirely new questions, specifically those unanswered by the ideals of valor and patriotism: what sort of person can kill? Who are those lost to the killing? Finally, what happens to human consciousness confronting the prospect of nuclear apocalypse?

Not nuclear destruction but the annihilation of regional identity faces the writers in John Burt's narrative. Burt first recounts this cultural anxiety through detailed discussions of the works of Robert Penn Warren, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, and Eudora Welty. The specter of modernization threatened the very essence of the old South. Yet, that same sense of threat brought promises of freedom and renewal. Burt's narrative demonstrates that for Southern literature, modernization meant a chance to escape the sorts of traps experienced by William Faulkner's characters, such as the obsession of living and telling the same story over and over again. To some extent, then, the new modernity of Southern literature offered a possible end to the nightmares of collective guilt and family curses. Burt, however, presents this notion of escape as yet another layer of the shared mythic history of the South. Where solutions are imagined, new problems take on familiar patterns. For example, in his discussion of

two crime novels, Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Burt sees not the solution to racism but the substitution of class for race as the mark of the Southern scapegoat. A clean break from the familiar Faulknerian story would mean abandoning a tangled web of definitions, and the writing itself shows a tacit awareness that this would entail a *loss* of freedom. Even if such escape were possible, the Southern authors seem to say, this break with the past would be nothing more than a recoding of memory. Ironically, then, the freedoms won by late Southern authors bespeak a continued entanglement with the past. Nostalgia is now heightened, having been revived by the *illusion* of broken connection. Burt concentrates on authors and works that experiment in redrawing the boundaries of identity for postrenascence Southern literature. Margaret Walker, William Styron, and Ernest J. Gaines provide important perspectives for understanding the legacy of reconstruction, and Walker Percy, Reynolds Price, and Peter Taylor provide diverse views of the South's legacy to American memory. The recent literature of the American South, it turns out, is a story of the varieties of literary *resistance* to historical change, from history's incomplete burials in O'Connor or Welty to its imperial dominance in the tradition reaching from Faulkner to Price.

Historical change may be both represented and resisted in stylistic innovations, and these experiments are central to many of the fictions of postmodernism. But for Wendy Steiner, stylistic experimentation involves far more than aesthetic choice. Her history covers American fiction from about 1970 to the present, and as she organizes her material, her narrative reopens the study of this period by first complicating the relations among the long-standing standard categories of postmodernist discourse. Steiner enriches the inherited categories she identifies: she challenges the divisions of traditionalism, experimentalism, and feminism. In this way, she establishes the need for a more dynamic model of critical memory – specifically, a model that acknowledges the social concerns of literature. Her revised sense of historical vision emphasizes the overlappings and mutual dependencies of traditional, experimental, and feminist voices in postmodern American fiction. These hybrid forms become new vehicles for postmodern realism, which demonstrates its cultural engagement by reflecting on contemporary experiences of ambiguity. Thus Steiner shows that an intellectual concern with the confusion between history and fiction becomes *experientially* central – central to the fabric of everyday life – as American audiences sort through the press accounts of the Vietnam War. In both literature and culture, such confusion issues not in newly credible documentaries but in the increasingly relativistic perceptions of truth and value. Steiner's analyses are based on her strong claim for the frequently over-