

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 90

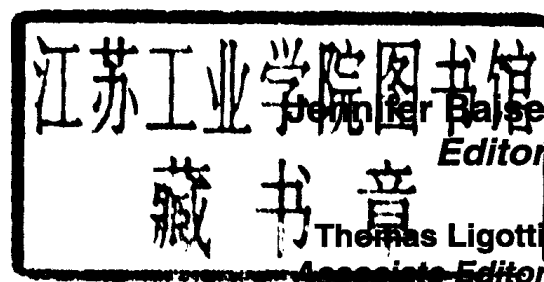
TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 90

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

## Topics Volume

**Excerpts from Criticism of Various Topics  
in Twentieth-Century Literature, including Literary  
and Critical Movements, Prominent Themes and  
Genres, Anniversary Celebrations, and Surveys  
of National Literatures**



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# Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities, and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many libraries would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

## Scope of the Series

*TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1960 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topic entries widen the focus of the series from individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

*TCLC* is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, which reprints commentary on authors now living or who have died since 1960. Because of the different periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*. For additional information about *CLC* and Gale's other criticism titles, users should consult the Guide to Gale Literary Criticism Series preceding the title page in this volume.

## Coverage

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully compiled to present:

- criticism of authors, or literary topics, representing a variety of genres and nationalities
- both major and lesser-known writers and literary works of the period
- 6-12 authors or 3-6 topics per volume
- individual entries that survey critical response to each author's work or each topic in literary history, including early criticism to reflect initial reactions; later criticism to represent any rise or decline in reputation; and current retrospective analyses.

## Organization of This Book

An author entry consists of the following elements: author heading, biographical and critical introduction, list of principal works, reprints of criticism (each preceded by an annotation and a bibliographic citation), and a bibliography of further reading.

- The **Author Heading** consists of the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of

the introduction to the author entry are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.

- The **Biographical and Critical Introduction** outlines the author's life and career, as well as the critical issues surrounding his or her work. References to past volumes of *TCLC* are provided at the beginning of the introduction. Additional sources of information in other biographical and critical reference series published by Gale, including *Short Story Criticism*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*, are listed in a box at the end of the entry.
- Some *TCLC* entries include **Portraits** of the author. Entries also may contain reproductions of materials pertinent to an author's career, including manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, and drawings, as well as photographs of important people, places, and events in an author's life.
- The **List of Principal Works** is chronological by date of first book publication and identifies the genre of each work. In the case of foreign authors with both foreign-language publications and English translations, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Critical essays are prefaced by **Annotations** providing the reader with information about both the critic and the criticism that follows. Included are the critic's reputation, individual approach to literary criticism, and particular expertise in an author's works. Also noted are the relative importance of a work of criticism, the scope of the essay, and the growth of critical controversy or changes in critical trends regarding an author. In some cases, these annotations cross-reference essays by critics who discuss each other's commentary.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation** designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Criticism is arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All titles of works by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable the user to easily locate discussion of particular works. Also for purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it appeared. Some of the essays in *TCLC* also contain translated material. Unless otherwise noted, translations in brackets are by the editors; translations in parentheses or continuous with the text are by the critic. Publication information (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of works) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- An annotated list of **Further Reading** appearing at the end of each author entry suggests secondary sources on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

## Cumulative Indexes

- Each volume of *TCLC* contains a cumulative **Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in Gale's Literary Criticism Series, along with cross references to such biographical series as *Contemporary Authors* and *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. For readers' convenience, a complete list of Gale titles included appears on the first page of the author index. Useful for locating authors within the various series, this index is particularly valuable for those authors who are identified by a certain period but who, because of their death dates, are placed in another, or for those authors whose careers span two periods. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is found in *TCLC*, yet a writer often associated with him, Ernest Hemingway, is found in *CLC*.

- Each *TCLC* volume includes a cumulative **Nationality Index** which lists all authors who have appeared in *TCLC* volumes, arranged alphabetically under their respective nationalities, as well as Topics volume entries devoted to particular national literatures.
- Each new volume in Gale's Literary Criticism Series includes a cumulative **Topic Index**, which lists all literary topics treated in *NCLC*, *TCLC*, *LC 1400-1800*, and the *CLC* yearbook.
- Each new volume of *TCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes, includes a **Title Index** listing the titles of all literary works discussed in the volume. In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale has also produced a **Special Paperbound Edition** of the *TCLC* title index. This annual cumulation lists all titles discussed in the series since its inception and is issued with the first volume of *TCLC* published each year. Additional copies of the index are available on request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the following year's cumulation. Titles discussed in the Topics volume entries are not included *TCLC* cumulative index.

## Citing Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in Gale's literary Criticism Series may use the following general forms to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to materials drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

<sup>1</sup>William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, (AMS Press, 1987); reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 94-105.

<sup>2</sup>George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," *Partisan Review*, 6 (Winter 1949), pp. 85-92; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, Vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Garipey (Detroit: Gale Research, 1995), pp. 40-3.

## Suggestions Are Welcome

In response to suggestions, several features have been added to *TCLC* since the series began, including annotations to critical essays, a cumulative index to authors in all Gale literary criticism series, entries devoted to criticism on a single work by a major author, more extensive illustrations, and a title index listing all literary works discussed in the series since its inception.

Readers who wish to suggest authors or topics to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to write the editors.

# Acknowledgments

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# The City and Literature

## INTRODUCTION

Literary depictions of urban areas range from the painstakingly detailed descriptions of Dublin in James Joyce's *Ulysses* to the bleak cityscapes of the post-apocalyptic futurist scenarios of H. G. Wells, Philip K. Dick, and Samuel Delany. As humanity increasingly became more urbanized, the image writers portrayed of its cities became more diverse. A contemporary of King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More created *Utopia*, an idealized, fictional island country that is centered around the capital of Amaurote, with fifty-four cities of equal size each containing approximately six thousand homes. Samuel Pepys's diary details London during the plague years and the Great Fire of 1666. The English Romantic movement began a literary tradition of disparaging the city. Such poets as William Blake wrote that the increased industrialization of the cities served to degrade its inhabitants. The Industrial Revolution in England, France, and the United States spurred writers to write of the inhumane living conditions in the countries' capitals. In *Walden* American Transcendentalist writer Henry David Thoreau wrote of how the effects of urban living crush the spirit. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such writers as Theodore Dreiser and Stephen Crane wrote about the city as a malevolent force toward their protagonists. Modernist, existentialist, and postmodernist writers of the twentieth century continued to depict the city as an usurper of the human spirit that inherently destroys humanity's essence.

---

## REPRESENTATIVE WORKS\*

S. Y. Agnon  
*Sippur Pashut* 1935  
Horatio Alger  
*Helen Ford* 1866  
*Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Bootblacks* 1868  
Nelson Algren  
*The Neon Wilderness* (short stories) 1947  
*The Man with the Golden Arm* 1950  
Sherwood Anderson  
*Dark Laughter* 1925  
Sholem Asch  
*East River* 1946  
Paul Auster  
*City of Glass* 1985  
*Ghosts* 1986  
*The Locked Room* 1986

Donald Barthelme  
*City Life* (short stories) 1970  
Saul Bellow  
*The Victim* 1947  
*The Adventures of Augie March* 1953  
Leonard Bishop  
*Down All Your Streets* 1952  
*Days of My Love* 1953  
Thomas Boyd  
*In Time of Peace* 1935  
Charles Brockden Brown  
*Arthur Mervyn* 1800  
Claude Brown  
*Manchild in the Promised Land* 1965  
Eugene Brown  
*Trespass* 1952  
William Burroughs  
*Naked Lunch* 1959  
Abraham Cahan  
*Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* 1896  
Italo Calvino  
*Invisible Cities* 1972  
Albert Camus  
*The Plague* 1947  
Winston Churchill  
*The Dwelling-Place of Light* 1917  
Stephen Crane  
*Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* 1896  
Edward Dahlberg  
*Bottom Dogs* 1930  
Marcia Davenport  
*East Side, West Side* 1947  
Samuel Delany  
*The Towers of Toron* 1964  
*City of a Thousand Suns* 1965  
Floyd Dell  
*The Briary Bush* 1921  
Henry Denker  
*My Son, the Lawyer* 1950  
Thomas Disch  
*334* 1976  
John Dos Passos  
*One Man's Initiation—1917* 1920  
*Three Soldiers* 1921  
*Streets of Night* 1923  
*Manhattan Transfer* 1925  
*The 42nd Parallel* 1930  
*1919* 1932  
*The Big Money* 1936  
*Adventures of a Young Man* 1939  
Theodore Dreiser  
*Sister Carrie* 1900  
*The Financier* 1912  
*An American Tragedy* 1925

Ralph Ellison  
*The Invisible Man* 1952  
 James T. Farrell  
*Studs Lonigan* 1935  
*No Star Is Lost* 1938  
 Edna Ferber  
*Nobody's in Town* 1939  
 Nat Ferber  
*New York: A Novel* 1929  
 Rudolf Fisher  
*The Walls of Jericho* 1928  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald  
*This Side of Paradise* 1920  
*The Beautiful and Damned* 1922  
*The Great Gatsby* 1925  
 Waldo Frank  
*City Block* 1922  
 Henry B. Fuller  
*The Cliff Dwellers* 1893  
 Albert Halper  
*Union Square* 1943  
 Thomas Hardy  
*Desperate Remedies* 1871  
*A Pair of Blue Eyes* 1873  
*Jude the Obscure* 1896  
 Joseph Heller  
*Catch 22* 1961  
 Robert Herrick  
*A Life for a Life* 1910  
 William Dean Howells  
*A Hazard of New Fortunes* 1889  
 Evan Hunter  
*Blackboard Jungle* 1954  
 Fanny Hurst  
*Mannequin* 1926  
 Henry James  
*The Bostonians* 1886  
*The American Scene* 1907  
 James Joyce  
*Dubliners* (short stories) 1914  
*Ulysses* 1922  
 MacKinlay Kantor  
*Diversity* 1928  
 Day Kellogg Lee  
*The Master Builder* 1852  
 Meyer Levin  
*The Old Bunch* 1937  
 Sinclair Lewis  
*Main Street* 1920  
*Babbitt* 1922  
 Andre Malraux  
*The Human Condition* 1933  
 Thomas Mann  
*Death in Venice* 1912  
 Claude McKay  
*Home to Harlem* 1928  
*A Long Way from Home* 1937  
 Henry Miller  
*Tropic of Cancer* 1934  
*Black Spring* 1936  
*Tropic of Capricorn* 1939  
 Frederic Morton  
*Asphalt and Desire* 1952

Willard Motley  
*Knock on Any Door* 1947  
 Frank Norris  
*McTeague* 1899  
 John O'Hara  
*Butterfield 8* 1935  
 Marge Piercy  
*Woman on the Edge of Time* 1976  
 Ann Petry  
*The Street* 1946  
 Ernest Poole  
*The Voice of the Street* 1906  
 Thomas Pynchon  
*The Crying of Lot 49* 1966  
 Elmer Rice  
*Imperial City* 1937  
 Dorothy Richardson  
*The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl as Told by Herself* 1905  
 Rainer Maria Rilke  
*Malte Laurids Brigge* 1924  
 Ethel Rosenberg  
*Go Fight City Hall* 1946  
 J. D. Salinger  
*The Catcher in the Rye* 1951  
 Irving Schulman  
*The Amboy Dukes* 1947  
 Upton Sinclair  
*The Jungle* 1906  
*The Metropolis* 1908  
 Tess Slesinger  
*The Unpossessed* 1934  
 Betty Smith  
*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* 1943  
 Bayard Taylor  
*John Godfrey's Fortunes* 1864  
 Wallace Thurman  
*The Blacker the Berry* 1929  
 Carl Van Vechten  
*Nigger Heaven* 1926  
 Edith Wharton  
*The House of Mirth* 1905  
*The Age of Innocence* 1920  
 Thomas Wolfe  
*You Can't Go Home Again* 1940  
 Herman Wouk  
*City Boy* 1952  
 Richard Wright  
*Native Son* 1940  
*The Outsider* 1953  
*Lawd Today* 1963

\*All works are novels unless otherwise noted.

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## OVERVIEWS

Ihab Hassan

SOURCE: "Cities of Mind, Urban Words," in *Rumors of Change: Essays of Five Decades*, University of Alabama Press, 1995, pp. 68-84.

[In the following excerpt, originally written in 1981, Hassan discusses depictions of urban life from Plato to Samuel Delany.]

*The city is a fact in nature, like a cave, a run of mackerel or an ant-heap. But it is also a conscious work of art, and it holds within its communal framework many simpler and more personal forms of art. Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind. . . . With language itself, [the city] remains man's greatest work of art.*

—Lewis Mumford

*With cities, it is as with dreams: everything imaginable can be dreamed, but even the most unexpected dream is a rebus that conceals a desire or, its reverse, a fear. Cities, like dreams, are made of desire and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.*

—Italo Calvino

*Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.*

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

The city: grime, glamour, geometries of glass, steel, and concrete. Intractable, it rises from nature, like proud Babel, only to lie athwart our will, astride our being, or so it often seems. Yet immanent in that gritty structure is another: invisible, imaginary, made of dream and desire, agent of all our transformations. I want here to invoke that other city, less city perhaps than inscape of mind, rendered in that supreme fiction we call language. Immaterial, that city in-formed history from the start, molding human space and time ever since time and space molded themselves to the wagging tongue.

And so to commence, I shall tersely review the founding of that ideal city, which even the naturalist tradition in American fiction—from Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser, through James Farrell, Henry Roth, Nelson Algren, to Willard Motley, Hubert Selby, and John Rechy—failed to make into mortar and stone. I shall regard it as concept, project, field, a magic lantern through which the human condition may be viewed. Next, I shall consider some examples of fiction, largely postwar, uniquely American, omitting, alas, both international trends and historical antecedents. Last, from this special perspective, I shall assay some in-conclusion, which my brief scope must make even briefer.

## II

In its earliest representations, the city—Ur, Nineveh, Thebes, or that heaven-defying heap turned into verbal rubble that we call Babel—symbolized the place where divine powers entered human space. The sky gods came, and where they touched the earth, kings and heroes rose to overwhelm old village superstitions and build a city. As Lewis Mumford says: “All eyes now turned skywards. . . . Those who made the most of the city were not chagrined by the animal limitations of human existence: they sought deliberately, by a concentrated act of will, to transcend them.” And so they did, with language, “with glyphs, ideograms, and script, with the first abstractions of number and verbal signs.” All cities, it seems, are sacred, symbolic, heavenly at their origin, made of unconscious promptings as they grow into mind, made of mind that grows into purer mind through the power of language.

Thus the dematerializing metropolis coincides with the first temple or palace stone and dimly evokes, farther back, the burial mound, around which village life fearfully gathered. The “twin cities,” biopolis and necropolis, stand for the visible and invisible demesnes that all human endeavor, however profane, assumes. Arnold Toynbee, we recall, thought that cities helped to “etherialize” history. But etherialization, as Mumford knows, carries also its counterpoint—“The rhythm of life in cities seems to be an alternation between materialization and etherialization: the concrete structure, detaching itself through a human response, takes on a symbolic meaning, uniting the knower and the known; while subjective images, ideals, intuitions . . . likewise take on material attributes. . . . City design is thus the culminating point of a socially adequate process of materialization.”

Yet as the universe became conscious of itself in Homo sapiens, so do we now reflect upon the city through abstractions the city itself generates. To see a city whole is also to apprehend its theoretical nature, its hidden functions and ideal forms. For the city acts as mediator between the human and natural orders, as a changing network of social relations, as a flux of production and consumption, as a labyrinth of solitudes, as a system of covert controls, semiotic exchanges, perpetual barter, and, withal, as an incipient force of planetization. In short, at once fluid and formal, the city apprehends us in its vital grid.

Modern theoreticians of the city variously recognize this aspect of its character. Max Weber, for instance, conceives the city not as a large aggregate of dwellings but as a complex “autocephalic” system of self-maintaining forces, while Robert E. Park, founder of urban “ecological” sociology in America, describes it as “a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of organized attitudes and sentiments.” Practical and streetwise, Jane Jacobs still insists that the “ubiquitous principle” of cities is their need “for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other a constant mutual support,” a need that dishonest city planning invariably

conceals. Raymond Williams, though historically alert to the forces of production and consumption in the city, also perceives it as a "form of shared consciousness rather than merely a set of techniques," about which everything "from the magnificent to the apocalyptic—can be believed at once."

As for Marshall McLuhan, we know his theme: the old metropolitan space must eventually dissolve into electric information, a "total field of inclusive awareness." Similarly, Charles Jencks considers the urban environment as a communicating system, a cybernetic or semiotic mesh; hence the efforts of such architects as Nicholas Negroponte to use computers (URBAN 5) in designing cities. Finally, stretching the cybernetic metaphor to its limit, Paolo Soleri speculates that in "the urban organism, the mind remains in independent but correlated parcels divided spatially and coincidental with the parceled brains, the whole forming the mental or thinking skin of the city." His "arcology" presages no less than the passage from matter to spirit.

Such visions may seem intolerably angelic to citizens inured to the diabolic occlusions and exigencies of the modern metropolis. Yet the city remains an alembic of human time, perhaps of human nature—an alembic, to be sure, employed less often by master alchemists than by sorcerer's apprentices. Still, as a frame of choices and possibilities, the city enacts our sense of the future; not merely abstract, not mutable only, it fulfills time in utopic or dystopic images. This expectation strikes some thinkers as peculiarly American. Nearly half a century ago, Jean-Paul Sartre remarked, "For [Europeans], a city is, above all, a past; for [Americans], it is mainly a future; what they like in the city is everything it has not yet become and everything it can be." But Sartre was never the most reliable observer of America, and what he perceives as an American impatience merely avows the city's own high-handedness with history.

Utopia, dystopia, futuropolis: these cities of mind have occupied a space in the Western imagination since Plato's republic. In Christian times, the city of God, the heavenly city, even the medieval church triumphant, became structures of a pervasive spiritual energy whose absence in nether regions suffered the infernal city to rise. (Pieter Brueghel's paintings of Babel attest to this doubleness in their equivocation between heaven and hell.) But the great architects of the Italian Renaissance (Filippo Brunelleschi, Rafael Alberti, Bramante, and Leonardo da Vinci), its painters (notably Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Piero della Francesca, and Francesco di Giorgio), and its authors (especially Tommaso Campanella in *City of the Sun*) turned to the dream of reason; circular or square, radial or polygonal, their urban visions revealed logic, will, clarity, purest tyranny of the eye.

English utopian writers, like Sir Thomas More and Francis Bacon, also implicated their utopic concepts into urban space. So did, later, the pictorial architects of the eighteenth century, Etienne-Louis Boullée and

Claude Nicholas Ledoux, the nineteenth-century planners of Garden City, inspired by Ebenezer Howard, and those eccentric designers of the early twentieth century, Tony Garnier and Antonio Sant' Elia, who ushered in the austere shapes of futurism and constructivism, of the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. Closer to our time still, "plug-in cities" of Archigram illustrate the immanent structuralist principle; Buckminster Fuller's geodesic forms enclose us all in nearly invisible technology; and Constantinos Doxiadis's "entopias" offer blueprints of "the city of dreams that can come true." Abstract urbs all, bright geometries of desire, they share with Disneyland and Disney World—indubitably our two most solvent cities—a commitment to effective fantasy.

Yet as Jane Jacobs warns: "Designing a dream city is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination." Since our cities seem still to beggar the imagination of planners, our urban afflictions persistently defy our sense of a feasible future. Thus, dystopia becomes a synonym of megalopolis. Disneyland will not rescind Harlem, and against the visions of Soleri, Doxiadis, or Fuller, those of Fritz Lang in *Metropolis* or of Jean-Luc Godard in *Alphaville* may yet prevail. Writers and illustrators of speculative fiction certainly continue to envisage island cities in space—mobile, radiant, noetic, all Ariel and no Caliban, communicating with each other and the universe by means of unique mental powers. Yet these mind-cities yield, in darker speculations, to vast conurbations of disincorporate brains, floating in innumerable cubicles, ruled all by a sublime computer or despot brain. Here time and space, transcended by mind, betray the ultimate terror of dematerialization—complete control.

### III

I have not strayed altogether from my subject, the city in fiction; I have tried rather to perceive it from a certain angle that reveals the city as a fiction composing many fictions. Baudelaire, perhaps first among moderns, knew this well enough, though some might claim for Restif de la Bretonne or Eugène Sue earlier knowledge of nocturnal streets. Baudelaire, at any rate, allegorized Paris in various poems; one in particular, "Les Sept Vieillards," found an echo in T. S. Eliot's poem about another "unreal city":

Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,  
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!  
Les mystères partout coulent comme des sèves.

This spectral note pervades, in diverse timbres, all modern as well as postmodern literature—fiction, poetry, or drama, naturalist, symbolist, or absurd. Certainly, the city as a formal dream or internal shape of consciousness emerges in fiction before the postwar period. Marcel Proust's Paris, James Joyce's Dublin, Alfred Döblin's Berlin, Robert Musil's Vienna, the London of Virginia Woolf, the Manhattan of John Dos Passos, Henry Miller's Brooklyn, and Nathanael West's Los Angeles attest to a longer historical view. Perhaps I can make the point by adverting to the last two.

In *Black Spring* (1963), Miller declares himself a patriot of the fourteenth ward, where he was raised, to which he continually returns "as a paranoiac returns to his obsessions":

We live in the mind, in ideas, in fragments. We no longer drink in the wild outer music of the streets—we remember only. . . . Here there is buried legend after legend of youth and melancholy, of savage nights and mysterious bosoms dancing on the wet mirror of the pavement, of women chuckling softly as they scratch themselves, of wild sailors' shouts, of long queues standing in the lobby, of boats brushing each other in the fog and tugs snorting furiously against the rush of tide. . . .

The plasm of the dream is the pain of separation.  
The dream lives on after the body is buried.

After the city vanishes too, one might add. For Miller really dissolves the city into his emotions, into remembrances more vivid than the city ever was, splashing his words on the page as Jackson Pollock threw colors on a canvas, exorcising his death in images drenched in nostalgia. Sensations, perceptions, observances of the city thus obey, in the fourteenth ward, the imperative of his soft need.

The absorption or ingestion of the object—a whole borough here—typifies the romantic sensibility. But Miller could suddenly exchange the romantic egoist for the selfless cosmologist, perhaps no less romantic. Thus, in the surrealist section of *Black Spring* entitled "Megapolitan Maniac," he collapses the city not into the self but into the universe: "The city is loveliest when the sweet death racket begins. Her own life lived in defiance of nature, her electricity, her frigidaire, her soundproof walls. Box within box she rears her dry walls, the glint of lacquered nails, the plumes that wave across the corrugated sky. Here in the coffin depths grow the everlasting flowers sent by telegraph. . . . This is the city, and this the music. Out of the little black boxes an unending river of romance in which the crocodiles weep. All walking toward the mountain top. All in step. From the power house above God floods the street with music. It is God who turns the music on every evening just as we quit work."

The city as self, the city as cosmos: thus Miller draws the far limits of urban conceptualization. Nathanael West, however, conceptualizes the city with cooler art: in *The Day of the Locusts* (1939), Los Angeles finds its consummation in a painting that Tod Hackett wants to create. West—employing throughout various devices of style and impersonal narration to distance himself from the lunatic scene—ends his novel with a vision of chaos within another vision of chaos, rendered in the very act of experiencing that chaos amid the crowds assaulting Kahn's Persian Palace Theatre. Here is the passage depicting Andrews's apocalypse within apocalypse:

Despite the agony in his leg, he was able to think clearly about his picture, "The Burning of Los Angeles." After his quarrel with Faye, he had

worked on it continually to escape tormenting himself, and the way to it in his mind had become almost automatic.

As he stood on his good leg, clinging desperately to the iron rail, he could see all the rough charcoal strokes with which he had blocked it out on the big canvas.

A description of the fiery and phantasmic picture ensues, as Andrews imagines himself at work on his painting. Thus, West gives us in his novel the work of art that Andrews fails to complete. Can this mean that Hollywood, city of dreams, lends itself to our apprehension only as another kind of dream (the painting) within still another form of art or dream (West's fiction)? The question offends our sense of the real. Yet how different, finally, does Hollywood seem from all those modern cities that drive us to fictions of survival amidst their desperate confusions?

#### IV

The modern city compels certain idealizations of its orders or disorders. Moreover, all art selects, abstracts, and so must further conceptualize its objects, dense or ethereal. The great naturalists, I suspect, knew this subliminally, as did symbolists and modernists to a fuller degree. In the postwar period, however, fabulism, irrationalism, absurdism abet the conceptual tendency further. I have no leisure here to survey the entire fictional landscape; nor should I endeavor to do so, since the urban element in many novels seems sometimes extraneous. In certain works, though, urban setting and fictive form are inseparable. I cite—all too cursorily, I fear—two early examples: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953).

Ellison's novel transmutes Harlem into a dance of characters, a music of ideas and illusions; realism and surrealism here are seamless. Thus, the protagonist always moves between an act and its shadow: "I leaped aside, into the street, and there was a sudden and brilliant suspension of time, like the last ax stroke and the felling of a tall tree." All New York becomes the image, the sound, the very texture of a dramatic theme, and the coal cellar, in which *Invisible Man* at last confronts his invisibility, burns with an ironic intelligence more luminous than the 1369 light bulbs improbably affixed to its ceiling. Similarly, Bellow's Chicago shapes Augie's high call to freedom, his quest for the fabled "axial lines." Deadly, fluent like money, omnific like love, the city becomes the very form of American experience in midcentury. And when Augie wonders in a dejected moment if cities, once cradles of civilization, can ever become wholly barren of it, he thus refutes himself: "An inhuman thing, if possible, to have so many people together who beget nothing on one another. No, but it is not possible, and the dreary begets its own fire, and so this never happens."

To the classic fictions of Ellison and Bellow one may add others that variously render or vivify the American city.

But I should turn now to another kind of novel, more shadowy in its urban inscapes, more cunning. I allude to William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and Donald Barthelme's *City Life* (1970).

In Burroughs's entropic world, whether earthly or galactic, the city becomes a machine for dying. Fueled on sex, junk, and money, this infernal machine invariably regulates, violates, exterminates; in short, it both controls and negates, relying on the calculus of absolute human need. The need, beyond eroticism, is for forgetfulness, a final lubricity. This lubricity, in the metabolism of the addict, aspires to "Absolute ZERO." But if Burroughs's spectral city finds its center in the human body, locus of desire and decay, it meets its circumference in language. Death enters the erotic body and spreads through the body politic carried by the virus Word. Hence the cure: Rub Out the Word! Or if it proves impractical, then let the word, testifying against the world, testify also against itself. Cut up, desiccated, phantasmagoric, Burroughs's language reaches heights of savage poetry, grisly humor, metaphysical outrage, grotesque conceit, yet must finally expend itself, as the city must, in prophetic waste. Thus *Naked Lunch* attempts to become itself the feculent city, an expanse of shameful words, deeds, deaths, dreams. The shame of cities? It is of existence itself.

Pynchon, another wizard of words and waste, offers, in *The Crying of Lot 49*, a city ruled by the expectation of WASTE (We Await Silent Tristero's Empire) and DEATH ("Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn"). His Los Angeles, indeed the whole of urban California if not of the United States, seems a lunatic semiotic system, both immanent and indeterminate, the breath of some universal paranoia. The mystery that Oedipa Maas pursues through the labyrinths of signs remains a mystery; for self and society in America have dissolved into these same esoteric signs—hieroglyphs of concealed meaning or meaninglessness (we never know which).

Still, though entropy affects the physical, the social, the linguistic universes—pace Maxwell's demon—the mind insists on weaving and unweaving patterns, creating and decreating fictions, including Pynchon's own. Consider these communicative devices the author devises to guide or misguide his heroine through the book: a cryptic will, stamp collections, the mails, telephone, television, radio, graffiti and drawings, plays, movies, lapel buttons, wrecked cars, hallucinogens, maps, transistor circuits, motel signs, rock music, inaudible voice frequencies, striptease shows, impressions on a dirty mattress, footnotes, forged editions, doodles, puns, typographic errors, sign languages, children's games, tapes, armbands, bullet shots, epileptic fits, sex, silence, and so forth. Semiosis unending: can we wonder that the city, that all existence, turns for Oedipa into a cryptogram? Here she muses the nature of language: "Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurling of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the

true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did not know where she was."

The world, the city, the book: all promise some hierophany, always deferred. But is a malignant Logos or the encapsulated human self here at fault? Locked in an imaginary tower, Oedipa once dreams of letting her hair down to serve as ladder for another, only to discover that her hair is a wig. Narcissism, then, defines our city's limit, as in San Narciso. And the opposite of narcissism, which we call love, breaks through these limits and in so doing releases "the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word." In short, Pynchon's city of treacherous signs may stand in the void or hold some occult meaning that only love can yield. Or perhaps only the "unimaginable Pacific," the "hole left by the moon's tearing-free and monument to her exile," can redeem it. But which?

Burroughs's and Pynchon's are cities of entropy and mystery; Barthelme's, no less entropic or mysterious, is one of parody. *City Life*, of course, tells us nothing overtly about New York City. A collage of stories, a catena of fragments, it provides rather an experience of urban being, under the aspects of parody, pastiche, parataxis, under the aspect of the most delicate irony. The experience resists interpretation, battens on absurdity and irrelevance; and so we fasten on such words as *dreck*, *detritus*, *trash*, *waste*, and *sludge*, which Barthelme slyly supplies. "It's that we want to be on the leading edge of this trash phenomenon," he writes, "the everted sphere of the future, and that's why we pay particular attention, too, to those aspects of language that may be seen as a model of the trash phenomenon." And again: "We like books that have a lot of *dreck* in them, matter which presents itself as not wholly relevant (or indeed, at all relevant) but which, carefully attended to, can supply a kind of 'sense' of what is going on. This 'sense' is not to be obtained by reading between the lines (for there is nothing there, in those white spaces) but by reading the lines themselves." The *dreck*, *sludge*, or *trash*, may strike us as the unassimilable detritus of an urban mass civilization; yet they become available to us as epistemic units of city life, parodies of parodies—and parodies of parodies of parodies—that finally inhabit the mind as a unique mode of urban consciousness.

The transformation of *dreck* into mind is style in action. Barthelme's consummately ironic style employs catalogues, drawings, photographs, puns, vignettes, aphorisms, clichés, neologisms, jokes, innuendos, stutters, fragments, metafiction, non sequiturs, recondite allusions, odd juxtapositions, asides, absurd humor, and typographic horseplay, not only to defamiliarize his art but also to dematerialize his city. (Defamiliarization and dematerialization have been for nearly a century concomitants

in various arts—cubist, surrealist, and abstract.) Above all, Barthelme's rhetoric of irony deconstructs, displaces, defers urban reality—to use three vogueish terms—precisely because it declines to make it whole. The city, radically discontinuous, becomes a mental construct, re-constructed from verbal shards, sad, zany, or wise. As Barthelme remarked in an interview: "New York City is or can be regarded as a collage, as opposed to, say, a tribal village in which all the huts (or yurts, or whatever) are the same hut, duplicated. The point of collage is that unlike things are stuck together to make, in the best case, a new reality." This is more urbane than Ramona's urban statement near the end of *City Life*: "Ramona thought about the city.—I have to admit we are locked in the most exquisite mysterious muck. This muck heaves and palpitates. It is multidirectional and has a mayor. To describe it takes many hundreds of thousands of words. Our muck is only a part of a much greater muck—the nation-state—which is itself the creation of that muck of mucks, human consciousness. Of course all these things also have a touch of sublimity." And so the city, "dreck," "collage," or "palpitating muck," leads directly to the problem of the nation-state in the twentieth century and to "that muck of mucks, human consciousness"—touched with sublimity, of course.

## v

The city conceived as a machine for dying (Burroughs), as a paranoiac semiotic system (Pynchon), and as mental dreck or palpitating muck (Barthelme), presumes on the novelist's freedom from verisimilitude. Such freedom becomes constitutive in a number of works that we may unabashedly call fantasy or science fiction.

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) stands at the edge of this genre. Poised between three worlds—the desolate present, a utopic future, a dystopic alternative—the book refracts reality in the lens of several mental institutions; the madhouse becomes both metaphor and microcosm of the modern city, which ruthlessly exploits the poor, the powerless, and the deviant. At its core, Piercy's book seethes with poetic outrage, in the honored naturalist mode, threatening to explode its fantastic frame. Yet the frame holds because the present does contain all versions of its future; the modern city does enact the convulsions of its fate. Thus, the incarceration of Connie Ramos in Rockover Mental Hospital not only betrays the violence of our civilization; it further tests its potential for survival.

Connie communes mentally with two futures. One seems ideal, arcadian, impeccable in its advanced views of sex, race, ecology, technology, education, political life, yet earthy withal. The other looms like an urban nightmare of windowless skyscrapers, gray suns, fetid air, cyborg police, and unspeakable vulgarity. But the crucial insight of the novel identifies the war between these two possible futures with the actual war between Connie and her captors—that is, the struggle between two cities, one of human fulfillment, the other of inhuman deprivation. Here

is Connie's cry of pain: "Whoever owned this place, these cities, whoever owned those glittering glass office buildings in midtown filled with the purr of money turning over, those refineries over the river in Jersey with their flames licking the air, they gave nothing back. They took and took and left their garbage choking the air, the river, the sea itself. Choking her. A life of garbage. Human garbage."

Garbage (or dreck) this city really is not, but rather something more sinister: electroencephalic control through brain implants. Thus, the good doctor explains: "You see, we can electrically trigger almost every mood and emotion—the fight-or-flight reaction, euphoria, calm, pleasure, pain, terror! We can monitor and induce reactions through the microminiaturized radio under the skull."

The novel, as I have said, tells a tale of two cities. To their struggle—a struggle also between unborn futures, virtual worlds clashing in a crux of time—the novel can offer no denouement except the rage of Connie, her poisoned will to survive. Relentlessly ideological in parts—all the men, for instance, seem nasty or brutish—*Woman on the Edge of Time* still projects a powerful image of human courage and city madness. Barely removed from the present, it reveals us to ourselves all the more savagely in the urban mirror of our distortions.

Set only half a century hence, once more in New York, Thomas Disch's *334* (1976) also stands at the threshold of fantasy, revealing us to ourselves implacably. Again, life there seems so close to our own that we scarcely recognize it as alien. Yet violence and hebetude, garishness and despair, mingle easily in this crammed city of the imminent future; everything there seems a grotesque parody of our best hopes. Still, many characters—whether engaged in the cryonics black market or the no less deadening market of sex—strike us as vibrantly human, and their will to endure miraculously endures. As Lottie in Bellevue Hospital broods: "And anyhow the world doesn't end. Even though it may try to, even though you wish to hell it would—it can't. There's always some poorjerk who thinks he needs something he hasn't got, and there goes five years, ten years getting it." The same Lottie, however, in the same year, 2026, says: "The end of the world. Let me tell you about the end of the world. It happened fifty years ago. Maybe a hundred. And since then it's been lovely."

Indeed, the dominant structures and metaphors of the work suggest both perplexity and decadence. Composed of interrelated fragments, vignettes, tableaux, the book is a labyrinth of miseries—smog, lupus, television, eugenics, overcrowding, sadomasochism, artificial foods—each preternaturally vivid, all absurd. Centered on a dismal building at 344 East Eleventh Street, the various families accept historical decline within their spatial frame. Thus the titular number 334 evokes an address as well as the imaginary "birthdate" of Alexa, a character in the section called "Everyday Life in the Later Roman Empire"; her imaginary "death" in 410, the year Alaric sacked Rome,

terminates her "alternate historical existence" under the influence of a drug, Morbihanine. And so Alexa dreams of bloody ritual sacrifices at the Metropolitan Museum and wakes to wonder, in Spenglerian gloom, if civilization still warrants the human effort. Clearly, the city of Disch, Pynchonesque, emanates a subtle insanity: ourselves.

This theme is brilliantly prefigured in Samuel Delany's trilogy, *The Fall of the Towers* (1977), which includes *Captives of the Flame* (1963), *The Towers of Toron* (1964), and *City of a Thousand Suns* (1965). The city here, at last, realizes its fabulous potential; it emerges as a cosmic frame of mind, an extension of intelligences both terrestrial and extraterrestrial. In fact, the trilogy contains not one but many cities. There is, first, silent Telphar, deserted, with spires and high looping roadways, ruled by a "psychotic" computer, symbolizing mind turned against itself, symbolizing death. There is, next, the island capital, Toron, like "a black gloved hand, ringed with myriad diamonds, amethysts by the score, turquoises, rubies," rising with its towers "above the midnight horizon, each jewel with its internal flame," yet all too human, with kings, ministers, tycoons, circuses, rabble, a city conspiring against itself in a wholly imaginary war that projects its own civic corruptions until all its towers come tumbling down.

There is also that rough, utopic *City of a Thousand Suns*, salvaged by malcontents from death and rubble, rooted in earth, reaching beyond its forest clearing for the stars. Then, halfway across the universe, there is a nameless city, provisional home of the Triple Being, built twelve million years ago by a vanished civilization yet so made as to continue recreating itself into time. As the Triple Being, supernal spirit, explains: "*The city responds to the psychic pressures of those near, building itself according to the plans, methods, and techniques of whatever minds press it into activity.*"

In that city, beneath a double sun immeasurably distant from our own, a conference of sentient beings convenes. Delany depicts the scene marvelously. He begins, "What is a city?" and the conferees begin thus to answer, each according to its nature: "To one group at the meeting, immense thirty-foot worms, the city seemed a web of muddy tunnels and the words came as vibrations through their hides. . . . A metallic cyst received the words telepathically; for him the city was an airless, pitted siding of rock. . . . To the fifty-foot eyestalks of one listener the atmosphere of the city was tinged methane green. . . . To one living crystal in the city the words of the Triple Being came as a significant progression of musical chords. . . . A sentient cactus shifted its tentacles and beheld the city almost as it was in reality, a stretch of pastel sand; but, then, who can say what was the reality of the city." And so it continues, while the Triple Being unfolds the cosmic conflict centered now on cities of the Earth, a conflict of men engaged in phantasmic wars against themselves, which hence attract the Lord of the Flames: a roaming, curious, amoral force in the universe, negative by human reckoning, strange by the reckoning of all.

But I risk to make trite the exuberant inventions of Delany's work, which raises the question of the city radically—that is, at an imaginative limit. What is upolis? The good city eschews inversions of the (human) will and turns randomness not into uniformity but choice. "It is a place where the time passes as something other than time"; and the one and the many attain to a harmony that only time can yield. More empathic than telepathic—for Delany's characters know that communicating minds can jar and clash and still remain isolated—the good city grants its citizens time to touch, "experience and perception weighed against experience and perception, the music their minds made free in the double sound of their names." No wonder then that even the Lord of the Flames finds something to learn on bungling Earth. Though collective in his consciousness, dispersive in his influence, reversed in his polarities of love and death, matter and antimatter, this everted intergalactic creature realizes at last his kinship with creation.

Again, what is Delany's upolis? Both arcadian and utopian, in time and also out of it, at once cosmic, social, and personal, material as well as immaterial, founded on work and boundless in mind, concrete no less than universal, this city, unfinished, absorbs cosmic randomness into the ever-widening circles of its awareness, which may also be called—however shyly—love.

## VI

Given the human propensity for endings, what may we conclude about the city, fiction, or the city in fiction? Nothing conclusive, I fear.

Fiction and the city have been complicit, if not from the rise of Babel, then since Picaresque and bildungsroman. In these early genres, the novel often portrayed the innocent young man from the country come to experience urban sins and pleasures. In so doing, the novel recovered an ancient debate between nature and civilization, arcadia and polis, earth and fire, two mythic modes of human being in the world that still strain the sensibilities of our ironic age. It is as if the original sin of race were not only disobedient knowledge (Adam and Eve in the garden) but also disobedient artifice (Prometheus and his fire, Daedalus and his maze, the babbling builders of Babel).

I insist on this old complicity of language, knowledge, and artifice because I believe that it constitutes the central archetype of the city, its ambiguous gnosis. For the city has always been a crime against nature, against the pleromatic condition of some fabled disalienation, and it remains the crime that consciousness itself perpetrates, perpetuates, against creation. Mythically, then, and prophetically too, the city is less city than a moment in that human project realized by mind, a mind, as Friedrich Nietzsche knew, that can think only in fictions, a mind, as so many modern gnostics think, seeking ever-wider—and more problematic—expression of itself in the universe. Hence, the dematerialization of metropolis, often