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Preface

Malcolm Bradbury

I

The problems of mapping contemporary American fiction are enormous, and not entirely remote from those the first explorers and discoverers found as they faced the task of mapping the shapeless great American continent itself, before they were entirely sure it was a continent, or even on what part of the map of the world it lay. Let us suppose that the 'contemporary' period of the American novel is that since 1945 – a long period in writing, of some 40 years, during which the nature of fiction has evidently changed a great deal and its styles and manners altered and proliferated. In the 1940s and 1950s we thought we knew what a national tradition was, and in important books like Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) and Leslie A. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) it seemed that much of the modern terrain and its history had been mapped and that, perhaps for the first time, there was a discernable and usable American past for the novel which was available to the contemporary writer. Yet it was just as that past, with its romance tradition and its gothic features, its distinctive preoccupations and myths, was being constructed that signs were growing of an extraordinary new variety and heterogeneity in American fiction. And so it has been since. The 40 years since the end of the Second World War, a war that in many ways brought American writing and culture to a central place in the history of the contemporary arts, have indeed been years of extraordinary versatility, variety and multiplicity, the writing reflecting and refracting a nation itself multi-ethnic and multidox, extraordinarily mixed in its cultural roots and its cultural levels, and showing the complexities and cultural variation of an immigrant land spread across a vast continental land-mass that faces both toward Europe in the east and the Pacific in the west.

It is not surprising that the fiction that comes from it is multiform, in regional characteristics, ethnic sources and cultural levels. It is a fiction that has grown in ethnic variety – thus the dominance in the 1950s and 1960s both of the Jewish-American novel and the black novel, and the contemporary growth of hispanic fiction – and in regional variation, a good deal of the best current writing in fact displaying the characteristics and

contours of the region in which it is set. It has been a fiction that has manifested both the complex stratifications of American culture – from the high cultural to the pop, from the academic to the populist, from the avant garde to the generic – and indeed the cultural variation has been fed by its own intersections, so that play with cultural cliches and generic forms has been a way of fictional development; Kurt Vonnegut interplaying popular science fiction and wartime reportage in *Slaughterhouse-5*, Richard Brautigan parodying and interfusing the types in his fictions, so that *The Hawkline Monster* is subtitled 'A Gothic Western'. In the period we can call 'contemporary', then, a wide variety of traditions exist, themselves displaying the varieties of a culture that is both populist and profoundly assimilative of the culturally new. Moreover 40 years in the modern arts is a long time – long enough for forms that seemed innovative to become exhausted, original developments to become backwards, major careers to fall into silence, new generations to grow and die. It is therefore a period in which several different generations exist, often overlaying each other, adding new variation or commentary to what has shortly gone before. John Barth once proposed, indeed, that the age was one of the 'literature of exhaustion,' its literary arts displaying the 'used-upness' of fiction, so parodic and intertextual did much of the writing of the time become. Yet, he suggested in a later essay, it was also a time of 'the literature of replenishment', when the conventions and constraints of discourse fractured, the multiplying of types developed, and late twentieth-century fiction became a fiction of playful seductions quoting the past and constructing the indeterminacies of the present with a new buoyancy. This playfulness acquired a handy name, 'postmodernism', to account for it; the term, which has had much currency in contemporary architecture, where the same sense of exuberant and random quotation has come to be laid over modernist principles, has a fairly vigorous life in this book. It certainly bears some relation to the Byzantine and plural nature of contemporary American society; the multiple nature of the texture of American life, its driving search for a hyper-modernity, its rapid and ever-accelerating consumption of styles, its cultural eclecticism and its culturelessness, is constantly noted by those who visit the United States for the first time, as well as of course by its own social commentators and its novelists. Modern American fiction thus seems to display the late modern energy, plurality, cultural diversity, and of course the political and economic power of an immigrant and polyglot nation in its condition as a great continental superpower whose experience has been transformed by its late entry into a major role in global history. And perhaps it is this mixture of modernity and power, the assimilative energy of a late imperial fiction, that helps explain the dominant role the contemporary American novel has played in guiding the direction and shaping the prospects for the late twentieth-century novel at large. But its variety and assimilativeness are precisely what makes it hard for us to map, while at the same time they indicate some of the fundamental energies underlying the contemporary evolution of fiction.

The question of whether the energy and innovation remains as strong as it was is important, though perhaps hard to judge, for the nearer we come to the present the harder we find it to sense shapes and directions of promise and importance. It may well be that the enormous moral vigour of the 1940s and the 1950s and the experimental excitements of the 1960s and early 1970s have largely given way to more modest circularities and repetitions, and that Latin American and once again European fiction now has stronger excitements. But there can be no doubt at all that from the 1940s to the 1970s American fiction did play a dominant role in the international direction of the novel, and that the combination of economic and political power and major talent was an international force. It gave us many authors of major gifts, from the less than completely American Isaac Bashevis Singer and Vladimir Nabokov to Bellow and Updike, Mailer and Salinger, Pynchon and Hawkes. In many of its fundamental preoccupations – with the future of humanism and the collapse of the subject, with the power of reportage and the fictive text, with the recovery of realism and the advance of avant gardism – it pointed to many of the main artistic issues of the times. In recent years a number of very distinctive newer talents have emerged, a number of them considered in this book (which, like the parallel British volume, *The Contemporary English Novel*, is especially concerned with more recent developments and approaches to those developments). But what is striking is that in the 1940s and early 1950s this sense of variety and innovation was not generally felt, and that the assumption that postwar American fiction was a major power in the modern novel was not widespread. For the beginnings of the change into late twentieth-century achievement were, as in European countries, slow to come and when they did come they did not take the forms that many critics and commentators expected. The late twentieth-century mood in American fiction has its own strong character, and it is worth considering just how it developed.

II

Great expectations have, of course, been central to modern American experience. The coming of the twentieth century generated many myths of American influence, potency and modernity, and these flourished in the arts as well as in social and political life. But the struggles and the disappointments that troubled the life of the world in the twentieth century had their profound impact in the United States. The two major world wars both started in Europe, but they had great impact on the United States, and brought about their central involvement. The Great Depression of the 1930s was also a world event, though it had particular roots in the American economy, and challenged the entire direction of national development. It was the recovery of the American economy after 1945, as well as the growth of global strategic and political responsibilities, that made the United States a postwar superpower, different in character from what it had been before. In the arts too we can see something of the same

change. By the 1920s Americans could claim to be powerful figures in the development of artistic modernity, and in the 1930s the movement of emigrés from Europe increased the cosmopolitanism of artistic culture. But the experience of war, the impact of the holocaust, and the emergence of the atomic era transformed national awareness, and, as has been observed by a number of critics, American writing like Americans themselves seemed shaken into a consciousness of history which questioned and transformed many of the fundamental American myths. The spirit of writing changed with the spirit of the culture, and in the United States as in the economically or physically shattered countries of Europe awareness of the need to reconstruct artistic and intellectual life was clear. It was an existentialist season, and Jean-Paul Sartre's quest for a new intellectual responsibility helped shape the mood of the times: sombre, much concerned with moral recuperation, and with the destructive forces of totalitarian regimes – even those of life in the armies of those who had been fighting against totalitarianism – his influence was strong.

The postwar scene, in the United States as in Europe, was not marked by that sense of experimental excitement that passed through all the western arts after the First World War, when the movement of Modernism reached its peak. It was muted, cautious, and historically anxious, generally lacking in aesthetic flamboyance. Thus many critics in the late 1940s and early 1950s felt less that a whole new era was starting than that one was ending, as the great novelists who had given America its modern novel – Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Steinbeck – came toward the end of their careers, received their Nobel Prizes, and moved toward the end of *oeuvres* that now seemed not so much contemporary as eminently classical and teachable. As for successors, they seemed hard to discern, and the tradition seemed to some degree to have fractured. Looking around the new America of the 1950s, of new affluence and new conformity, new cold war conservatism and caution, critics like Malcolm Cowley and John Aldridge were disposed to consider that the great era of American fictional experiment was over, along with the bohemianism and expatriation, the modernism and the confident American mythologies that had made it. Indeed it came to seem that the American arts were in a post-modern time – and that phrase did not contain the affirmative and experimental association that we give to it today. It meant to suggest that the contemporary American writer wrote in late days, in the shadow of great predecessors, and without strong orientations and directions. The positive if critical myths of the great American moderns – the buoyancy of Scott Fitzgerald, who may have sensed that the American dream was lost but kept on trying to redeem it, displacing money into beauty and vulgarity into myth, the experimental rhetoric of William Faulkner, attempting to mythicize the past and give America a timeless history even if he knew the taint in the land and the power of history to defeat, the tight existential economy of Ernest Hemingway, which spread outward into metaphorical certainty and a faith in attainment and mastery – apparently no longer offered confident guidance to authors who belonged to the age after

Auschwitz and Hiroshima, the age of the modern lonely crowd, the disorienting city, of new material dreams and psychic needs. 'Let us assume for a moment that we have reached the end of one of those recurrent periods of cultural unrest, innovation and excitement that we call "modern",' Irving Howe wrote in a famous essay of 1959, 'Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction', going on to say that, if one wants to consider the fiction written in America since 1945, 'there is a decided advantage in regarding them as 'post-modern', significantly different from the kind of writing we usually call modern.' If we read the postwar writers in this way, Howe says, we will notice their distinctive qualities, the things that make them new but less heroic and demanding than their predecessors: 'It tunes the ear to their distinctive failures. And it lures one into patience and charity.'

Clearly Howe's definition of the postmodern condition by no means matches those which are several times explored, in different ways and from different standpoints, in the following book. Nonetheless it shares with them several features, including the most obvious, the general assumption that Modernism has come to an end, become historical. Howe explains this by discerning amid the plurality and multivalency of modernist fiction a basic sense of there being a stable reality, historical and social, from which the political and social instincts of Modernist fiction derive; and suggesting that it is this sense of the historically real which has collapsed. Again, this view diverges from a good deal of more recent criticism, which assumes that the postwar period was a time of a return to social and moral realism. For Howe, the force that has produced the change is the coming of modern mass-society, 'a relatively comfortable, half welfare and half garrison society in which the population grows passive, indifferent and atomized', materially satisfied but historically unalert, physically pleased but spiritually bereft. It is a society still to be fully grasped by the sociologist and the novelist, though many of them see 'the hovering sickness of soul, the despairing contentment, the prosperous malaise'. Surveying the work of writers like Bernard Malamud, Herbert Gold, J.D. Salinger, Nelson Algren, Wright Morris and Saul Bellow, what Howe discerns is an oblique approach to social existence, a feeling that experience can only be taken on the sly, and a quality of being novels of the will, improvising the life of self against the life of society. Hence they concentrate on an old American subject, the search 'for personal identity and freedom. In their distance from fixed social categories and their concern with the metaphysical implications of that distance, these novels constitute what I would call "post-modern" fiction.'

What is clear is that Howe felt that a new sense of alienation and extremity was entering American fiction, dissolving its sense of reality and therefore the power directly to confront history. And this view of the postwar American novel was to be developed by many of the writers themselves. So Saul Bellow, perhaps the most important of all the new writers, was to say himself in an essay a little later, 'Some Notes on Recent American Fiction' (1963), that he was struck by the theme of 'the loss of

self' in modern American writing, and the instinctive parallelism between the reports of American authors into the violent and arbitrary nature of existence and contemporary French philosophy. So, he suggests, many of his best contemporaries – and he adds to names mentioned previously those of James Baldwin, J.F. Powers, John Updike, Philip Roth, J.P. Donleavy and Vladimir Nabokov – seem to feel 'the pressure of a vast public life, which may dwarf him as an individual while permitting him to be a giant in hatred or fantasy'. Bellow suggests that the twin images of the sovereign self and the self absented or deprived, as in existentialist or absurdist philosophies, consort with each other, depriving the novel of the dense private life that was once essential to it. Indeed, he says, we have so debunked the idea of the Self that we cannot continue in the same way: 'Undeniably the human being is not what he was commonly thought a century ago. The question nevertheless remains. He is something. What is he?' This is the question, Bellow maintains, that contemporary writers have answered poorly. Yet his own splendid novels display the anxiety, struggling from an existential alienation toward a civil contract which will not readily yield itself in the age of anonymity and mass. In another influential and much quoted essay, 'Writing American Fiction' (1961), Philip Roth made a very similar point, arguing that the American actuality was continually outdoing the talents of any novelist, that it sickened and infuriated, and left the imagination bereft. The balanced equivalence of realism was clearly hard to achieve in the postwar American novel, and from Bellow's *Dangling Man* (1944) the underlying strong influence seems to be Kafka, with his sense of consciousness overwhelmed by the modern massing of power and authority, driven into fantasy and those anxieties of self that are expressed in the existential novel of Sartre and Camus, which clearly had potent influence on the American writers of the 1950s.

No doubt it is true that the American writers of the immediately postwar period, during the 1940s and 1950s, shared with their European contemporaries a reaction against the experimentalism of Modernism and a spirit of return to a relative realism. Yet in a sense this was a way of acquainting themselves with a history and a social reality dark, oppressive and disorienting, and the spirit was less one of simple realism than realism intensified on the one hand by a hard naturalism and on the other by fantasy. In this sense they did indeed lack the experimental verve of the writers who transfigured the arts after World War I, and when a more experimental spirit came back into writing during the 1960s some of their achievement appeared modest. Yet the view does little justice to some of the very finest of them; Bellow, Roth, Updike, and to some degree Mailer and Salinger seem among the great American twentieth-century novelists. They were indeed writing a fiction different in spirit from their predecessors, and in many ways far more Europeanized and cosmopolitan. The war novels they wrote – Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), John Hawkes's *The Cannibal* (1949), James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (1951) and then the bleaker, more absurdist works of the 1960s like Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter-*

house-5 (1969) – portrayed a time envisioned in terms of mass armies and corrupt military relations, with the adversary as often the American Army itself as the Nazi enemy. War was an aspect of a totalitarianism which had not died and still persisted in the social institutions and the moral oppressions of the age; the era of humanism seemed threatened, if not drawing to an end, in the random violence of the age, the harsh relations, the social massing. Sometimes highly naturalistic, sometimes drawing on elaborate forms of comic or grotesque fantasy, these books often appeared parables not simply of wartime life but of life in postwar American society itself. And when it came to portraying that society in its contemporary existence, similar themes returned, in the bleak naturalistic novels of Nelson Algren and John Horne Burns, or in the more grotesque and extreme writing of the new Southern novelists – Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Truman Capote – who revived Gothic forms from the past to deal with the prevailing sense of evil and extremity.

Thus the spirit of realism may, as Keith Opdahl's essay on Updike here proposes, have been important in postwar American fiction, but it was realism in complex and modern forms: Updike's high aestheticism, shading into myth and fantasy, Salinger's mannered, fragile portrait of a world of love and squalor, or the urgent moral realism of the Jewish-American novelists, who had every reason for bringing the postwar novel back to its humanistic, moral and metaphysical potential in the wake of the holocaust and the totalitarian threats of fascism to language; their work, concerned with social and historical experience but informed with a dark sense of modern alienation and bleak if not black comedy, had much to do, as Paul Levine argues, with the destiny of the postwar American novel. Fed by consciousness of the immigrant experience and the European backgrounds of American life, alert to the conditions of modern urban existence and the sufferings of victimization, it bore some relation to the development of black fiction, also discussed later in this book by Robert Stepto, and which, on from Richard Wright's *The Outsider* (1940), captures the sense of namelessness and exposure that marks much modern black life. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), which suggests that 'Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?', and the 1950s novels of James Baldwin indeed carry into lower frequencies the sense of existential extremism in modern American experience, while raising many of the moral and social preoccupations we associate with a realistic fiction. The painful world of Southern Gothic fiction also carried that haunting sense of alienation and that awareness of historical anxiety that seemed such a strong feature of the newer American novel, and the realism of the period – much as with similar realistic tendencies in Europe – was heavily marked by a moral urgency and a sense of absurdism that passed onward into the fictional tradition.

Centainly this made the direction of the postwar American novel hard to judge. Critical interpretation divided, sometimes emphasizing the return to traditionalism, sometimes emphasizing the dark, troubled, experimental nature of the new vision. Edmund Fuller, looking at the

writing of the period in his *Man and Modern Fiction* (1958), found it filled with a portrait of the individual as 'an ironic biological accident, inadequate, aimless, meaningless. . . . His uniqueness as a person is denied or suppressed. He inhabits a hostile universe.' Ihab Hassan, writing in *Radical Innocence* (1961), read matters differently, discerning a spirit of radical recovery at work, and the persistence of the anarchic hero who refuses to accept the rule of modern reality in the determination to find more transcendent and radical meanings in experience. Marcus Klein, in *After Alienation* (1964), considered that a central subject in the new American fiction was the desire to transcend the alienated self, and hence there was a general spirit of accommodation – if cautious and oblique, comic and absurd. Such divisions were understandable, given both the various nature of the new writers now emerging, and the fact that a good deal of the new fiction in a time of the new liberalism was marked by a sharp tension, by which the claims of alienation and accommodation, of isolated individual and massed social system, of a comically absurd self struggling with an anarchic process of history, combine and re-combine, generating fresh types of fictional structure. This allows for a re-apprehension of realism, and certainly for a marked change of spirit in postwar American fiction, away from the strong and modernism and American mythicism of the great novelists of the 1920s, toward a more anguished, urban, immigrant and often cosmopolitan vision. It was part of the Existentialist spirit of the time that the endeavour was made to draw humanist conclusions from potentially totalitarian situations, moral judgement from a world of cold war politics and often narrow national ideology.

Yet the position was hard to maintain, and from early in the postwar period we can find a more experimental, avant garde and politically radical spirit emerging in American fiction. John Hawkes published his gothic and experimental *The Cannibal* in 1949, and William Gaddis's great novel of art as counterfeiting, *The Recognitions*, came out in 1955. In the same year Vladimir Nabokov, an old Modernist hand who had published fiction in Russian and German, turned to the English language and an American subject to write his highly reflexive novel *Lolita*, which was sufficiently outrageous in its theme of the American as nymphet to be published in Paris. So was William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* (1959), a work which was to some a novel of virulent political satire, and to others of drug-induced hallucination, but which certainly helped familiarize the spirit of random and aleatory construction – the cut-up, fold-in method of writing – which helped justify a good deal of expressive practice in the 1960s. But in the American context Burroughs appeared part of a movement or tendency which had been developing right through the 1950s, the movement of the 'Beat' generation. Its romantic-radical bohemianism and its 'spontaneous bop prosody' found its fictional expression in the novels of Jack Kerouac, most famously in *On the Road* (1957), though the book to my taste acquired its reputation far more from the life-style it celebrated than from the creative depths of its prose. John Barth's *The Floating*

Opera, a work of modern absurdism about a nihilist who sees no sense in life but none in suicide either, came out in 1956; the book showed strong existentialist influence but, like Nabokov's novel, a strong sense of fiction's own self-referentiality, its inherent 'fictiveness'. It was clear that a new experimental mood was growing, developing from the new radicalism apparent in political and social culture that was to flower in the 1960s, but also from the late Modernist developments initiated by writers who had been shaped by prewar experimentalism, like Beckett, Borges and Nabokov. Thus the new spirit that came to preoccupy the 1960s was made of a number of strands, from the post-existentialist and absurdist spirit that fed the black humour mood of the early 1960s in the work of authors like Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut to the textual experimentalism of authors like Gaddis and Thomas Pynchon, and from the intertextual, fictive mood of the work of Barth, Nabokov and others to the self-conscious new reportage of the non-fiction novel and the 'new journalism'. It is out of these rather various funds that there came into being that tendency which we have chosen nowadays to describe as 'postmodernism'.

III

It is perhaps not surprising that the usefulness and the limitations of that term 'postmodernism' have been the concern of several of the contributors to this book, including Peter Currie, Allan Lloyd Smith and Jerome Klinkowitz, who has written extensively on the matter. It is a term that has, as we have seen, been widely and variously used, transformed, and in some quarters seriously despised. It has not always given great comfort to those writers who have been enrolled in its membership. It is a term that has largely arisen in criticism, rather than out of the movement identification of authors themselves, and like most critical terms it is far from pure, implying a history, a function and a philosophical approach to writing. It has been variously applied to a good many experimental writers whose work is therefore assumed to share much in common, writers who in various ways seem to have been redefining, recategorizing and deconstructing the practice of fiction and the nature of the fictional tradition. It has also done much to give us a vocabulary of understanding and a contemporary critical perspective. Beyond that, it has often been used as part of an endeavour to define the stylistic character and condition, the dominant aesthetic and epistemological tendency, of the arts of the age. Many of the assumptions surrounding it therefore derive from *post facto* definitions of the character, importance and implied legacy of the Modernist movement, which was itself remarkably various and constructed out of contention. The result of this is that the term amounts to a troubled but now strongly forged alliance between the practice of fictional writing, and the criticism of it. Thus, where novelists have indeed been willing to talk of 'surfiction', 'metafiction', and so on, critics have supplemented practice with theory, and often aligned the fictional practice with critical developments in the area of Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction.

'Metafiction' has been twin-towned with 'Paracriticism', 'discontinous fiction' with 'Deconstruction', and those conditions of linguistic slippage and aporia which have engaged contemporary philosophers and literary theorists have been given analogues or paradigms in the often randomizing, deferring, self-parodying, intertextual practices of many of the more experimental new novelists.

Similarity between philosophical theory and fictional practice should not surprise us; it has always been characteristic of the arts, and an appropriate aspect of their interpretation. But philosophy and fiction or poetry are far from being analogous modes of enquiry, and the theoretical interest of part of modern fiction – its status as anti-text, its resistance to referentiality, its sense of the disappearance of the subject, its use of randomness as a generative principle, its emphasis not so much on the iconic nature of the art object but its multiple use and its plurality – is not an outright proof of its importance as art. The temptation to see synchrony between the direction of philosophy and that of fiction has proved strong. Thus in Ihab and Sally Hassan's invaluable collection of essays on postmodernism, *Innovation/Renovation* (1983), one of a good many important books that have appeared on innovative American writing and its cultural context over the last few years, the French philosopher J.-F. Lyotard writes: 'A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher; the text he writes, the work he produces, are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work . . .'. The modern writer shares the condition of expressive indeterminacy of which philosophers have grown profoundly conscious. And yet this statement might be applied to the work of any artist or writer, or to none. The prevalence of postmodern theoretics has perhaps been not so much the cause of or the explanation for contemporary American writing, but a visible and powerful intellectual context surrounding it. It is one of the interests of this present book that its essays look predominantly at the fiction of a time after postmoderism, acknowledging, as Jerome Klinkowitz does, that the spirit of experiment the term designates has by no means died, but has changed in flavour and taken on new casts and preoccupations. And as several of these essays suggest, there is not only evidence in current American fiction, the fiction of the 1980s, of a new assessment of the importance of realism, a realism undoubtedly questioned and challenged by what has gone before, but some use in looking back and reading the works of the writers who have been called 'postmodern' in a more open and historically attentive way. This revision is understandable. The temptation to give canonical status to the postmodern has not only sometimes limited the way in which some of the best writers have been read, but narrowed the span of American fiction and led to neglect of other important writers and tendencies, some of them given their due attention in this book.

The spirit of American fiction in the 1980s has indeed changed, and not only in the work of newer writers – the important new black writers, the

major work of new women writers, the newer, exacting experiments of authors like Walter Abish or Raymond Carver – but in that of well-established figures like William Gaddis or Robert Coover. Both have recently published very important novels – Gaddis's *Carpenter's Gothic*, Coover's *Gerald's Party* – which are written in modes a good deal closer to realism, though with a strong sense of the parodic and the power of the American Gothic tradition to which Gaddis's title directly alludes. They retain a strong sense of textual self-examination, and possess an habitual virtuosity, a great sense of performance always strong in the greatest American fiction. They also possess a strong sense of political and historical urgency, someting that indeed has never been far from a good deal of American experimental writing. Today American writing seems to show less a clear aesthetic direction than a general versatility, founded in part on its lively postwar heritage. The essays in this collection show the mood, looking from a variety of perspectives on the mixed directions of current American fiction, and at its intersections with other forms and other genres – so Warren French looks at fiction and film, and Ihab Hassan, one of the most interesting critics of postmodernism, at forms beyond conventional fiction, autobiography and adventure. If, once again, in the middle of the 1980s, American fiction, always changeable, seems to have chosen multi-directionality and variety over strong aesthetic definition, it needs a similar range of mapmakers, a plurality of perspectives.

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