In Time, Tense, and American Literature, Cindy Weinstein examines American authors who employ a range of tenses to tell a story that has already taken place. This book argues that key novels in the archive of American literature are inconsistent in their retrospective status, ricocheting between past, present, and future. Taking The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym as her point of departure, Weinstein shows how Edgar Allan Poe’s way of representing time involves careening tenses, missing chronometers, and inoperable watches, thus establishing a vocabulary of time that is anticipated in Charles Brockden Brown and further articulated in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Theodore Dreiser, and Edward P. Jones. Each chapter examines the often strange narrative fabric of these works and presents an opportunity to understand how especially complicated experiences of cultural upheaval, from the founding of the new nation to the psychic consequences of race relations and the Civil War to the rise of modernity and beyond, find contextual expression through a literary uncertainty about time.

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TIME, TENSE, AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

When Is Now?

CINDY WEINSTEIN

California Institute of Technology
To my parents, who gave me time, and to Jim, Sarah, and Sam for giving it meaning
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