

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
POSTMODERN AMERICAN FICTION

Few previous periods in the history of American literature could rival the richness of the postmodern era – the diversity of its authors, the complexity of its ideas and visions, and the multiplicity of its subjects and forms. This volume offers an authoritative, comprehensive, and accessible guide to the American fiction of this remarkable period. It traces the development of postmodern American fiction over the past half century and explores its key aesthetic, cultural, and political contexts. It examines its principal styles and genres, from the early experiments with metafiction to the most recent developments, such as the graphic novel and digital fiction, and offers concise, compelling readings of many of its major works. An indispensable resource for students, scholars, and the general reader, the *Companion* both highlights the extraordinary achievements of postmodern American fiction and provides illuminating critical frameworks for understanding it.

PAULA GEYH is Associate Professor of English at Yeshiva University. She is the author of *Cities, Citizens, and Technologies: Urban Life and Postmodernity*, and a coeditor, with Fred G. Leebron and Andrew Levy, of *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology*. Her articles on postmodern literature and culture have appeared in such journals as *Contemporary Literature*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *PARADOXA*, and *Criticism*.

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COMPANION TO  
POSTMODERN  
AMERICAN FICTION

EDITED BY  
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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-10344-3 – The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction  
 Edited by Paula Geyh  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi - 110002, India  
 79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107103443](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107103443)  
 DOI: 10.1017/9781316216514

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First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

Names: Geyh, Paula, editor.

Title: The Cambridge companion to postmodern American fiction / edited by Paula Geyh.

Description: New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Series: Cambridge companions to literature | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016047831 | ISBN 9781107103443 (hardback) | ISBN 9781107502772 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: American fiction – 20th century – History and criticism. | American fiction – 21st century – History and criticism. | Postmodernism (Literature) – United States.

Classification: LCC PS374.P64 C36 2017 | DDC 813/.5409 – dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016047831>

ISBN 978-1-107-10344-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-50277-2 Paperback

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PAULA GEYH is Associate Professor of English at Yeshiva University. She is the author of *Cities, Citizens, and Technologies: Urban Life and Postmodernity* (2009) and a coeditor, with Fred G. Leebron and Andrew Levy, of *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* (1998).

## CONTRIBUTORS

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TIMOTHY PARRISH is Professor of English at Virginia Tech. He is the author of three books, including *Ralph Ellison and the Genius of America* (2012). He has published widely on American literature and culture, and is the editor of both *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists* (2013) and *The Cambridge Companion to Philip Roth* (2007). His story "Philip Roth's Final Hours" (2016) is part of a larger cycle of creative essays and stories.

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1960 John F. Kennedy elected president  
 Black students hold sit-in at Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina  
 Birth control pill becomes available for use as a contraceptive  
 Laser invented  
 John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor*
- 1961 Construction of the Berlin Wall  
 Freedom Rides organized by CORE  
 Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin first man in space  
 William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*  
 Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*
- 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis  
 Telstar, the first telecommunications satellite  
 John Glenn first American astronaut to orbit the Earth  
 James Baldwin, *Another Country*  
 Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (English translation)  
 William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded*  
 Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle*  
 Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*  
 Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
- 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech  
 President John F. Kennedy assassinated  
 Lyndon B. Johnson becomes president  
 James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *V.*  
 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*



## CHRONOLOGY

- 1964 Lyndon B. Johnson elected president  
 Civil Rights Act  
 President Johnson declares War on Poverty  
 Donald Barthelme, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*  
 William S. Burroughs, *Nova Express*  
 Hubert Selby Jr., *Last Exit to Brooklyn*  
 Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation”
- 1965 Malcolm X assassinated  
 Civil Rights March from Selma to Montgomery led by  
 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
 Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*
- 1966 China’s Cultural Revolution begins  
 Black Panthers founded by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton  
 National Organization of Women (NOW) founded  
 Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch* (English translation)  
 William H. Gass, *Omensetters Luck*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*  
 Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*  
 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*  
 Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of  
 the Human Sciences”
- 1967 Six-Day War  
 Summer of Love  
 Donald Barthelme, *Snow White*  
 Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America*  
 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*  
 Susan Sontag, *Death Kit*  
 John Barth, “The Literature of Exhaustion”  
 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”
- 1968 Richard Nixon elected president  
 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert Kennedy assassinated  
 Prague Spring  
 May 1968 protests in France  
 John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse*  
 Donald Barthelme, *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts*  
 Richard Brautigan, *In Watermelon Sugar*  
 Robert Coover, *The Universal Baseball Association*

## CHRONOLOGY

- William H. Gass, *In the Heart of the Heart of the Country*  
 William H. Gass, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife*  
 Michael Herr, *Dispatches*  
 Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*  
 Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*
- 1969 United States lands men on the moon  
 Creation of the ARPANET, forerunner of the Internet  
 Robert Coover, *Pricksongs and Descants: Fictions*  
 Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*  
 Ishmael Reed, *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*  
 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five*
- 1970 United States invades Cambodia  
 Kent State Massacre of antiwar protesters  
 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) founded  
 Donald Barthelme, *City Life*  
 Joan Didion, *Play It As It Lays*  
 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
- 1971 Pentagon Papers scandal  
 Invention of the microchip  
 E. L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel*  
 John Gardner, *Grendel*  
 Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*
- 1972 Richard Nixon re-elected president  
 Nixon goes to China  
 Equal Rights Amendment approved by Congress  
 John Barth, *Chimera*  
 John Gardner, *The Sunlight Dialogues*  
 Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo*  
 Gene Wolfe, *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*
- 1973 Skylab launched  
*Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision  
 Kathy Acker, *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by the Black Tarantula*  
 Toni Morrison, *Sula*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*  
 Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*
- 1974 Richard Nixon resigns; Gerald Ford becomes president

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1975 Vietnam War ends  
 Bill Gates and Paul Allen found Microsoft  
 Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren*  
 E. L. Doctorow, *Ragtime*  
 William Gaddis, *JR*  
 Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*  
 Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*
- 1976 Jimmy Carter elected president  
 Mao Zedong dies; China's Cultural Revolution ends  
 Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak found Apple  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior*  
 Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time*  
 Manuel Puig, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*  
 Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*  
 Tom Robbins, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*
- 1977 Voyager spacecraft launched  
 Robert Coover, *The Public Burning*  
 Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*  
 Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*
- 1978 First test-tube baby born  
 Israel and Egypt sign Camp David Peace Accords  
 Gerald Vizenor, *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*
- 1979 Margaret Thatcher becomes prime minister of the United Kingdom  
 Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident  
 John Barth, *LETTERS*  
 Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song*  
 V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*  
 Philip Roth, *The Ghost Writer*  
 Gilbert Sorrentino, *Mulligan Stew*  
 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*
- 1980 Ronald Reagan elected president  
 Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters*  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men*  
 Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*  
 Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1981 First Space Shuttle flight  
 IBM introduces personal computer  
 President of Egypt Anwar Sadat assassinated  
 Sandra Day O'Connor becomes first woman Supreme Court justice  
 Donald Barthelme, *Sixty Stories*  
 Philip K. Dick, *VALIS*  
 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*  
 Alexander Theroux, *D'Arconville's Cat*  
 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*
- 1982 Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations*  
 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee*  
 Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*  
 Ntozake Shange, *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*  
 Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
- 1983 Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*  
 Samuel R. Delany, *Return to Neveryón*  
 Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*  
 Wendy Law-Yone, *The Coffin Tree*  
 Paule Marshall, *Praisesong for the Widow*  
 Steve Meretzky, *Planetfall*  
 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*
- 1984 HIV identified as the cause of AIDS  
 Ronald Reagan re-elected president  
 Octavia Butler, *Dawn* (Part 1 of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy)  
 Joan Didion, *Democracy*  
 Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*  
 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*
- 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev becomes premier of the Soviet Union  
 DNA fingerprinting  
 Paul Auster, *City of Glass*  
 Don DeLillo, *White Noise*  
 Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*  
 Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"
- 1986 US Space Shuttle *Challenger* explodes  
 Nuclear reactor accident at Chernobyl  
 Iran–Contra scandal  
 Kathy Acker, *Don Quixote, which was a dream*  
 Art Spiegelman, *Maus*

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1987 Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev sign Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty  
 US stock market crash  
 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*  
 Jay Cantor, *Krazy Kat*  
 Robert Coover, *A Night at the Movies, or, You Must Remember This*  
 Michael Joyce, *afternoon, a story* (hypertext)  
 Maxine Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*  
 Toni Morrison, *Beloved*  
 Cynthia Ozick, *The Messiah of Stockholm*  
 William T. Vollmann, *You Bright and Risen Angels*  
 David Foster Wallace, *The Broom of the System*  
 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*
- 1988 George H. W. Bush elected president  
 Perestroika begins  
 Harvard patents genetically altered mouse  
 Kathy Acker, *In the Realm of the Senseless*  
 Octavia Butler, *Adulthood Rites* (Part 2 of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy)  
 Don DeLillo, *Libra*  
 Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*  
 Cynthia Ozick, *The Shawl*  
 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*
- 1989 Berlin Wall falls; collapse of Soviet bloc in Europe  
 Tiananmen Square Massacre  
 US government bails out savings-and-loan banks  
 Octavia Butler, *Imago* (Part 3 of the *Xenogenesis* trilogy)  
 Rikki Ducornet, *Fountains of Neptune*  
 Oscar Hijuelos, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*  
 Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*  
 William T. Vollmann, *The Rainbow Stories*
- 1990 Reunification of West and East Germany  
 Creation of the World Wide Web  
 Hubble Space Telescope launched  
 Iraq invades Kuwait; Gulf War begins  
 Lynda Barry, *Come Over, Come Over*  
 Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters*

## CHRONOLOGY

- Charles Johnson, *Middle Passage*  
 Valerie Martin, *Mary Reilly*  
 Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland*  
 Kim Stanley Robinson, *A Short, Sharp Shock*  
 Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*  
 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- 1991
- Dissolution of the Soviet Union  
 Gulf War ends  
 Julia Alvarez, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*  
 Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek*  
 Douglas Coupland, *Generation X*  
 Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*  
 Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*  
 Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*  
 Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres*  
 Art Spiegelman, *Maus II*  
 Gerald Vizenor, *Feral Lasers*  
 Gerald Vizenor, *Landfill Meditations: Crossblood Stories*  
 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*  
 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*
- 1992
- Maastricht Treaty creates the European Union  
 Bill Clinton elected president  
 Bosnian Wars begin  
 Cristina García, *Dreaming in Cuban*  
 Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*  
 Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*
- 1993
- Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)  
 Ana Castillo, *So Far from God*  
 Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*  
 Tei Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú*
- 1994
- South Africa ends apartheid; Nelson Mandela elected president  
 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) goes into effect  
 Netscape introduced

## CHRONOLOGY

- Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*  
 Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*  
 George Landow, *Hyper/Text/Theory*
- 1995 World Trade Organization (WTO) established  
 Oklahoma City bombing  
 Dayton Accords end Bosnian War  
 Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It*  
 Rikki Ducornet, *Phosphor in Dreamland*  
 William H. Gass, *The Tunnel*  
 Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*  
 Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker*  
 Richard Powers, *Galatea 2.2*
- 1996 Bill Clinton re-elected president  
 Dolly the sheep cloned  
 Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*  
 Percival Everett, *Watershed*  
 David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*
- 1997 Don DeLillo, *Underworld*  
 Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*  
 Toni Morrison, *Paradise*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*  
 Philip Roth, *American Pastoral*  
 Gerald Vizenor, *Hotline Healers*
- 1998 International Space Station launched  
 Google founded  
 Adam Cadre, *Photopia*  
 Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*
- 1999 Rikki Ducornet, *The Fan-Maker's Inquisition*  
 Viktor Pelevin, *Generation P*  
 Colson Whitehead, *The Intuitionist*
- 2000 George W. Bush elected president  
 Vladimir Putin elected president of Russia  
 Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*  
 Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*  
 Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat*  
 Nick Montfort, *Ad Verbum*  
 Judd Morrissey, *The Jew's Daughter*

## CHRONOLOGY

- Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*  
 Emily Short, *Galatea*  
 Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”
- 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks United States on September 11  
 Afghan War begins  
 Wikipedia launched  
 Apple introduces iPod  
 Percival Everett, *Erasure*  
 Jonathan Franzen, *The Corrections*
- 2002 Euro enters circulation  
 Lydia Davis, *Samuel Johnson Is Indignant*  
 Kelley Eskridge, *Solitaire*  
 Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*  
 Aleksandar Hemon, *Nowhere Man*
- 2003 Human Genome Project completed  
 United States and allies invade Iraq  
 Don DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*
- 2004 NATO and EU expand to include most of the former Eastern Bloc  
 Web 2.0  
 Facebook introduced  
 Mars Rover explores planet surface  
 George W. Bush re-elected president  
 Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, *Madeleine Is Sleeping*  
 Rikki Ducornet, *Gazelle*  
 Kate Pullinger, Stefan Schemat, and babel, *The Breathing Wall*  
 Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America*  
 Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadow of No Towers*
- 2005 Angela Merkel becomes first woman chancellor of Germany  
 YouTube launched  
 Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions commences  
 Hurricane Katrina floods New Orleans
- 2006 Twitter launched  
 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*  
 Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*  
 Dave Eggers, *What is the what*



## CHRONOLOGY

- Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*  
 Shelley Jackson, *Half Life*  
 Kate Pullinger, Chris Joseph, and Andy Campbell, *Inanimate Alice* begins  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day*  
 Gary Shteyngart, *Absurdistan*
- 2007 Global economic crisis  
 Apple introduces the iPhone  
 Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*  
 Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*  
 Helena María Viramontes, *Their Dogs Came with Them*
- 2008 Barack Obama elected president  
 Nicholson Baker, *Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization*  
 Matt Richtel, *Twitter*
- 2009 Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun*  
 Tao Lin, *Shoplifting from American Apparel*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice*  
 Tale of Tales, *The Path*
- 2010 European sovereign debt crisis  
 Arab Spring  
 Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*  
 Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom*  
 Ben Marcus, *The Flame Alphabet*
- 2011 Iraq War ends  
 David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King*
- 2012 Higgs boson discovered  
 Barack Obama re-elected president  
 Chris Ware, *Building Stories*
- 2013 Edward Snowden releases documents proving mass surveillance by National Security Agency (NSA)  
 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*  
 Jonathan Franzen, *The Kraus Project: Essays by Karl Kraus*  
 Thomas Pynchon, *Bleeding Edge*
- 2014 Chang-Rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*  
 Jeff Vandermeer, *Southern Reach* trilogy