

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## AFFECT AND AMERICAN LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Rachel Greenwald Smith's *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* examines the relationship between American literature and politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Smith contends that the representation of emotions in contemporary fiction emphasizes the personal lives of characters at a time when there is an unprecedented, and often damaging, focus on the individual in American life. Through readings of works by Paul Auster, Karen Tei Yamashita, Ben Marcus, Lydia Millet, and others who stage experiments in the relationship between feeling and form, Smith argues for the centrality of a counter-tradition in contemporary literature concerned with impersonal feelings: feelings that challenge the neoliberal notion that emotions are the property of the self.

Rachel Greenwald Smith is an assistant professor of English at Saint Louis University. Her work has appeared in journals such as *American Literature*, *Twentieth Century Literature*, *Mediations*, and *Modern Fiction Studies*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

AFFECT AND  
AMERICAN LITERATURE  
IN THE  
AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM

RACHEL GREENWALD SMITH

*Saint Louis University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism  
 Rachel Greenwald Smith  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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/9781107095229](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107095229)

© Rachel Greenwald Smith 2015

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

First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

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

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Smith, Rachel Greenwald, author.

Affect and American literature in the age of neoliberalism / Rachel Greenwald Smith,  
 Saint Louis University.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-09522-9 (hardback)

1. American literature – 21st century – History and criticism. 2. Literature and society – 21st century – United States. 3. Emotions in literature. 4. Affect (Psychology) in literature. 5. Neoliberalism – United States. 6. American literature – 20th century – History and criticism. 7. Literature and society – 20th century – United States. I. Title.

PS229.S65 2015

810.9'355–dc23 2014038215

ISBN 978-1-107-09522-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*For my parents*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

The emotion of art is impersonal.

– T. S. Eliot

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## *Contents*

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> ix
Introduction: The Affective Hypothesis	i
1. Personal and Impersonal: Two Forms of the Neoliberal Novel	30
2. Affect and Aesthetics in 9/11 Fiction	61
3. Reading Like an Entrepreneur: Neoliberal Agency and Textual Systems	77
4. Ecology, Feeling, and Form in Neoliberal Literature	100
Epilogue	127
<i>Notes</i>	131
<i>Bibliography</i>	163
<i>Index</i>	175

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## *Acknowledgments*

This book calls into question the notion that we own our own feelings. Likewise, writing this book has been a persistent reminder of how little we own our own thoughts. The ideas enclosed here are not in any way exclusively mine: they were fostered, challenged, and refined by the brilliance of those with whom I came into contact during the process of its evolution. Most of all, this book is a reflection of the intellectual culture of my family, in which my mother's insistence on the importance of political critique was answered by my father's interest in the ability of works of art to access the strange, intuitive, and unknown. In this and in so many other ways, this book would not have been written without the unceasing support and inspiration of my parents, Marta Greenwald and Gary Mac Smith, and my sister, Sophie Smith.

In practical terms, this project began with a dissertation that served as a testing ground for some of its central claims. While no actual material from that project appears here, I am greatly indebted to my mentors at Rutgers who helped me in my early efforts to think through questions of politics, affect, and literary form. Thanks particularly to my advisor, Richard Dienst, who not only tolerated but improbably encouraged my propensity toward manifesto writing, and to Marianne DeKoven, John McClure, and Harriet Davidson for their guidance. Thanks also to my cohort at Rutgers, particularly Paul Benzon and Cornelius Collins, for helping me learn what it meant to be both an academic and a human being; to my friends in New York – Aram Jibilian, Christa Parravani, Jacob Steingroot, and Helena Ribeiro – for cocktails, brunch, warmth, and wisdom; and to my bandmates Boshra AlSaadi, Nicole Greco, Rich Smalley, and Robbie Overbey, for putting up with the inconveniences of my double life. And I am endlessly grateful for the friendship and collaboration of Sean Grattan and Megan Ward, both of whom read substantive parts of this manuscript along with much of everything else I have

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

*Acknowledgments*

written, and who have been rare and enduring sources of sanity throughout my academic development.

I feel very lucky to have found a home at Saint Louis University, where the vitality of the English department has been a source of great stimulation. Thanks particularly to the two department chairs who served during the completion of this project, Sara van den Berg and Jonathan Sawday, and to the rest of the faculty – Toby Benis, Ellen Crowell, Ruth Evans, Devin Johnston, Georgia Johnston, Paul Lynch, Jen Rust, Nathaniel Rivers, Joe Weixlmann, Phyllis Weliver, and many others – whose friendship and counsel have been invaluable. Thanks too to my friends in the English department at Washington University – Musa Gurnis and Melanie Micir, as well as Maggie Gram and Dan Grausam – for making Saint Louis such a vibrant and welcoming place to live and work. I am particularly grateful to one of these friends, Vincent Sherry, for first bringing my work to the attention of Ray Ryan at Cambridge University Press. It has been a great pleasure to work with Ray, as well as Caitlin Gallagher. Their work, along with the rigorous and thoughtful readings of Michael Clune and Steve Belletto, has given this project greater shape and scope.

Portions of this book have benefited from the feedback of the audiences and participants of the Post45 Symposium at Stanford University, the Northeast Americanist Colloquium at Brown University, the Americanist group at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and the English department's Faculty Research Symposium at the University of Missouri, Columbia. Thanks to Michael Szalay, Mark McGurl, Deak Nabers, Jennifer Lozano, Benjamin Bascom, and Alex Socarides for their hospitality during these events. I am also exceptionally grateful for the community of scholars associated with the Association for the Study of Arts of the Present, most of all Andy Hoberek and Mitchum Huehls, both of whom offered substantive comments on this project and have offered their support from its earliest stages.

In a book that takes seriously the claims that nonhuman beings and things have upon us, it seems apt to express my gratitude to those that made writing this book feel even remotely possible. Thanks to Remi and Mosley, my furry companions, who refuse to let me take myself too seriously. Also thanks to the egg sandwiches at Bloc 11 in Somerville; the electricity generator (and the air conditioner it so industriously powered) at Costa Coffee in New Delhi's GK2 district; the creepy and beautiful lagoon at the Art Library at the University of Iowa; the cormorants who migrate every winter to the river on which my parents' house boat is moored; and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-09522-9 - *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Rachel Greenwald Smith

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xi

the 300-pound orange tank desk in my home office in Saint Louis that makes my work space, if not my work itself, feel substantial.

This project was financially supported by two Mellon Faculty Development Grants as well as a Vice Presidential Faculty Leave Grant, all through Saint Louis University. Kathryn Grundy, Ludwig Weber, and Emily Philips offered essential research assistance. Kay Kodner provided an early copyedit on the manuscript. A version of Chapter 2 and a portion of Chapter 4 originally appeared in *American Literature* and *Twentieth-Century Literature*, respectively. I am grateful to the editors of both journals and to Duke University Press and Hofstra University Press for granting permission for that material to appear here.

Finally, it is impossible to describe the impact that Ted Mathys has had on this project. From his patience in helping me clarify its thorniest claims, to his tireless reading and rereading of every one of its sentences, he has been my greatest inspiration, editor, critic, and advocate. And, when one year ago, Lucy Noa Mathys-Smith appeared in this world, he became my partner in navigating the most astonishing and wondrous affective terrain I have ever encountered. Thank you, Ted, for this.