



Escaping the Split-level Trap: Postsuburban Narratives in Recent American Fiction

Tim Foster

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This book engages with a number of recent works of fiction in order to understand how American literature has commented on the emergence of a postsuburban environment – that is to say a cosmopolitan landscape in which the previous city/suburb binary is no longer evident. Whilst the term 'postsuburban' is resistant to easy categorisation, here it is used as a mode of enquiry both to reassess what fiction has to tell literary criticism about the foundational concept of suburbia, as well as to assess contemporary writing free from the assumptions of an inherited suburban imaginary. It is this book's thesis that these postsuburban environments are seen by the writers who set their fictions there as places that are far more than white middle-class dystopias, and that it is a fallacy to attribute to them, as certain literary critics do, the negative cultural clichés associated with postwar suburban fictions. After offering revisionist readings of Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) and Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* (1961), the book considers Richard Ford's trilogy *The Sportsman* (1986), *Independence Day* (1995), and *The Lay of the Land* (2006) as a representation of a classic postwar suburb that has been overtaken by development and sprawl. It focuses next on T. C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995), and Junot Diaz's *Drown* (1996), which both suggest the postsuburban landscape as a place of cross-cultural exchange and re-invention. An analysis of Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs* (1995) follows and proposes that the physical postsuburban spaces of innovation that exist in Silicon Valley, the novel's setting, are paralleled by the changing virtual spaces of the Internet. Lastly, it explores *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007) by Dinaw Mengestu, and Richard Price's *Lush Life* (2008), two novels that deal with one of the corollaries of the breakdown of the city/suburb binary and the emergence of a postsuburban environment: inner-city gentrification.

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