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American Literature, Post-1945

This list understands postwar American literature as that which constantly questions the veracity of its representations. When mapped onto the novels of this literary moment, this process of calling into question is often tied to the fallibility of memory—an idea that most notably manifests itself in terms of the narrative and formal experimentation that characterizes the period. Accordingly, whether historical, familial, or personal memory, the novels on this list require narrators, characters, and readers to cynically frame the epistemology of each narrative. Likewise, the poetry on this list follows a similar theme and displays a fragmentation that is indicated by an increasingly free and para-textual. Experimentation in both of these literary forms ultimately translates to what this list understands as the increasingly ergodic nature of postwar American literature.

Primary Works:

1. Invisible Man—Ellison (1952)
2. Howl and Other Poems—Ginsberg (1956)
3. Naked Lunch—Burroughs (1959)
4. Catch-22—Heller (1961)
5. Ariel—Plath (1965)
6. Omensetter's Luck—Gass (1966)
7. The Crying of Lot 49—Pynchon (1966)
8. Lost in the Funhouse—Barth (1968)
9. In the Mecca—Brooks (1968)
10. Slaughterhouse Five—Vonnegut (1969)
11. The Lathe of Heaven—Le Guin (1971)
12. Mumbo Jumbo—Reed (1972)
13. Crash—Ballard (1973)
14. Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror—Ashbery (1975)
15. The Woman Warrior—Kingston (1975)
16. Patternmaster—Butler (1976)
17. Song of Solomon—Morrison (1977)
18. Love Medicine—Erdrich (1984)
19. Neuromancer—Gibson (1984)
20. White Noise—DeLillo (1985)
21. American Psycho—Ellis (1991)
22. Snow Crash—Stephenson (1992)
23. Djbot Baghostus's Run—Mackey (1993)
24. Crystallography—Bök (1994)
25. Infinite Jest—Wallace (1996)
26. Gain—Powers (1998)
27. House of Leaves—Danielewski (2000)
28. John Henry Days—Whitehead (2001)
29. The Yiddish Policemen's Union—Chabon (2007)
30. The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao—Diaz (2008)

Secondary Works:

1. The Sense of an Ending—Kermode (1967)
2. Postmodernist Fiction—McHale (1987)
3. A Poetics of Postmodernism—Hutcheon (1988)
4. A History of Modern Poetry, vol. 2—Perkins (1989)
5. A Poetics—Bernstein (1992)
6. Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media—Perloff (1994)
7. Postmodern Narrative Theory—Currie (1998)
8. The Program Era—McGurl (2009)
9. Originary Technicity—Bradley (2011)
10. What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology—Steigler (2013)