

The Post-Expressivist Turn:

Four American Novels and the Author-Function.

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for my Mother and Father

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Abstract.

“The Post-Expressivist Turn: Four American Novels and the Author-Function” proposes a model of the author-function as a “diagnostic” tool. An “author-centred” mode of critique can interrogate the hegemonic narrative of liberal humanism, or “liberal modernity”, in Western culture. The argument in this thesis proceeds from the recognition that the hegemonic convention of the author in contemporary Western culture (that is, the “expressivist” convention of the author) has been disarmed of its claims to ideological innocence and commonsensicality.

This thesis utilises the insights of poststructuralism, specifically the discourse theory of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, to deploy a new model of the author-function which foregrounds the ideological and discursive precepts that the expressivist model of the author has been assumed to transcend. The thesis examines four novels: *The Bostonians* by Henry James, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *V.* by Thomas Pynchon, and *Democracy* by Joan Didion. Taken together, these encompass a hundred-year trajectory defined by the literary schools of late realism (*The Bostonians*), modernism (*The Great Gatsby*), late modernism (*V.*), and postmodernism (*Democracy*). Each of these novels is deployed as a stage in a cumulative trajectory which foregrounds a “post-expressivist” operation of the author. This post-expressivist model of the author presumes no claims to epistemological self-evidence or commonsensicality. Consequently, the author-function in each of these novels is freed from its traditionally displaced, reified position in the cultural milieu. Instead, the author is re-engaged in the Western body politic as a discursively-situated material event. It is this discursive engagedness which once more installs the author as a productive diagnostic, as a productive means of interrogation of the hegemony of liberal modernity. This is effected through an interrogation by this post-expressivist author-model of the perceived efficacy of the project of American liberal humanism as a basis for the realisation of a democratic, rational utopia. In tracing a progressive denaturalisation of the author as an extra-contextual function (*The Bostonians*), through to a foregrounding of the author as an enunciative function (*Democracy*), this thesis delineates an “author-centred” model of critique relative to a trajectory that recognises the position of pre-eminence still enjoyed by the author in late-capitalist Western culture.

Declaration.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the university library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Mark Caldicott
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