
Oldies, but Critically Goldies

Marc Chenetier's *Beyond Suspicion. New American Fiction Since 1960*, Liverpool University Press

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Marc Chenetier's study incorporates American authors belonging to the 1960-1990s temporal frame and it inspiringly x-rays the works of such names as: W. Gaddis, Th. Pynchon, Stanley Elkin, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth and Raymond Carver. *Beyond Suspicion...* underlines the dynamic of the American fiction, emphasizing nonetheless its progression and its development within its paradigm. The author points out to a sort of an error in judgment, to a sort of a critical stereotype continuously perpetuated by the hermeneutic canon, in the sense that the classic generic approaches to American fiction are misleading by the mere rejection of the categorization of literary pieces by their writer's region, race and gender; instead, he suggests and consequently attempts an examination of such works from a variety of artistic and epistemological perspectives.

As the title of the book itself states, the study may very well provide the readers a new, reinvigorating approach, that goes beyond given denominators and beyond commonly accepted literary umbrellas. Despite the fact that Marc Chenetier is obviously operating with such categories that are meant to render accuracy, logic, sense and order to his endeavour (*New Directions, Traditions, Transitions, Revisions* and *Evolutions* as chapter titles), his study ultimately seems to simply reject any possibility of a systematic organization, of working with clearly-cut categories, or of applying any trackable lines of literary evolution. Instead, the readers find themselves on a journey, embarking on an adventure, essayistically wandering through nearly half a century's display of American writing, thus discovering new, daring and unconventional meanings of literature. There is a fascination within the chapters' titles and subtitles and their purpose is to invite its readers to a new, out-of-the-box world (for instance, chapter 7 title - *The Connoisseurs of Chaos* – brings along a list of subtitles that ultimately resembles J. L. Borges's style: *Uncertainties, Apocalypses Now. Or Later. Or Past, Neuromancy, New Paradigms, Scientific Fictions, Between V and V-2, From Opposition to Collaboration, Neural Language, Physics of Emotions, Trivial Pursuit* and *Novels of Mastery*).

Another possible grasp of Marc Chentier's *Beyond Suspicion...* is that of embracing it as a sort of a guide, in the sense that it pretty much provides its readers a tour in the contemporary American fiction, extensively relying on plenty of associations, insights and debates, thus connecting some invisible dots not only

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among a multitude of works but also between an impressive diversity of aspects as far as the American literature, philosophy and criticism are concerned. The author is interested in exploring the impact of media, the reconfiguration of history and the construction of the consumerist subjectivity; in this respect, he displays a persuasive range of metafictional techniques, including both those which would emphasize the self-conscious author paradigm and those which would perceive literature as a communication game. Thus, he is definitely interested in such works that would prospect the very role of myth: that of rendering value, that of repudiating or even sabotaging it.

When discussing the concept of “low culture”, the author naturally chooses to refer to *minimalism* and to successfully apply it on Raymond Carver. He supports his analysis on the use of minimalism as a given platform of text interpretation and thus his discussion of Carver becomes rather a way of questioning the very nature of the term itself, since Marc Chentier clearly states that “nothing is as simple, as that which a generic label tries to designate globally. The confusion, the careless groupings, the misunderstandings engendered by such shorthand deserve some clarification” (see p. 220). Nevertheless, the author of the study would simultaneously make Raymond Carver its central figure and, through both connections and associations carefully articulated, he would eventually and clearly differentiate Carver from plenty of the copycats that he notices as routing around the acknowledged centre.

Overall, one cannot deny the relevance of Marc Chentier’s given reference point study: it provides its readers a pretty synthetic perspective on the evolution in American fiction between 1960 and the 1990s. The author undoubtedly proves both his originality and his systematic ability of supplying a fresh and intriguing perspective on the American fiction phenomenon. One might notice that *Beyond Suspicion...* is also worthy of gracefully connecting the French literary theory recurrent concerns with the American aesthetic paradigm dynamic, in a fresh and persuasive hermeneutic discourse.