Specters of Democracy

Ivy G. Wilson

This book interrogates the representational strategies that 19th-century Americans used in art and literature to delineate blackness as an index to the forms of U.S. citizenship. The book reveals how the difficult task of representing African Americans—both enslaved and free—in imaginative expression was part of a larger dilemma concerning representative democracy. More specifically, the book analyzes how African Americans manipulated aurality and visuality in art that depicted images of national belonging not only as a mode of critique but as an iteration or articulation of democratic representation itself. Such a turn to culture as a particular arena where African Americans had varying levels of agency is all the more necessary in the years before they were ostensibly granted access to formal political structures with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Recovering important aspects of the African American presence in the debates about democracy and citizenship, this book focuses on the mutual engagement with the national idioms by both black and white Americans and illustrates how African Americans in particular deployed artistic practices to enact a more egalitarian society.

Frederick Douglass's “Glib-tongue”

Ivy G. Wilson

This chapter outlines how Frederick Douglass deploys a series of speech acts in his 1852 “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” address and 1852 novella The Heroic Slave to manipulate the accepted
national idioms on the right-of-revolution as a means to critique slavery as anathema to democracy itself. In theorizing Douglass's creation of a polyphonic discourse system, the chapter traces how he uses a contrapuntal mechanism to alternate black and white voices in the debates about democracy. In particular, the chapter reveals how Douglass stylizes repetition as the sonic device of the reverb to manipulate Patrick Henry's well-known expression “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” to legitimate mid-century black liberation movements as specifically American.

Science, Medicine, Technology, and the Novel, 1860–1915
Jane F. Thrailkill


This chapter examines how the American novel tackled the paradoxes of science, medicine, and technology in the period between 1860 and 1915. It considers how many late nineteenth-century novels explored the human effects of technology using a particular form of narrative speech known as free indirect discourse. Citing the works of writers such as Charles Chesnutt, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edward Bellamy, and Stephen Crane, the chapter also demonstrates how fiction tackles scientific concerns including the evolutionary theory and the human consciousness.

Fiction and Reality
Katie Brown

in Writing and the Revolution: Venezuelan Metafiction 2004-2012

Chapter 6 demonstrates how fiction that highlights its own constructed nature is not only a reaction against the delegitimisation of the author as an individual talent in Bolivarian cultural policy, but also a challenge to the grand narratives of nationalism and socialism propagated by the government. These metafictional texts encourage readers to recognise the blurring of the boundary between truth and fiction at the heart of the
increasingly violent and destructive polarization of Venezuelan society. The metafictional aspects of Bajo las hojas (Centeno, 2010), Rating (Barrera Tyzka, 2011) and El niño malo... (Chirinos, 2004) are a message to readers to detect fiction outside of the novel: in official histories, ‘reality’ television, news reports and political rhetoric.