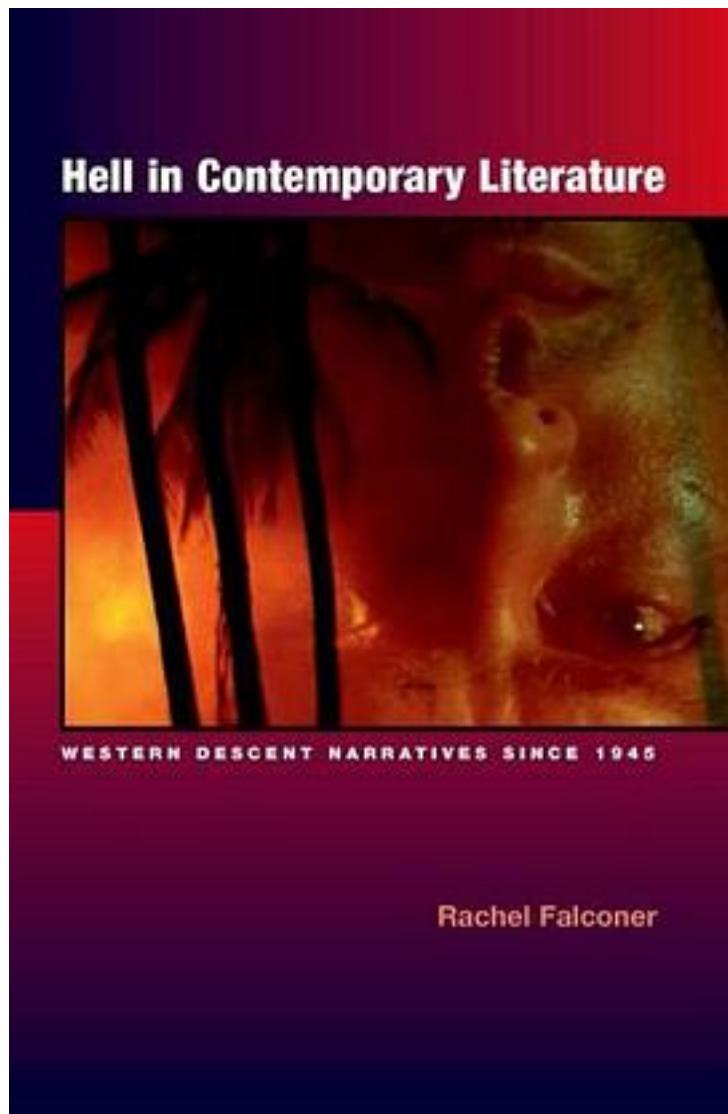


Hell in Contemporary Literature



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What does it mean when people use the word 'Hell' to convey the horror of an actual, personal or historical experience? Now available in paperback, this book explores the idea that modern, Western secular cultures have retained a belief in the concept of Hell as an event or experience of endless or unjust suffering. In the contemporary period, the descent to Hell has come to represent the means of recovering - or discovering - selfhood. In exploring these ideas, this book discusses descent journeys in Holocaust testimony and fiction, memoirs of mental illness, and feminist, postmodern and postcolonial narratives written after 1945. A wide range of texts are discussed, including writing by Primo Levi, W.G. Sebald, Anne Michaels, Alasdair Gray, and Salman Rushdie, and films such as Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* and the *Matrix* trilogy. Drawing on theoretical writing by Bakhtin, Levinas, Derrida, Judith Butler, David Harvey and Paul Ricoeur, the book addresses such broader theoretical issues as: narration and identity; the ethics of the subject; trauma and memory; descent as sexual or political dissent; the interrelation of realism and fantasy; and Occidentalism and Orientalism.

Key Features

- *Defines and discusses what constitutes Hell in contemporary secular Western cultures
- *Relates ideas from psychoanalysis to literary traditions ranging from Virgil and Dante to the present
- *Explores the concept of Hell in relation to crises in Western thought and identity. e.g. distortions of global capitalism, mental illness, war trauma and incarceration
- *Explains the significance of this narrative tradition of a 'descent to hell' in the immediate political context of 9/11 and its aftermath

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