

Partial Faiths



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出版者:University of Georgia Press

出版时间:2007-12-25

装帧:Paperback

isbn:9780820330334

Spiritual conversions figure heavily in such novels as Thomas Pynchon's "Vineland," Toni Morrison's "Paradise," and Louise Erdrich's "Love Medicine." What connects such varied works is that their convert-characters are disenchanted with secularism yet apprehensive of dogmatic religiosity. "Partial Faiths" is the first study to identify a body of contemporary fiction in such terms, take the measure of its structures and strategies, and evaluate its contribution to public discourse on religion's place in postmodern life. Postsecularism is most often associated with philosophers and theorists such as Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor, William Connolly, Jurgen Habermas, and Gianni Vattimo. But it is also being explored and invented, says John A. McClure, by many novelists: Leslie Marmon Silko, Don DeLillo, Michael Ondaatje, and N. Scott Momaday among others. These novelists, who are often regarded as belonging to different domains of contemporary fiction, are fleshing out the postsecular issues that scholars treat more abstractly. But the modes of belief elaborated in these novels and the new narrative forms synchronized with these modes are dramatically partial and open-ended. Postsecular fiction does not aspire to any full "mapping" of the reenchanting cosmos or any formal moral code, nor does it promise anything like full redemption. It is partial in another sense as well: it is emphatically dedicated to progressive ideals of social transformation and well-being,

in repudiation of resurgent fundamentalist prescriptions for the same.

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