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## REFERENCES

New York: Bloomsbury, 2015. Pp. 260. ISBN 978-1-4411-3253-6.

- 1 From its earliest days, New York City has accumulated its fair share of writers. Literary communities such as Greenwich Village and Brooklyn neighborhoods quickly come to mind when one thinks of the New York City author. Over the years, numerous published scholarly works have attempted to analyze the draw the city has generated for would-be writers. In the 21st century, the allure of the metropolis remains ever strong and in this contemporary, thorough analysis, James Peacock narrows the spectrum and the period to investigate the literature produced in and about the borough of Brooklyn, roughly spanning 1989 to 2013. Limiting the breadth of analysis, Peacock argues, allows for a close examination of the swift gentrification during the period, issues of race, impacts of urban space, connections between movement and migration, and, most importantly, how the community is perceived and projected in the works under consideration. Divided into seven chapters, *Brooklyn Fictions* explores the borough through these aforementioned categories and centers on key texts, illustrating Peacock's argument that "a concomitant questioning on community boundaries" (10) will bring us to better envisage the implications of mobility and transformation within the urban community.
- 2 Laying the groundwork for the term "community," Peacock is quick to note that the word contains multifarious definitions and meanings for each segment involved in its composition. Brooklyn is disassociated in many respects from its neighboring borough of Manhattan, and authors seeking to live in and represent the borough exhibit a

tendency to portray a symbolic Brooklyn: in doing so, they must negotiate between tradition and place. Capital and community emerge as interlocked, as Peacock utilizes his selected texts to emphasize how the (re)gentrification of the neighborhood has, over the years, perpetuated a desire for a cosmopolitan atmosphere embodied with a local flair. Community aids capital in that the desire for the local transforms the elements of “the local—marriage, family, neighborhood—with a particular form of exchange value” (30). Depictions of diversity within community become a clear element of modern Brooklyn fiction; the manner in which community is portrayed by the novelist becomes the framework through which Peacock grounds his argument. Couched in the varieties of small literary communities within Brooklyn, readers of these novels (Peacock’s extensive incorporation of Brooklyn novels is impressive) must engage with the novelist in a sectionalized portrayal of the community at large, through “partiality and subjectivism” (36), resulting in a contributive understanding of how communities work.

- 3 The *bildungsroman*, Peacock argues in Chapter 2, presents readers with an awakening to environment. Examining Sharon Schwartz’s *Leaving Brooklyn* (1989), Peacock describes what he calls the “Coming-of-age in the community”; this narrative form provides the reader with the protagonist’s growing awareness of the historicity of surroundings, as achieved through acquiring an “individual sovereignty” (44) in the community. Expanding on his initial argument, Peacock notes that the novel presents community through limited and “repeated acts on the part of the reader” (54) in order to generate an image of the narrative’s environment. There is a sense that the community has been lost in the modern age; therefore, authenticity becomes a crucial factor in regenerating the idea and ideal of community, and many of the novels scrutinized in this work look to the past in order to comprehend the present. In order to demonstrate the changing topography of the borough, Peacock utilizes an earlier text, Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943), to contrast its pastoral ideal of community with sundry depictions in the contemporary texts of *Brooklyn Fictions*. Citing Deleuze and Guattari, Peacock scrutinizes space and the shifting of locality, through the gentrification of the community as it becomes less inclusive and more exclusive. Community, though, is not static; it continues to progress regardless of the ideologies held by its diversified members. In the *bildungsroman*, the protagonist’s coming of age requires his or her awareness that community does not entail an encompassing conglomeration.
- 4 The genre of realism and the human experience portrayed in many Brooklyn novels enforces the conception that the human experience is “itself mediated, abstracted, and commodified” (69). The use-value of the narrations correlate with perceived human experience that—it is expected—should conceptually depict the environment in which the novel is set. Peacock draws from Tom Wolfe, who surmises that realism in the New York novel may mean, “cramming as much of New York City between the covers” (71). Using Michael Stephens’s *Season at Coole* (1972) and *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead* (1994), Peacock explores the relation between capitalist realism and the images of success as measured by commodities. Acquisition of commodities, however, may not always come in the form of physical possessions, and in the section on *Season at Coole*, we learn that the Coole family strive to accumulate family legends (72) as a form of holding on to the valued past. In his analysis of *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead*, Peacock makes a first foray into the topic of race and shifting demographics occurring in New York City during the 1980s. What Peacock successfully demonstrates through these two novels is that community requires participation; furthermore, the depictions of the

human experience within Stephens' work, illustrate "how 'shifty' terms like 'home,' 'community,' and 'family' are" (92).

- 5 The crime and detective genres are plausibly too often overlooked by academics as works worthy of scholarly attention. Peacock avoids this faulty assumption and devotes an entire chapter to one of the dominant genres of Brooklyn-based literature. His argument for doing so stands as follows: "crime stories are particularly useful for the analysis of community formations [...] because in many cases the processes of mapping and narrative reconstruction undergone by the characters unearth the possibility of collective culpability" (94). Of importance to the crime genre is the setting in which the narrative unfolds. In the various crime novels considered, emphasis is placed on how the individual experience becomes linked with authenticity. Utilizing theories of Frederic Jameson, Peacock notes that authenticity is "a problematic concept in Brooklyn fictions" (101) due to an individual's inability to be entirely cognitive of the external forces influencing their phenomenological experience. The crime novel provides a significant basis for exploring discipline within the community, as the individual must be held accountable to this larger community. Within the crime genre, Peacock launches into "Apocalyptic communities," demonstrating how the threat of immanent disaster (such as 9/11) creates continuities within community identity.
- 6 In Chapter 5, Peacock is concerned with interpreting the most significant impact on Brooklyn in the last 25 years: the gentrification of the borough. The literature in this genre varies from material consumption, to the efforts of raising children in an "appropriate" environment, to the living the American life within the ubiquitous brownstone houses that line the streets of more affluent neighborhoods. Peacock exercises significant effort on establishing the ideologies surrounding the image of "Brownstone Brooklyn" by examining the shift from viewing the neighborhood as community to considering the neighborhood as commodity. In this chapter, Peacock is particularly intent on exploring "the specifics of interior and exterior design, with markers of taste, with differences in attitude to history and supposed authenticity revealed through aesthetic choices" (130). One of the recurring themes within this work is how externalities may reflect the inner life of a character. Employing Paula Fox's *Desperate Characters* (1970) and L. J. Davis's *A Meaningful Life* (1971), Peacock appraises architecture and interior design and the implications these do, or do not, have on inner life. Mothers in Brooklyn appear in several of the texts under analysis in the form of what Peacock calls "the Brooklyn motherhood novel" (146). In these "matrifocal" novels, emphasis is often placed on providing a healthy environment for children, concerns about playgrounds and schools, purchasing the proper motherhood commodities, and ensuring their children have the "correct" friends. The racial fears and commodity fetishism present in the literary characters provide Peacock the platform to expose the walls communities build within their own environments.
- 7 "Race, Authenticity, and Urban Space" become the focus of Chapter 6, as ethnicity plays crucial roles in neighborhood boundaries. A refreshing element in Peacock's work is that he draws from a variety of material to tie the novels to a real place and time. For instance, as an introduction to the chapter, he utilizes a 2014 Spike Lee performance concerning gentrification, and then smoothly transitions into the discussion of novels whose authors approach "racial identity, race relations, and racial anxiety as central themes" (160). Significant for understanding race-focused texts is to consider how production and consumption are multifarious, while at the same time crucial for

generating “a racially defined community,” as community members actively participate in “the consumption of certain commodities but also on the production and consumption of subcultural behaviors and styles” (161). One particular novel demonstrating the commodity and consumption of cultural behaviors is Jonathan Lethem’s *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003), which employs graffiti as a signifier for a larger, social examination of racial integration. As Myria Georgiou observes, in *Media and the City* (2013), graffiti is a component of the “visual history of the creator’s own city, a voice and a presence both inside and outside a territory,” where graffiti provides an avenue for “expressions of urban identities from the margins” (176). Peacock’s analysis of the correlation between graffiti and race aids in drawing out the larger issues many of these novels question: is there an integrated America where a variety of races can function together in a community? Other novels in this chapter address the ghetto and the coding of the street as opposed to that of the neighborhood. Overall, this chapter places emphasis on the characters and their social interactions, while Brooklyn is shifted to the background.

- 8 Both American-born as well as a growing number of transitional residents have represented Brooklyn’s ethnic diversity. The final chapter explores three novels only partially set within Brooklyn; Peacock argues that the inclusion of such novels is warranted due to the differences and similarities that offer a compelling analysis of Brooklyn from a transnational perspective. Utilizing Jonathan Lethem’s *Girl in Landscape* (1998), Lioda Martiza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home* (1999), and Colm Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* (2009), Peacock investigates the “participation in multiple communities characterized by difference and mobility” (190). This chapter, as with the previous chapter on race, intentionally focuses on the inhabitants rather than the place, and at times, Brooklyn drifts completely out of view. Crucial for Peacock’s argument is that the Brooklyn in these texts is a “transnational space—one defined by movement, plurality, difference, process” (194). Narration and elements of magical realism in Pérez’s work, as well as the science fiction twist in Lethem’s novel, are of interest for Peacock as these narrative techniques represent the inability to grasp inclusively the culturally diversified communities of Brooklyn. *Girl in Landscape*, Peacock notes, accentuates both recognizable and alien landscapes; in doing so, it suggests Brooklyn is a “‘broken land’ of mourning” (212) through which the narratives “can be taken as allegories of fragmented reading.” Additionally, “[t]hey demonstrate that the individual needs others to complete the scene” (213), thereby creating a need for community.
- 9 A thoroughly enjoyable read, Peacock’s knowledge of Brooklyn-related novels is, at times, overwhelming. While the references and novels included are indeed copious, Peacock’s explanations and summations of the texts—even if at times plot spoilers—provide the reader adequate preparation to engage with his larger argument. At times, Peacock does jump beyond his own imposed period restrictions, spending significant time with texts from the 1970s, but these digressions are justified for the larger framework of the argument. Only seldom does he revert to novels discussed in previous chapters; more commonly, he provides the reader with alternative novels to reiterate a previous point. The concluding remarks engage the community of readers, in which Brooklynites may or may not take part. The hip sections of Brooklyn attract even more writers and the community of readers is growing; however, the question arises if readers actually endeavor in face-to-face discussions, foundational—as Peacock has demonstrated—for the functioning of community. For Peacock, writing *Brooklyn Fictions*

has given him a larger understanding of the multifarious nature of the term “community,” including the community of readers involved with reading the novels he has considered in this work.

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