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Looking at Kafka" and *The Great American Novel*. *The Human Stain* and *American Pastoral* reexamine issues of passing that can also be found as early as *Goodbye, Columbus*. In reviewing the significance of gloves to Libby and Gabe in *Letting Go*, I find myself wanting to rethink that novel in relation to the wonderful passages about the glovemaking industry in *American Pastoral*. Even *Portnoy's Complaint* may seem like a new novel when we compare how Roth has revisited its themes, as Ranen Omer-Sherman points out, in *The Dying Animal* and *Sabbath's Theater*.

Derek Parker Royal should be congratulated for giving this book a thorough index (over ten pages), as well as a secondary bibliography of over a dozen pages and a primary bibliography that includes not only Roth's books but also such categories as "Uncollected Stories," "Uncollected Essays," "Uncollected Reviews," and "Uncollected Interviews." Royal has produced a collection that will accomplish the important task of drawing more scholars to studying Roth.

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Kathleen Fitzpatrick. *The Anxiety of Obsolescence: The American Novel in the Age of Television*. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2006. ix + 268 pp.

In *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* Kathleen Fitzpatrick observes that pronouncements about the death of print literacy at the hands of electronic media have become so frequent that they are rarely questioned. However, Fitzpatrick not only calls into question the accuracy of these pronouncements but also the motives of those who announce print's death. In light of the fact that "more people are buying more books than ever these days" (4), she wonders, "[w]hat purpose does the discourse of the death of print serve? And, more pointedly, why has this discourse been picked up by those presumably least likely to benefit from it—contemporary novelists such as Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo?" (3). Identifying Pynchon's and DeLillo's novels as part of a contemporary subgenre she refers to as "novels of obsolescence," Fitzpatrick finds that running throughout these novels are representations of conflict between the novel and electronic media, especially television, "in which the novelist serves on the front lines of a cultural war" (5). Rather than accepting contemporary novelists'

anxieties about electronic media at face value, Fitzpatrick instead contextualizes this anxiety within discourses of technophobia, the literary novel, and postmodernism and seeks to uncover what cultural work is performed by vilifying television in literature.

Fitzpatrick's title and discussion of the anxiety of obsolescence bears an obvious resemblance to Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence; however, she uses this similarity primarily to signal what she perceives as a significant shift in contemporary literature and criticism. In contrast to an anxiety of influence, Fitzpatrick contends that postmodern novelists such as Pynchon and DeLillo are more concerned with "what's coming next" rather than with what came before (6). Although Fitzpatrick focuses on Pynchon and DeLillo throughout her study, she suggests that the anxiety of obsolescence is reflected in contemporary criticism as well, and criticism serves as an important secondary focus in the book. In the book's first chapter, "Three Discourses in the Age of Television," Fitzpatrick explores areas of cultural conversation related to the anxiety of obsolescence: the recurrent declaration of the death of the novel, the perceived threat of new technologies, and postmodernism. In addition to establishing a context for her subsequent analyses of Pynchon's and DeLillo's novels, this chapter also provides a cogent analysis of three quite distinct discourses, which in Fitzpatrick's view work together to create the particular circumstances giving rise to the discourse of obsolescence in contemporary literature and criticism. She explains that even before contemporary novelists adopted a discourse of obsolescence, obsolescence was central to discussions of the novel and to postmodernism in general.

Fitzpatrick uses the critical lens established in her first chapter to analyze a variety of novels by Pynchon and DeLillo, building on and expanding scholarship on these two important contemporary authors in doing so. She traces a thread of anxiety running throughout their novels related to three concepts about new forms of technology: "technologies of mechanization have produced concerns about dehumanization; technologies of image production have been greeted with concerns about illusion and ideology; and technologies of interconnection have confronted concerns about the loss of the individual" (27). At the heart of *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* are chapters devoted to the machine, the spectacle, and the network. Each of these chapters focuses on several novels by Pynchon and DeLillo; *Gravity's Rainbow*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *V.*, *Mao II*, *White Noise*, and *Underworld* receive particular attention. In each chapter, Fitzpatrick is sensitive to ways in which Pynchon's and DeLillo's concerns about technology evolve throughout their fiction and also ways in which the authors differ from one another. For example, in her chapter on the machine, Fitzpatrick

contrasts scenes from Pynchon's *V.* and DeLillo's *Americana* in order to illustrate how differently Pynchon and DeLillo represent the threat of mechanicity. In Pynchon's *V.*, Fergus Mixolydian invents and grafts into his arm a sleep switch that connects him to his television, while in DeLillo's *Americana,* David Bell describes himself as intertwined with his television in a form of technological mating. For Fitzpatrick, these scenes characterize a crucial difference between Pychon and DeLillo. She explains, "while television, for Pynchon, represents a new and particularly effective mode of technological engagement, the specific engagement with the medium is merely a symptom of the movement of the human toward mechanicity begun long before," for DeLillo "television itself, as part of an expansion of the mediation of experience in contemporary culture, is responsible for this movement into mechanicity" (89). Despite acknowledging their differences, Fitzpatrick argues that in the end Pynchon and DeLillo depict technology, particularly television, as threatening to radically (and negatively) alter what it means to be human and an individual, concepts that are intimately tied to the concept of a reading self. This is the crux of the conflict between television and the novel as depicted in the novel of obsolescence.

Fitzpatrick focuses on television in her study because the technology represents a particular point of convergence among the machine, the spectacle, and the network, but she uses the term "television" in a broad sense as a metonym for "all media forms (including photography and film) that participate in or are defined by the machine, the spectacle, and the network" (36). Fitzpatrick's method throughout the book is to pay "close attention both to cultural milieu and to textual particulars, moving between extended close readings of a number of important contemporary US novels and the broader historical, cultural, and technological context for that fiction," and her goal is to "return our critical attention to representations and to the specific ideological formations with which those representations interact" (7). Consequently, as she explores the representations of television in Pynchon's and DeLillo's fiction, she is attentive to the ideological underpinnings of those representations, and she concludes that in novels of obsolescence technological concerns serve to mask deeper and less palatable anxieties about social change and lost privilege. For her, these novels represent a "contemporary version of the 'melodrama of beset [white] manhood' defined by Nina Baym, in which the threat that television poses to the novelist functions as an acceptable cultural scapegoat for that much stickier social issue: the perceived dominance of the contemporary literary scene of fiction by women and racial and ethnic minorities" (50). Claiming obsolescence for oneself as a writer and for one's novels, then, becomes a way

to claim marginality in a culture "obsessed with fragmentation and decentering, a paradoxical source of return to dominance" (233).

She tests her argument about the anxiety of obsolescence in the book's closing chapter by broadening her focus to include a younger generation of writers—the "New White Guys," such as Jonathan Franzen and David Foster Wallace—and to include one of Pynchon and DeLillo's celebrated peers, Toni Morrison. In this chapter, Fitzpatrick questions, "is the anxiety of obsolescence . . . unique to the writers I have addressed in these pages? Or is it a formation common to the entirety of literary culture, all of which is apparently under threat by television and responding in similarly defensive fashion?" (202). As Fitzpatrick illustrates how differently writers such as Franzen, Wallace, and Morrison perceive television's threat than do Pynchon and DeLillo, she usefully identifies the parameters of the novel of obsolescence and solidifies her argument about the real cultural work performed by the discourse of obsolescence.

As a reworking of the anxiety of influence for postmodern literary culture, *The Anxiety of Obsolescence* convincingly illustrates the centrality of the discourse of obsolescence to contemporary literature and criticism even as it exposes the social forces that drive particular novelists and critics to turn to obsolescence as a way to claim marginal status for themselves. The book is an important resource for studying contemporary literature and culture and a valuable addition to scholarship on Pynchon and DeLillo.

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Jennifer C. James. *A Freedom Bought with Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2007. 278 pp.

Jennifer James's analysis of African American war literature from the nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century fills a considerable void in the study of African American letters. James's simple argument, "that there . . . exists a substantial body of imaginative literature by African Americans chronicling war" (7), is a persuasive one, as she frames her study within issues not just of race but of gender, class, and nationalism as well. James examines such canonical texts as William Wells Brown's *Clotelle; or, The Colored Heroine, a Tale of the*