



# The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks

*Philip Nel*

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## **The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks Philip Nel**

Was there a sudden break in the world of art, literature, and music when modernism gave way to postmodernism?

Philip Nel attacks the notion of tremendous and sudden change in artistic understanding and literary practice. Instead, in *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks* he proposes that a series of small but far-reaching changes drew understanding from modernism to postmodernism.

What bonds these two periods together? The constant agent of change, Nel argues, was the avant-garde. Tracking its influence on novelists, popular culture figures, and children's authors, this book re-evaluates how twentieth-century culture has been traditionally divided into "modern" and "postmodern."

Suggesting that a modernism and postmodernism division prevents accurate evaluation of a work, Nel realigns our conceptions of twentieth-century literature, art, and music. Focusing on eight figures—Nathanael West, Djuna Barnes, Dr. Seuss, Donald Barthelme, Don DeLillo, Chris Van Allsburg, Laurie Anderson, and Leonard Cohen—as representative, *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity* examines works along a spectrum of political involvement.

This first book to analyze postmodern children's literature revives the radical Dr. Seuss by reading him alongside avant-garde artists. Nel argues that Chris Van Allsburg speaks the internet generation's vernacular, using a surrealist idiom to pose questions that linger beyond his picture books' final pages.

*The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity* is a nuanced and wide-ranging re-reading of how postmodernism displays art's ability to imagine a better world.

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