



American Secrets: The Politics and Poetics of Secrecy in the Literature and Culture of the United States

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Predicated upon the principles of political freedom, cultural openness, religious tolerance, individual self-reliance, and ethnic diversity, the United States of America has been tempted recurrently by the lures of the secret. *American Secrets* explores this political, historical, and cultural phenomenon from many, often surprisingly, overlapping angles in these analyses of the literary and cultural uses and abuses of secrecy within a democratic culture. Through analyses of diverse literary works and cultural manifestations—from Mark Twain's anti-imperialist prophecies to 9/11 conspiracy theories, from the traumas of the Vietnam war to the homophobia of the American military establishment, from the unresolved dilemmas of nuclear politics to the secret ecologies shunted aside by the exploitation of the environment, from the questionings of national identity on the ethnic and (trans)sexual margins to the confessional modes of poetry and the poetics of the unspeakable and unrepresentable—these essays reveal the politics within the poetics and, indissociably, the poetics fueling the politics of secrecy in its ambivalent deployment.

Secrecy often seems to be a question without an answer or an answer that either seems to beg the question or to be a question itself. These essays address this paradox with their own questioning explorations. In answering such questions, the volume as a whole provides an illuminating overview of the pervasiveness of the secret and its modalities in American culture while also dealing specifically with the poetics of the secret in its various, historically recurrent literary manifestations.

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