

## Abstract

Above anything else, New Sincerity is characterized by responding to postmodern irony, not in the form of its abandonment, but rather in its unmasking, critique, redeployment and transcendence. What Jeffrey Eugenides shares with New Sincerity authors is a critical treatment of the heritage of postmodernism. Balancing between postmodernist techniques and their transcendence, Eugenides writes about contemporary issues plaguing the American society (gender identity, mental health, the American dream, migration) and addresses the literary tradition of American fiction. However, his response to the literary tradition of postmodernism differs from the majority of New Sincerity writers. The New Sincerity's "manifesto," David Foster Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram," is an essay about fiction, but it is also a text about American television and culture. Eugenides' books by and large avoid commentary on popular culture, and their socio-political commentary is often found inadequate: their reflection of the legacy of Reaganomics within the Bush and Clinton administrations is oblique, as is their treatment of the many other issues symptomatic of the 1980s and 1990s: the spread of HIV/AIDS, the ubiquitous television culture and its gradual replacement in the digital age, information oversaturation and the looming war on terrorism. Although written in the 1990s and early 2000s, these novels hardly ever reference popular music or television shows or politics. Instead, Eugenides' books make sustained references to the canon. This thesis approaches the work of Jeffrey Eugenides in the context of New Sincerity by treating his work as a post-postmodernist return to modernism, even though a modernism that needs to deal with the heritage of postmodern irony. Eugenides' sincerity is perhaps more conservative than that of his colleagues, but governed by a similar ethos. This thesis at first delineates the key characteristics of New Sincerity authors. It deals especially with the differences between authenticity and sincerity, and with delineating the space in which such sincerity can thrive, referring to the philosophy of dialogue and intersubjectivity. Three novels by Eugenides — *The Marriage Plot* (2011), *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), and *Middlesex* (2002) — are analysed from the perspective of their reworking of the postmodernist heritage, while concentrating on the themes of the literary tradition, nostalgia and hybridity. For instance, *The Virgin Suicides* is a voyeuristic parable of television watching set in Detroit suburbs in the 1970s, *Middlesex* is an epic "gender novel" oddity and *The Marriage Plot* is a variation on the modernist Bildungsroman examined from the perspective of thesis writing, academic postmodernism and also the texts of David Foster Wallace.

**Key words:** New Sincerity, Jeffrey Eugenides, Modernism, Postmodernism, Post-postmodernism, Sincerity, Authenticity, Realism, Pop culture, Conservatism, American culture, Fiction writing, Metafiction