**Apocalypse after Apocalypse: Reggie Nadelson’s Artie Cohen novels.**

*James Peacock, Keele University*

**Abstract**

This article looks at three New York crime novels by Reggie Nadelson - *Disturbed Earth* (2004), *Red Hook* (2005) and *Manhattan 62* (2014). It argues that the atmosphere in these stories is, partly in response to 9/11, exaggeratedly apocalyptic, but that ultimately they emphasise historical continuities and reject apocalyptic thinking.

**Key Words:** Reggie Nadelson, New York City, apocalypse, gentrification, 9/11

**\*\*\*\*\***

The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead,

in the black headlines of the latest edition. (White 710)

Crime writer Reggie Nadelson, who is also a journalist and travel writer, has at the time of writing published nine novels in the successful series starring New York detective Artie Cohen, the first being *Red Mercury Blues* (1995). One might also include *Manhattan 62* (2014), whose first-person narrator is the Irish-American NYPD detective Pat Wynne but which turns out to be a pre-history of Artie Cohen and concludes with a scene in which Wynne and Cohen meet. Such intertextual links between Nadelson’s novels are a familiar generic characteristic of hard-boiled detective stories with a singular hero-narrator, and also constitute a gift to dedicated fans of the series, delivered with a knowing smile. Yet as this article goes on to argue, they have a wider significance when considered in the light of the author’s ongoing preoccupations – local and global relations, community and, most importantly, the tension between an appreciation of historical continuities and the fear of ultimate destruction, the end of New York. In other words, if intertextual links suggest continuities and what Raymond Williams calls “knowable communities” (165), then they are consistent with certain views espoused by the narratives themselves.

With this in mind, the article explores the exaggeratedly apocalyptic depiction of New York, a city still struggling to come to terms with the attacks of September 11th 2001, in Reggie Nadelson’s *Disturbed Earth* (2004) and *Red Hook* (2005), and asks whether the pervasive sense of impending destruction leading to a radical break with what has gone before is not a new phenomenon, engendered uniquely by the events of 9/11, but a persistent characteristic of New York life and of the immigrant populations who live there. In the last section of the article, attention is turned to Nadelson’s 2014 novel *Manhattan 62*, in which terrified New Yorkers follow the development of the Cuban Missile Crisis and anticipate nuclear Armageddon. By setting the story during this time of crisis, and by including striking symbolic adumbrations of the destruction of the Twin Towers, Nadelson emphasises parallels with the contemporary situation and therefore historical continuities. In all three of the novels under consideration here, the author brings the present and past into close and anxious proximity and stresses the ways in which they inflect each other. Similarly, the local – specifically, the neighbourhoods of Brooklyn and Manhattan where the action occurs – is always read against the global forces and movements with which it exists in supplementary relation.

With this nuanced treatment of time and space, Nadelson encourages what Fredric Jameson calls “a relationship to the present as history; that is [. . .] a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective” (Jameson 284). In so doing, she questions apocalyptic thinking and exploits what might be seen as a characteristically New York paradox: that the more shocking and “new” an event might be, the more citizens have seen it all before. My prefatory quotation from E. B. White’s 1949 essay “Here is New York,” a piece upon which Nadelson also draws at the start of *Manhattan 62*, further emphasises this paradox: even as the image of the “jets overhead” assumes an eerie prescience, its uncanny qualities are somewhat dimmed by dint of its repetition in recent history. From our vantage point in the present, it is simultaneously predictive and predictable.

The main action of both *Disturbed Earth* and *Red Hook* begins with phone calls that summon detective Artie Cohen down to the water’s edge in Brooklyn. In the earlier novel, he finds himself at Coney Island, a place “haunted by relics of its old dreamscape” (Nadelson, *Earth* 7) looking at a bag of bloodied clothes and bitterly anticipating another murdered child. In *Red Hook*, a call from his friend Sid McKay takes him to the old industrial docklands area of Red Hook, “a weird fat lip of land cut off from the rest of the city by a couple of highways” (Nadelson, *Red Hook* 7) or, in Sid’s more dramatic terms, “the edge of the world” (*Earth* 30)*.* Water is symbolically significant throughout Nadelson’s Artie Cohen series and especially so in the first two novels examined here. A city “with as many rituals and taboos as a chain of South Seas islands” (*Red Hook* 43), New York’s culture is shaped by its geographical location. Time and again the reader is reminded that New York is surrounded by water, and that water contributes to both its beauty and its sense of precariousness. Arriving in Sheepshead Bay, Artie says: “The boroughs, but especially Brooklyn, always spread towards water, from the Hudson River, the East River, down to the Atlantic Ocean. The seacoast of New York. Ten miles from Manhattan. Easy to remember here on the coast that the city was an archipelago, a series of islands and inlets, beaches and marshes, rivers, basins, derelict shipyards, wetlands where birds congregated, Jamaica Bay where the planes came in low like big water birds” (*Earth* 43-4).

As the title, *Disturbed Earth*, implies, land is arbitrary and vulnerable, always under threat from the awesome power of the sea. If, as the narrator reflects, new villages such as Gerritsen Beach were formed on the Brooklyn coast by material transported from Manhattan and dumped in the marshland (*Earth* 45), then it is easy to conceive of a future time when the water will reclaim the land, and when the planes linked by simile to the birds in the quotation above will be usurped in turn by the birds themselves. That is partly why Artie feels there is “too much fear” in these places (*Earth* 45): the fear of losing material wealth through failed speculations, organised crime or simple bad luck participates in a more primal fear of losing everything, of meeting one’s end in natural disaster.

Bodies, of course, frequently end up in the water[[1]](#footnote-1): in *Disturbed Earth* Ivana Galitzine, a member of the Russian community Nadelson so meticulously chronicles, runs into the ocean at Coney Island and drowns herself, depressed by the failure of the immigrant dream and her role in a child’s disappearance (*Earth* 329); Sid McKay is thrown into the Red Hook canal and his killer, the Russian sailor called Meler, eventually throws himself overboard after confessing his crime to Artie in a small boat out in the storm-tossed bay. Meler’s story – of how he swam to the shore from the stranded Russian ship *Red Dawn* and lived illegally for decades in Brooklyn (*Red Hook* 84-5) – evokes the era of the Red Scare, the pathological fear of Communism during the 1950s, in order to highlight, through Meler’s enduring presence in Red Hook, parallels between that time and the post-9/11 mistrust of otherness exploited by the Bush administration.

In all of these incidents, death in the water symbolises, simultaneously, an attempt to bury the past and recognition of the failure of that attempt in the present. For example, Meler commits homicide because Sid’s research into the history of Red Hook threatened to reveal his illegal status, and commits suicide because he cannot contemplate the revelation of his secrets in the light of Artie’s solving of the case. As the detective puts it, typically laconically: “He disappeared with his history” (*Red Hook* 382). In one sense, Artie is right: Meler becomes a lost New Yorker in a city perpetually afraid of losing everything. But in another sense, he cannot be lost while his story, wrapped up in the history of immigration, gentrification and international relations, persists in the memories of those who knew him and in the pages of the book.

The repeated images of water in the Artie Cohen novels thus play an important part in symbolising the fluidity of relations between past and present, even as they connote for many characters the transformative edges between eras of experience. Staring out to see near

Brighton Beach, Artie observes:

On the ocean at the edge of the flat, slate-colored surface of the water, lights from a ship blinked. Immigrants had once come on those ships; they had made a break, willing to leave everything they knew for a foreign place, for a better life, or for streets lined with gold. Now people came in airplanes and called home on their cell phones. The break was never sharp; they clung to the place they’d come from. (*Earth* 51)

In this passage, only the transportation and communications technology have changed; the principles of migration and aspiration remain the same. The use of parallelism – notably the repetition of the verb “come” and of clauses beginning with the pronoun “they” – reinforces the impression that the break is never sharp. Moreover, the temporal blurring enacted by the overlapping of “those ships” with the ship Artie is looking at in the present of his narrative further breaks down the distinction between past and present. Flat and “slate-colored,” the water presents a surface upon which immigrant narratives have been written and continue to be written.

Artie’s own break has been far from sharp, despite his best efforts. Born in Russia and resident for several years in Israel, he arrived in the States intent on jettisoning his past: “when I got to New York, I worked on my English; I got rid of my accent and learned to talk like a New Yorker. Hating the Russians ate me up for years and then, after a while, I tried to let it go” (*Earth* 52)*.* Ironically, it is when the past “finally fade[s]” and no strong ties to his birthplace remain that Artie is able to embrace his Russian identity again, including the language, whose sounds, he says, “insinuated themselves back into my being” (*Earth* 53). Now he finds himself repeatedly involved with the Russian speaking people of New York, especially those living in coastal Brooklyn; his occasional boss Sonny Lippert enlists him in the search for the missing child at the start of *Disturbed Earth* because the clothes were discovered by a Russian jogger and Artie supposedly knows “the community” (*Earth* 19) better than others. His best friend is the monumental Tolya Sverdloff, New York property tycoon and global businessman with ties to London, Moscow and Hong Kong (as the dedicated reader knows from the second novel in the series, *Hot Poppies* [1997]); in short, Artie could not make a sharp break even if he still wanted to. And neighbourhoods like Brighton Beach, he sardonically observes, resist the break quite consciously by assuming an exaggeratedly Russian milieu. In his opinion, they too readily become pastiche, “a kind of theme park with stuff in the shops—dresses with glitter, big furs, fancy china—you probably couldn’t even find in Moscow anymore” (*Earth* 52). Yet such places and objects, deterritorialised yet retaining traces of cultural congruity, exemplify the tension between past and present experienced by the residents. In their vulgar excess they speak of desperation, perhaps, the omnipresent fear that all connection with the past is about to be lost.

I stress again that this is the constitutive tension of the Artie Cohen novels – the tension between epochal breaks with the past and continuities, between true apocalypse and a persistent perception of imminent apocalypse which ironically becomes, in fact, one of the continuities of New York City’s identity, each perceived disaster leaving its imprint on the fabric of the city. This situation is mordantly summed up by Artie’s half sister, Genia: “Nothing changes [. . .] Except we become less safe, more frightened, terrorist, disease, war coming” (*Earth* 180). Genia’s comments imply that safety, rather than being something measurable and objective, is a matter of emotion and perception. Fright accumulated over time begets danger, regardless of the number or magnitude of the external threats.

Although this article takes the form of a specific literary case study, and shies away from making too many grand claims about the contemporary cultural situation, it is worth noting that the tension outlined here has exercised the minds of a number of scholars of postmodernism and what has become known as “post-postmodernism” in recent years. Fredric Jameson famously characterizes postmodernism as obsessively theorising transition and change, looking for ruptures, “for the telltale instant after which it is no longer the same, for the ‘When-it-all-changed,’ as William Gibson puts it” (Jameson ix). As Adam Kelly notes, “‘9/11,’ the U.S. bailout scheme, and the election of Barack Obama have become the most recent and popular candidates to signify the moment ‘when-it-all-changed,’” and the first of these, as we shall see, is crucial to understanding the stories under consideration here (Kelly 314). Yet Kelly goes on to endorse the view of Andrew Hoberek, who argues that any change from one cultural dominant to another consists not of epochal (or indeed apocalyptic) “readily visible” transformations, but of “a range of uneven, tentative, local shifts” (Hoberek 241).

Hoberek’s spatialised language – the allusions to “global” and “local” processes – is, of course, consistent with a Jamesonian conception of a postmodern spatial turn, but it is also especially useful in the analysis of novels like Nadelson’s (and many other contemporary New York fictions) because anxieties of apocalypse are frequently bound up in questions of land, space and community. This is revealed through the titles. *Disturbed Earth* connotes the uprooting that is integral to the personal histories of so many immigrant characters in the novel. It also refers to a planet that has become psychologically damaged since the attacks of September 11th 2001, and to the giant hole in the ground in Lower Manhattan, in a city “still on the edge of a nervous breakdown after all this time” (*Earth* 20). As well as these global, apocalyptic connotations, however, it connotes certain continuities: changing uses of space, ongoing processes of urban demolition, renewal and development which include dockside renovations, the transfer of earth from Manhattan to the Brooklyn coastline and, of course, the redevelopment of Ground Zero.

Continuing the theme of redevelopment, *Red Hook* focuses specifically on gentrification in the eponymous waterside neighbourhood. Gentrification speaks to the tension between finality and continuity this article has identified because it raises the question of whether certain kinds of redevelopment – for example, the conversion of old warehouses and industrial buildings into luxury apartments – constitute a brutal and unsentimental break with the culture of what went before or help to salvage a disappearing past through the accumulation and polishing of “authentic” architectural features and interior designs. Behind Sid McKay’s assessment of the gentrifiers’ motivations lurks a sense of impending apocalypse: “People want a piece of the city before it’s all gone, so they’re finding their way to the fringes, the old industrial city” (*Red Hook* 27). And yet his position is deeply contradictory. On the one hand, he is in favour of development because he sees the place “coming to life,” suggesting that it has previously been dead (*Red Hook* 36). On the other hand, it is his persistent desire to keep alive in photographs and written accounts the working class, industrial history of the pre-gentrification neighbourhood, including the story of the Russian sailor, that leads to his murder.

Likewise, Artie’s descriptions reveal an area in transition and full of contradictory signals, unsure about whether signifiers of the pre-gentrification Red Hook will be lost forever, or retained in isolated pockets. On the same page we are told that “[y]ou could see Red Hook was changing: fancy little signs that hung out front of warehouses proclaimed that artists and film people had moved in,” but in a local bar “you could imagine the place as it had been. Red Hook looked ancient, suspended in time” (*Red Hook* 93). Tolya, who, as a businessman heavily invested in property development, exhibits a brutal honesty about the situation, also seems to describe a post-apocalyptic landscape: “People are fighting over industrial bones of New York, Artyom” (*Red Hook* 112). Red Hook is, according to Cohen’s police colleague Clara Fuentes, “officially cool” (*Red Hook* 16), yet remains a “frontier village” of “urban pioneers” who cling onto their “tight community” at local meetings and street festivals (*Red Hook* 27). Through his peregrinations and street level observations, the detective is in an ideal position to observe the “uneven, tentative, local shifts” which signify the increasing influence of global capital on neighbourhoods like Red Hook and which invariably lead to what Sharon Zukin calls “supergentrification” (Zukin 9), the supplanting of independent establishments and bohemian cultural centres by global brands such as Starbucks and McDonalds.

What is at stake in all of these appraisals, and what is equally at stake in other contemporary Brooklyn novels such as Kitty Burns Florey’s *Solos* (2004), Paul Auster’s *The Brooklyn Follies* (2005) and the scurrilous Park Slope fictions of Amy Sohn, is “authenticity,” which, according to Sharon Zukin, is “a tool of power” because a dominant group’s discourse of authenticity and origins can obliterate the alternative sense of authenticity of another, marginalised group (Zukin 3). If, for example, an understanding of authenticity based on a working-class population and culture; on traditional ideas of community and, as was the case in pre-gentrification, dominantly Italian Cobble Hill, ethnic homogeneity, is supplanted by an aspirant middle-class understanding of authenticity as historic houses, period interiors and a benign form of multiculturalism, then a significant power shift has occurred which renders one version of authenticity redundant and has the potential retroactively to erase it from history (in a more or less apocalyptic manner). Authenticity, then, is subjective and “achieved” through applications of power (Zukin 23); it is socially constructed, not organic. And even as those who seek it deploy the language of origins, of befores and afters, the concept succumbs to (and therefore contributes to) the tension between apocalyptic endings and continuities so important to Nadelson’s New York City. For the search for and reclamation of origins is always historicised, ideologically charged and evolving; it is one of New York’s enduring characteristics that authenticities are constantly finding themselves embattled, lost, and found. And there is never a “sharp break” between them.

So the crimes and misdemeanours that occur in *Disturbed Earth* and *Red Hook,* both actual and anticipated, are, unsurprisingly, appropriate to the concerns central to the novels that I have outlined – immigration, gentrification, authenticity and the effects of global forces on localities. They derive, particularly in *Red Hook*, with its focus on gentrification, from the conflict that arises when different claims are made to spatial and temporal authenticity – that is, the authenticity of neighborhoods and competing narratives of their histories. In this essay I employ a neologism, “crimescape,” which expresses crime’s relationship to community and place. It is derived from Tim Ingold’s term “taskscape,” which refers to the social character of a landscape as it develops through the practices of the people who have inhabited it. Landscape is “constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves” (Ingold 152). Past practices of dwelling, work and movement inform present activities and suggest, in turn, future practices. Thus the taskscape has a temporal aspect in the manner of Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope – time is revealed through particular constructions of space. The “crimescape” is a special form of the taskscape: crimes – be they murders, frauds, thefts or acts of terror – suggest and contribute to the social and economic character of the city and neighborhoods in which they occur, and the manner of their narration and investigation (if the fictional genre requires formal investigation) implies a particular kind of historicity, temporality and spatiality.

For example, *The Brooklyn Follies*, though it cannot be considered a crime novel in any conventional sense, contains a tragic storyline concerned with forgery – firstly of paintings, and secondly of a supposed original manuscript of *The Scarlet Letter*. In the deeply gentrified neighbourhood of Park Slope, forgery instates an appropriate crimescape because it serves to reinforce a constitutive ideological assumption of gentrification: that no matter how eccentric and eclectic the residents may be, they share an horizon of expectation based on a particular humanistic notion of authenticity rooted in utilitarian individualism. Such an ideology finds any form of copying rebarbative because it demands that the gentrified way of life be valorised as “original”: the unmasking and shaming of the forger restores faith in communal originality and, importantly, upholds the cultural and economic value of the artwork as commodity. By contrast, the crime of squatting in Auster’s *Sunset Park* (2010) describes a more benign crimescape. In occupying the abandoned house in Sunset Park, Bing Nathan and his eclectic group of comrades see themselves as “protecting the safety of the street, making life more livable for everyone around them” (77). Squatting is part of a process of community-building at a local level which is conceived in direct response to the global recession.

As a final, somewhat absurd, example, Helene Buzzi, one of the minor characters in Amy Sohn’s satire on contemporary parenthood *Motherland* (2013), steals brand-name baby strollers from the streets of Park Slope. Her crime is a highly individualized response to what she perceives as a reduction in the local quality of life under excessive gentrification. So-called “ubermoms,” the affluent mothers who have migrated to the Slope from Manhattan and parade their children in their designer clothes as tokens of their economic success, lack, according to Helene, “*consciousness of a greater society*” (83, italics in original). Pavements blocked by expensive, elaborate buggies enact in spatial terms the commodification of lifestyles under global capitalism and the results of uneven development – the supposed homogenisation of bourgeois consumer desires coupled with increasing socioeconomic division in localities. Thus Helene’s confiscation of these baby vehicles (which she then hides in her basement) constitutes an idiosyncratic corrective to the effects of these global forces.

In Artie Cohen’s New York, as we have seen, people picture themselves living on the edge – of the land, of reason, of disaster, of devastating loss. With this predisposition to apocalyptic thinking, it is no surprise that the crimescape of both novels at first appears, often with the aid of pathetic fallacy, excessively apocalyptic. In *Red Hook*, the journalist Jack Santiago exploits post 9/11 fear during a Republican convention in Manhattan to create a story about an influx of “nukes” into the city (*Red Hook* 305). (Nuclear terror is one of many connections between different Artie Cohen novels: *Red Mercury Blues* is named after the lethal substance that may or may not have been imported from Russia and sold out of a Brooklyn car parts store.) In *Disturbed Earth*, Sonny Lippert posits a new and terrifying crimescape when he argues that “the rise in child abuse, in kidnapping, was connected to the fear that was rampant everywhere” (*Earth* 106).

The climactic scenes of *Disturbed Earth*, when Artie finally discovers that his autistic nephew Billy is the perpetrator of a kidnapping and murder, take place during the worst blizzard to have hit New York in years, “the kind of storm that paralyzed the city” (*Earth* 220).(This is yet another intertextual reference: *Hot Poppies* begins with a similarly crippling storm.) Symbolic of an imminent crossing over into nothingness, the blanket of snow might be read as a tabula rasa, but more accurately it should be seen as potentially enabling a form of amnesia, a covering over of traces. I employ the term “amnesia” in the idiosyncratic sense Jonathan Lethem repeatedly does in his novels and short stories – to signify a willed forgetting, and a refusal to recognise that other communities of people different to you are nonetheless experiencing the world in similar ways. This is the significance of Artie’s somewhat clumsy assessment of Billy’s moral disconnection from his criminal acts: “A faintly puzzled look was on his face as if he slept perplexed by the fact that what he had done was wrong. He didn’t really understand what he did or why; it occurred to me that in that way he was like America” (*Earth* 385). Thus Billy’s autism becomes a metaphor for an insulating isolationism that refuses to acknowledge the full global implications of national decisions, or, as Miranda Joseph describes, the supplementary relationship between global and local forces (Joseph 2-3).

That is why the Artie Cohen novels so forcefully depict immigrant experience: focussing on the lives of Russians in Brighton Beach and Hispanics in Red Hook serves as a constant reminder that a national imaginary of renewals and clean breaks is not just factitious but morally dubious. And that is why, ultimately, the immigrant, multilingual detective and the crimescape through which he travels resist apocalyptic thinking. Unless one visualises events, no matter how catastrophic they might appear, along a historical continuum and as part of local and global interactions, then apocalypse becomes an excuse for forgetfulness, and simply a chance to start over and disregard the political, cultural and social continuities that, complexly combined, brought about the catastrophe in the first place. To emphasise continuities requires a hard-headed, pragmatic determination not all of the characters possess; it can lead to the relentlessly bleak outlook of Artie’s half-sister Genia, or to the flinty-eyed optimism of Artie’s new girlfriend Maxine. She says of New York, the city she could never leave: “I loved it on September 10, I think it’s important to keep on loving it” (*Red Hook* 101).

In *Manhattan 62* Reggie Nadelson keeps on loving New York. In this novel, however, her nostalgic affection is channelled into a very particular time and place – the bohemian Greenwich Village scene of the early 1960s “where girls with long hair lay in the green grass and read poetry” (9), where “the famous beatnik writer broke the toilet door” in the Cedar bar (24) and where kids waiting in line at Café Wha excitedly ask: “Did you hear that new guy, Dylan? You heard him?” (51). And yet it is also the time of “the goddamn Cold War, of them and us, politics and war, gulags, massacres, nukes, the KGB and CIA, and of the Cuban Missile Crisis” (1). All of which means that the initial meeting in Washington Square between the narrator – Irish-American NYPD detective Pat Wynne – and a charismatic Russian émigré called Max Ostalsky provokes in Pat a deep questioning of his own aspirations and lifestyle choices but also of his political views. Not only does Wynne’s friendship with Max and the seductive Nancy Rudnick provide “easy transit to a different world where there’s music all the time, where nobody seems to care about making money, and artists and writers hang around the cafés” (10), it also fuels his interest in Communism “and the Russians, who are the real goods and run the whole Commie show” (15). When Max is suspected of being a spy and of murdering a young Cuban man, Wynne’s affections and allegiances are tested even more strenuously. In this respect, he performs a similar structural function to Artie Cohen: his personal experiences – including fighting in Korea and studying Russian history at Fordham (15) – are a conduit for the introduction of a crimescape informed by the wider global, political narratives of the time.

However, *Manhattan 62* is evidently not only about the time in which its story is set. To include in its selection of prefatory questions both a specific reference to the Cuban Missile Crisis and an extract from E. B. White’s 1949 essay “Here is New York” claiming that “[t]he city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a wedge of geese can quickly end this island fantasy” is to implant in the reader’s mind from the outset the political and symbolic connections between the early 1960s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. In both cases, the United States is “a superpower that seems haunted by fear – fear, among other things, of its own possible impotence and potential decline” (Gray 21). Throughout the narrative of *Manhattan 62*, these connections are emphasised. The following passage is typical. On his way to visit Mike Bounine, the man he suspects may be “running Ostalsky” (195), Wynne reflects:

The bombs would turn the subways into a fiery hell, incinerating men, women and children

trapped underground. More nukes would hit us, the Empire State Building, the Chrysler, all

the skyscrapers that pierced the New York sky, all that gleaming steel, concrete, marble,

wiped off the face of the earth as if the buildings were sandcastles caught in a stiff breeze

[. . .] It was coming. (193-4)

Although Wynne somewhat melodramatically claims “[d]eep down people knew that once it

began, there would be no hope” (195), the reader’s privileged perspective allows for understanding that such apocalyptic thinking has proved to be unfounded, just as the destruction of the Twin Towers’ “gleaming steel, concrete, marble” did not usher in the end of times. And yet, once again, the expectation of imminent apocalypse is the basis of similarity and thus forces us to consider the events Wynne describes, as well as contemporary events (including the reading of the novel) in properly historical terms through the play of familiarity and distance from immediacy fiction allows.

*Manhattan 62* is one of many historical New York novels, many of them crime stories, to have been published after 2001. They include Elizabeth Gaffney’s nineteenth-century thriller *Metropolis* (2006), Jay Rubenfeld’s Freudian murder mystery *The Interpretation of Murder* (2006), Emily Barton’s *Brookland* (2006), which ends rather apocalyptically with a huge conflagration in a gin distillery, and Lyndsay Faye’s police drama *The Gods of Gotham* (2012). The contemporary New York historical novel begs to be understood as one of a “highly varied and ever-growing range of literary responses” to ‘9/11’ as both a set of historical events and as a symbol (Keniston and Quinn 2). As Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn argue, as more time elapsed after the attacks, the sense that these events were incommensurable, “unprecedented and cataclysmic” gave way to a desire “to place 9/11 into an historical framework” as a means of “refusing incommensurability.” With this in mind, contemporary New York historical novels participate in “the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity” made possible by increased historical distance (Keniston and Quinn 3, italics in original).

In traumatological terms, such novels – with their gruesome tales of murder, arson, disappeared children and the constant threat of confrontation and mass violence – operate, again paradoxically, as transfigured representations or repetitions of the traumatic event (or at least its ambience and its individual and collective psychological effects) as well as retroactive predictions of the event, which serve to replace shock and rupture with anticipatory fear. They explicitly step outside the arrested time of trauma (what Kristiaan Versluys calls “springing the time trap” [4]) by engaging directly with historical themes, purposefully displacing the events of 9/11 in order to locate them within a longer form of “narrative memory” (Caruth 153). In so doing, they counteract the idea that 9/11 is “a limit event that shatters the symbolic resources of the culture and defeats the normal processes of meaning making and semiosis” (Versluys 1). In other words, they provide an alternative approach to the incommensurability of apocalypse, showing that what is perceived as apocalypse is, in fact, commensurable and explicable.

The epilogue to *Manhattan 62*, called “New York City, 2012,” further stresses continuities. Fifty years after his first meeting with Max Ostalsky, Wynne reflects on the events of the intervening years – revelations about the planned murder of Bobby Kennedy in 1962, the DNA tests connecting Max to the murder of Rica Valdes, Wynne’s marriage to Nancy Rudnick, their move to Sag Harbor, the discovery of Max’s notebooks among Nancy’s things after her death – and, in descriptive passages linking this novel to *Disturbed Earth* and, particularly, *Red Hook*, the transformations New York has undergone: “The old waterfront was full of high-rise apartments and yuppies on thousand-dollar bikes. All fixed up now, Pier 46 was populated by people who read the *New York Times*. The High Line has become the fanciest damn park you ever saw” (414). Finally, Wynne meets Max’s son, who turns out to be none other than Detective Artie Cohen: “he was a dead ringer for his dad: tall, dark-haired, with the same blue eyes as his father, the same handsome, humorous face” (416). The ending is neat and knowing but, as I suggested at the beginning of this article, such intertextual links between Nadelson’s novels mirror at a generic literary level the real-life historical continuities the author wishes to emphasise. What is more, though the ending is undoubtedly nostalgic and suffused with homosocial affection, it is essentially non-romantic because it resists a facile division of experience into treasured befores and debased afters, and the fetishisation of the moment after which things could “never be the same again.” For Wynne, and for the reader, Artie fills in some of the details of Max’s life since the early 1960s, but not all of it. The final words of the novel refuse finality and predict further continuities:

My ears filled with tears for so many years lost. “Is there more? About your dad?”

“It’s a long story,” he said.

“I have plenty of time.” (418)

They capture the irony implicit in the *Lost New York* exhibition held at New York University in 2009: that “[e]verything passes” (*Manhattan 62* 415) but, in recognising that fact, one realises that nothing is really lost.

**Works Cited**

Auster, Paul. *The Brooklyn Follies*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

- - - . *Sunset Park*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.

Barton, Emily. *Brookland*. New York: Picador, 2006.

Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University

Press, 1996.

Cohen, Gabriel. *The Graving Dock*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007.

Faye, Lyndsay. *The Gods of Gotham*. New York: Berkley, 2012.

Florey, Kitty Burns. *Solos*. New York: Berkley, 2004.

Gaffney, Elizabeth. *Metropolis*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Gray, Richard. *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell,

2011.

Ingold, Tim. “The Temporality of the Landscape.” *World Archaeology* 25.2 (1993): 152-74.

Hoberek, Andrew. “Introduction: After Postmodernism.” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.3

(2007): 233-47.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* London: Verso,

1991.

Joseph, Miranda. *Against the Romance of Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 2002.

Kelly, Adam. “Moments of Decision in Contemporary American Fiction: Roth, Auster,

Eugenides.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 51 (2010): 313-32.

Keniston, Ann and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (eds.) *Literature After 9/11*. 2008. New York:

Routledge, 2010.

Nadelson, Reggie. *Disturbed Earth*. 2004. London: Arrow, 2005.

- - - . *Hot Poppies*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997.

---. *Londongrad*. London: Arrow, 2009.

---. *Manhattan 62*. London: Corvus, 2014.

---. *Red Hook*. 2005. London: Arrow, 2006.

---. *Red Mercury Blues*. 1995. London: Arrow, 2002.

Patell, Cyrus K. And Bryan Waterman. “Introduction.” *Lost New York 1609-2009.* New

York: Fales Library, 2009.

Rubenfeld, Jed. *The Interpretation of Murder*. 2006. London: Headline Review, 2007.

Sohn, Amy. *Motherland*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012.

Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. New York: Columbia

University Press, 2009.

White, E. B. “Here is New York.” *Empire City: New York through the Centuries*. Ed.

Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005: 695-711.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. London: Hogarth Press, 1973.

Zukin, Sharon. *Naked City: the Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. New York:

Oxford University Press, 2010.

**James Peacock** is Senior Lecturer in English and American Literatures at Keele University in the UK. He specialises in contemporary American fiction and has published monographs on Paul Auster and Jonathan Lethem. Currently he is working on a book about fictions set in Brooklyn.

1. This is true of other detective stories set in Red Hook. Gabriel Cohen’s *The Graving Dock* (2007) begins with the discovery of a boy’s body in a floating coffin, and ends with the drowning of the killer. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)