UNDERSTANDING WILLIAM GIBSON
Gerald Alva Miller Jr.

Gerald Alva Miller Jr.’s Understanding William Gibson is a thoughtful examination of the life and work of William Gibson, author of eleven novels and twenty short stories. Gibson is the recipient of many notable awards for science fiction writing including the Nebula, Hugo, and Philip K. Dick awards. Gibson’s iconic novel, Neuromancer, popularized the concept of cyberspace. With his early stories and his first trilogy of novels, Gibson became the father figure for a new genre of science fiction called “cyberpunk” that brought a gritty realism to its cerebral plots involving hackers and artificial intelligences.

This study situates Gibson as a major figure in both science fiction history and contemporary American fiction, and it notes how his aesthetic affected both areas of literature. Miller follows a brief biographical sketch and a survey of the works that influenced Gibson with an examination that divides the body of work into early stories, his three major novel trilogies, and his standalone works. Miller also delves into Gibson’s obscure stories, published and unpublished screenplays, major essays, and collaborations with other authors.

Miller’s exploration starts by connecting Gibson to the major countercultural elements that influenced him (the Beat Generation, hippies, and the punk rock movement) while also placing him within the history of science fiction and examining how his early works reacted against contemporaneous trends in the genre.

Miller then traces Gibson’s aesthetic transformations across his two subsequent novel trilogies that increasingly eschew distant futures either to focus on our contemporary historical moment as a kind of science fiction itself or to imagine technological singularities that might lie just around the corner. The study concludes with a discussion of Gibson’s lasting influence and a brief examination of his most recent novel, The Peripheral, which signals yet another radical change in Gibson’s aesthetic.

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Understanding William Gibson

Gerald Alva Miller Jr. has a doctorate in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and specializes in twentieth-century American literature, critical theory, film studies, science fiction, and horror. He is an English instructor at Alamance Community College in Graham, North Carolina, and he is the author of Exploring the Limits of the Human through Science Fiction.