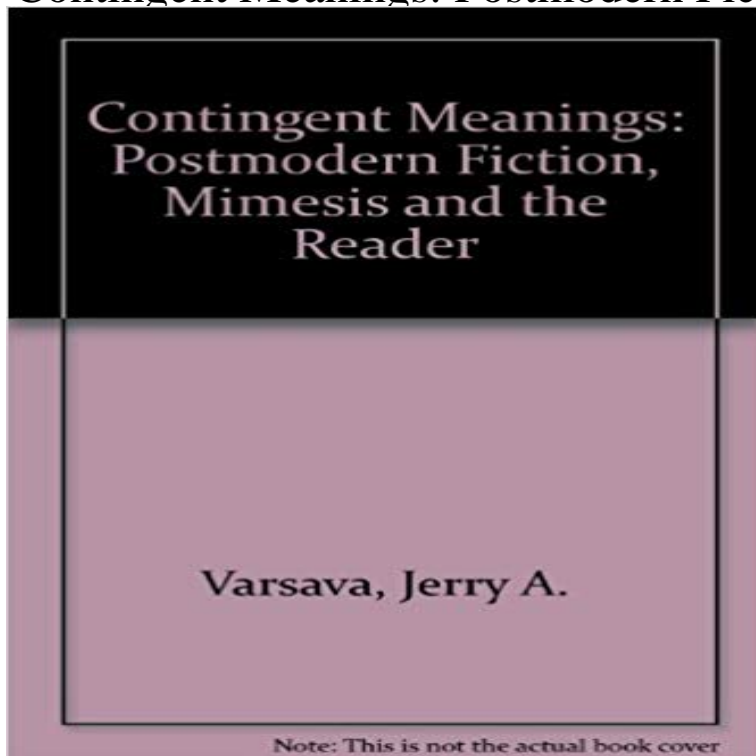


## Contingent Meanings: Postmodern Fiction, Mimesis, and the Reader



In making a case for a mimetic function in postmodern fiction, Jerry Varsava evaluates the American reception of postmodern fiction, challenging both the critics who condemn postmodernism as morally pointless and those who celebrate postmodern fiction for its aesthetic alone. He then advances a view of mimesis: the reader of fiction, not the writer, establishes the texts reference to the world. Varsava interprets selected postmodern fictions in the second part of *Contingent Meanings*, applying his claim that such works in fact do relate to fundamental moral concerns in the late 20th century. In the works of Walter Abish, Robert Coover, Peter Handke, and Gilbert Sorrentino, Varsava demonstrates a link between formal innovation and such contemporary issues as anti-Semitism, consumerism, the culture industry, the fetishization of high culture, gender politics, the narrativity of experience, and revisionist historiography. Postmodern fiction, Varsava concludes, may be viewed as a kind of critical realism that depicts, however paradoxically, foibles of contemporary life.

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