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Part II

Introduction

A. The Scope of the Volume

With this new volume in our series of *Teaching Contemporary Literature and Culture*, we hope to accommodate students' interests in the favoured art form of the novel in English. Its relevance both in the EFL classroom and in the university seminar of literary and cultural studies is based upon the extraordinary liveliness of this genre, complemented by its outstanding success on the worldwide literary markets. It continues to flourish in many different cultures today. Hence, it is the novels' power to appeal in a large variety of ways to students at both school and university levels that this collection of essays wishes to reflect. This volume provides a wealth of material to underscore the richness of the contemporary scene of the novel in English and transmit, wherever possible, some of the enthusiasm it has always inspired in its editors and contributors.

In the attempt to provide new perspectives on the contemporary novel in English, the present volume offers readings of thirty novels in two parts. Again, our aim is a twofold one: to introduce the reader to a great variety of contemporary novels set or written in English-speaking countries around the globe, and, second, to promote and support the reading and teaching of these novels. Both teachers and students at school and university levels will be able to profit from the contributions on individual works collected here. They show a wide range of approaches and points for discussion, all of which, however, share a commitment to analysing, learning about and, most of all, enjoying the reading of narratives.

As in the previous volume on drama, this new collection again offers a global perspective, while the editors aimed at a transnational scope in the selection of novels. Although these can be arranged according to the main three disciplinary subdivisions of English Studies characteristic of many English departments and many curricula, consisting of British and Irish Studies (British including Literature in English of Scottish and Welsh origin), American Studies and Postcolonial Studies / New English Literatures, the respective importance of each of these areas has been newly evaluated. The emphasis on the "novel in English" from the English-speaking parts of the world instead of on the "English novel" is deliberately strong in comparison to more traditional canons and arrangements in anthologies. Novelists from Australia and New Zealand,

Asia, Canada, the Caribbean and Africa are given space here in order to avoid the impression, still present in many histories and anthologies of English literature, that these "new" literatures merely form an appendix to the major traditions of British and American literature. In the choice of novels from Britain, Ireland and the US, the editors have tried to indicate the growing richness and variety in terms of cultures and ethnicities symptomatic of textual productions in these countries.

The novels, like the plays in our previous collection, thus chosen are still a long way from being representative in a constitutive sense. Rather, they have been included with regard to their provocative and controversial potential, their popularity and/or success with readers, their innovative qualities and possible contribution to intercultural understanding. They raise questions as to their adaptability to international contexts and their resistance to cultural assimilation in asserting culture-specific, local forms of art. The selected novels serve as indicators to the growing richness and continued relevance of the contemporary novel in English as a mode of cultural negotiation in Anglophone countries and traditions around the world. The novels and their readings in the two parts of this volume therefore will have achieved all the editors can hope for if they manage to raise students' and teachers' curiosity and to guide them towards reading and studying the novels themselves and then be equipped or at least motivated for independent explorations further afield.

We believe that the interpretations collected in these volumes can be profitable both on the level of advanced EFL teaching at schools and at university seminar level. What pupils perhaps lack in scholarly wisdom, they may make up for in curiosity and freshness of the mind. And what students perhaps lack in spontaneous interest, they may make up for by appreciating scholarly approaches. Therefore, it is our wish to present accessible interpretations and to create an interest in narrative texts in general. Each article loosely follows a general outline but without rigid adherence. It begins with a short introduction to the author's biography, the novel's generic traditions and its historical contexts. This is followed by references to the novel's innovative qualities and its intertextual aspects. The ensuing plot synopsis leads to a short interpretation, focussing on its main issues and a close reading of an important chapter or excerpt, which could give those not familiar with the text a first impression of its textual characteristics. In general, articles conclude with helpful advice on teaching activities and a short list of relevant and up-to-date secondary sources.

B. The Contributions at a Glance

The variety of approaches taken up in the contributions can perhaps best be discerned in the following brief characterization of their main points of discussion. Thus, MARGARET ATWOOD'S *Oryx and Crake* (2003) is best to be read as a critique of a purely scientific world-view, Barbara Korte advises. What informs this haunting work by the Canadian Booker-prize winning author is the plea for humanism, a "feminized" approach to science and respect for the world in which we live. It raises some of the most urgent problems Western civilization is facing at the dawn of the 21st century: ecological problems, the permeation of reality by the media, the social consequences of late capitalism, a terrorism provoked by the West's claim to hegemony, and above all the ethical challenge posed by scientific progress and technology.

The Sea (2005) is a novel that explores the realms of the mind, prodding the limits of our capacity to remember and reconstruct traumatic events suffered in the past. Susanne Peters argues that this postmodern novel by Irish author JOHN BANVILLE forges an artistic link between personal grief and the possibility of relief through the act of writing. It is an important book in its clarity of ekphrastic vision, investigating the complex relation between language and memory, the reconstruction of the past. Although Banville's concept of language does not credit its healing powers, his challenging exploration of visual memory makes it worthwhile to include in this volume.

Thomas Rommel argues that JULIAN BARNES'S novels are perfect embodiments of postmodern theory in fiction. His *History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) is a challenging novel, raising issues of intertextuality in fiction, and inviting comparison with a wealth of other texts, among them the Old Testament, legal documents, epistolary novels or autobiographies. Barnes is feigning authorial innocence as well as questioning the novel's own status as a comprehensive piece of fiction. Thus, the heterogeneous nature of the text is well suited for an in-depth analysis of what constitutes fiction, postmodern literature and theory, and fictionality.

T.C. BOYLE'S *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995) is an artfully organized novel tracing the charged issue of illegal Mexican immigration into Southern California through three books of decreasing length, writes Peter Freese. The book translates a political issue into individual experience by means of a double-barreled plot which presents the world alternately from two contrasted and subtly intertwined points of view: the one of well-to-do Anglos residing in gated communities and deeply resenting the influx of immigrants and that of poor Mexican *indocumentatos* dreaming of a better life in the promised land of America and eking out a miserable existence in the canyons. On one level *The Tortilla Curtain* is a psychologically

convincing cautionary tale about how easily a well-meaning liberal humanist can turn into a mindless racist.

In her third novel *So Far from God* (1992), ANA CASTILLO combines themes that are typical of the Mexican-American cultural heritage and historical past with aspects of modern and postmodern American life, argues Marga Munkelt. The apparent peacefulness of the rural setting is counterbalanced by the thematic incorporation of world politics and worldwide challenges like war, poverty, health problems and the deterioration of the environment. The narrative structure of *So Far From Good* juxtaposes elements of orality and complex forms of intertextuality, thought presentation and reader involvement. The most important achievements of *So Far from God,* in addition to its emphasis on the transformation of gender roles, are its innovative application of a multifaceted syncretism, its richness of intertextual references, and its playful switching of the narrator's identities and narrative styles.

Gerd Bayer suggests that J.M. COETZEE'S dual affiliation to Europe and South Africa allows us to place his novel *Foe* (1986) in at least two contexts, that of South African literature and that of the postmodern novel in English. In terms of its basic plot, *Foe* is a retelling of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe.* Apart from questioning the possibility of verbal communication, central themes are the writing of fiction and the brutal control of the cultural or ethnic other. Coetzee's *Foe* also combines multifarious intertextual references to the early history of the English novel with serious commentary about the craft of writing, the process of publication, and the relationship between fact and fiction.

Russell West-Pavlov argues that DAVID DABYDEEN'S *Bildungsroman The Intended* (1991) closely follows Franz Fanon's diagnosis of the colonized's alienation and documents the resulting desire to become white. The achievement of a more robust sense of selfhood, the construction of an identity, comes about through an identification with words. One dimension of Dabydeen's novel is clearly personal and autobiographical. However, the issue of collective cultural loss and provisional reconstruction in a temporary schoolground diaspora coalition has a significance beyond that of the personal. Dabydeen's contribution to the ongoing self-creation of British-Caribbean cultural identity has also considerable repercussions for British society as a whole.

The various restrictions and denials which are reflected in imagery and character development also inform the novel's unusual title, writes Silke Stroh of TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *The Book of NOT: Stopping the Time* (2006). The body itself, body functions, and food, feature repeatedly in this novel as sites and metaphors for the imposition and negotiation of (as well as resistance to) colonial and gender oppression. Among the *leitmo-*

tifs discussed are various constructions of space, stasis and movement. Generational conflicts likewise play an important part. The relative simplicity of the novel's language makes it accessible literary reading for senior secondary school pupils, while form and subject matter enhance its accessibility and attractiveness for senior secondary school and junior university students.

Among UNITY DOW'S concerns in *The Screaming of the Innocent* (2002) are the well-being and rights of children, particularly the way they fall prey to those meant to guide and guard them. As is the case with Coetzee's *Foe*, it is useful to read *The Screaming of the Innocent* against the backdrop of two literary traditions, in this case they are African women's writing and (postcolonial) crime fiction, argues Christine Matzke. Dow utilises a narrative of detection, particularly elements of the mystery story or clue-puzzle which is concerned with the identification of criminals and the rendering of an explanation for the crime. The novel thus blends elements of feminist and human rights' agendas frequently found in African women's writing with an inquiry into crime and social dynamics characteristic of narratives of detection.

RODDY DOYLE'S *Paddy Clarke* delineates the gradual disintegration of a marriage and family as remembered by their eldest child. Ingrid Wolter argues that Doyle parallels the trials and traumas of ten-year old Patrick Clarke with major environmental changes and instances of social disintegration in 1960s Ireland. In *Paddy Clarke*, political actions indeed affect Paddy, his friends, his family and the neighbourhood through the loss of playgrounds, the rising cruelty among the boys, families moving away, or shops closing down. Doyle gives the voice of a young first-person narrator much authenticity, which accounts for a large share in the appeal of the novel.

Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp is convinced that BUCHI EMECHETA'S novel *The New Tribe* (2000) is perfect classroom material both for A-Level students and university undergraduates. Emecheta focuses on "the new tribe", children of Nigerian background born and bred in Britain. In their attempt to stake a place in the country they were born in, the members of this new tribe have agendas and form alliances that differ from those of the previous generation of British immigrants. The novel traces its protagonist's journey from the initial, youthful stages of ignorance, naivety and illusion through to adulthood and self-knowledge in a chronological and linear narrative structure. Learning about difference concerns not only ethnicity, but also, for example, differences in class and gender, and Emecheta reminds us that it is not only a person's skin colour and ethnic origin that determine his or her social position and sense of

identity, defeating pre-conceived notions of ethnic essentialism and cultural purity.

JONATHAN FRANZEN'S bestseller novel of globalization *The Corrections* (2001) is a sprawling family saga of the 1990s, depicting its members in all their weaknesses and shortcomings, their longings and desolation, with a satirical, funny, and sometimes merciless prose, writes Christa Grewe-Volpp. It comprises a wide range of topics, from home-making and restaurant cooking, consumerism and the stock market, a luxury cruise and the railroad system, computer games and TV, new pharmaceutical products to the distressing aspects of aging. Taken together, they constitute a harrowing, expansive, depressing portrait of American culture.

Renate Brosch argues that KATE GRENVILLE'S *The Secret River* (2006) is a meticulously researched novel about the first settlement in Australia and hence provides a wealth of information about the historical situation of the colony. It is a novel that originates in an engagement with the Aboriginal question, and thus, setting is vitally important to this book. The story partly resembles that of a *Bildungsroman.* The central subject of the novel is the issue of entitlement to the land. The novel details a variety of responses to the racial conflict and embodies these in a gallery of settler caricatures. The passages of mutual visual observation between black and white manifest the inescapable fallacy of culturally conditioned perception as well as the potential for imaginative transgression of the boundaries of conventionalized ways of seeing.

ROMESH GUNESEKERA'S first novel *Reef* (1994) is about the Sri Lankan experience in the twentieth century, one of utmost civil strife. Yet, Gunesekera's work is not political in a simplistic, partisan way. As Florian Kläger suggests, its rather foregrounds the precariousness of human lives against the backdrop of civil war, the rootlessness of exile, and the tentative efforts at home-making away from home. This hybridity is of course a central characteristic of *Reef*'s protagonist: after the fashion of a *Bildungsroman*, the novel presents its main character in a state of transition from childhood to adulthood, from ignorance and innocence to proficiency and experience, from life in a domestic environment to a migrant state, from a state of dependency to his release from his master's influence.

Marion Fries-Dieckmann argues in her contribution on NICK HORNBY'S instant success and cult classic *High Fidelity* (1995) that the main feature is that of the 'New Lad' of the 1990s. Human fallibility, adolescent fears and imaginary scenarios are rendered in a most humorous way that invite the reader to identify with the protagonist. This is supported by an informal, bold and colloquial language which contains

striking references to music and musicians. The innovative quality of *High Fidelity* can be attributed to two major aspects: the crisis of masculinity and the topicality of pop culture, both of which highly commend it for discussions at both school and university level.

Jarmila Mildorf also stresses the suitability of KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *Never Let Me Go* (2005) for teaching purposes. Although the novel refers hardly anywhere in the text explicitly to medical practice, the power of medicine and its implications for society loom large in a world where, it turns out, some people are cloned and raised for the sole aim of becoming donors for organ transplants. Ishiguro's novel needs to be read in a context of a long literary tradition about technological advances that enable humans to refashion themselves and about the moral implications thereof. *Never Let Me Go* is quite innovative in that it adopts the perspective of a clone, inviting the reader to regard the clone as a fellow human being and to feel sympathetic towards her. While the novel deals with a highly topical issue, it is also replete with the sorrows and heartaches of puberty, with love and relationship problems, and with the challenges of growing up in a parentless and somewhat strange environment.

Among the most fascinating features of JACKIE KAY'S *Trumpet* (1998) is the impression that it gives of variations on a particular musical theme, argues Silvia Mergenthal. Kay's novel is challenging in terms of its narrative structure and technique, and it demands active participation in piecing the protagonist's story together. Its topic of sexual transformation is one in the course of which individuals – who often articulate feelings of being trapped in the "wrong" body – attempt to adjust their bodies to what they regard as their "real" gender. Thus, *Trumpet* is poised between essentialist and non-essentialist conceptions of self.

The narrative voice in HANIF KUREISHI'S *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) is apparently fully aware of its search for belonging and identity. Susanne Reichl argues that the struggle with questions of identity and performance, is something that the reader can trace throughout the novel. Two approaches to ethnicity are present in the novel: the inescapability of ethnic identity, which makes it impossible for the protagonist to negate his Indian identity altogether, and the powerful notion of the constructedness of ethnic identity. Thus, all the major characters in *The Buddha of Suburbia* undergo a development that underscores the performativity of identity, whether related to ethnicity, class or gender. The novel is rich in characters and back-stories, in humorous and sad scenes, in mockery and very serious issues, and last but not least in opportunities for students to identify engaging concerns.

JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *The Namesake* (2004) is a novel that chronicles the life of a family of Indian immigrants in America and, set between 1968

and 2000, spans a period of over thirty years. The clash between tradition-bound life in Calcutta and urban America, the longing for the certainties of Indian life, the hybrid identity of the major character and the difficult process of assimilation, address many essential aspects of immigrant existence, writes Oliver Lindner. However, it does not only capture what it means to live between East and West but also narrates the joys and hardships of growing up and finding a place in society, thereby incorporating fundamental elements of adolescent experience. One of the major merits of this novel lies in the emotional depth of its characters. Both first- and second-generation Indian immigrants, as represented by the parents and their children, reveal very different attitudes towards their new home country.

The reasons for bestowing accolades on ANDREA LEVY'S *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) are legion, is the opinion of Susanne Pichler. All her characters − black and white, Jamaicans, Jamaican immigrants to Great Britain, their British-born children and the white English − can be weak, brave, courageous, hopeless, good or bad. It is Levy's portrayal of their everyday experiences, her exhaustive and intelligent exploration of the reality of juggling multiple (ethnic) identities and histories that her black British characters face that draws the readers to her novels. With its treatment of first-generation immigrants' initial difficulties of gaining a foothold in British society, with its treatment of black Britons' search for "home" and "belonging", as well as cultural and personal wholeness, and with its treatment of racism and institutional discrimination, this novel expertly spins a whole web of themes of social, cultural and political relevance.

Saturday is further proof of IAN MCEWAN'S outstanding narrative skills as a psycho-social satirist, argues Ines Detmers. McEwan's fiction may be said to carry a deliberate tinge of absurdity and therefore purports to provide an analysis of increasingly self-estranged forms of both society and human nature. Among the central topics addressed in *Saturday* are manifestations of both individual and collective vulnerability, shaped thematically and structurally by motifs of intrusion and invasion. Crucial to such a reading is to discover the symptoms of degeneration displayed in the text. As *Saturday* is rooted in the tradition of the consciousness novel, it lends itself very well to teaching postmodern fiction with special regard to its modernist sources.

Remembering Babylon (1993) is certainly one of the most intriguing novels by DAVID MALOUF, is the opinion of Danuta Fjellestad. Major events in Australian history provide the crucial context, while the profound dilemmas and traumas lying at the very foundation of Australian settler culture are inseparably bound up with the processes of colonization. The tale that Malouf unfolds focuses on the transformations

of the white community that are initiated by the protagonist's entry into it. A set of closely related, though not identical, terms is helpful in describing these figurations: in-betweenness, liminality, hybridity, going native, and the Other. Reading this novel within the framework of postcolonial studies generates inquiries that encourage both novice and veteran readers to reflect on the complexity of individual, communal, and national identity formation.

Despite its internalisation and its emphasis on minute detail rather than grand or momentous developments, ROHINTON MISTRY'S *Family Matters* (2002) offers great insight into the human psyche, according to Ursula Kluwick. Since Mistry's characters frequently feel powerless, they spend a lot of time brooding about their situations and problems, and their various plans and designs together create a huge jigsaw puzzle of human nature. The novel challenges students' (multi-) cultural competence by introducing them to an element of Indian culture they are likely to be unfamiliar with: middle-class Parsis.

Beloved (1987) is TONI MORRISON'S most successful one so far, writes Walter Göbel. It deals with slavery and its aftermath, the period of Reconstruction, while the shadow of slavery and its traumatic effects upon a family of former slaves are literally embodied in the ghost of Beloved, which haunts the present and becomes more and more spiteful until it is expelled in a ritualistic act of communal bonding. From a late 20th-century viewpoint, such an act of remembering must include the imaginative appropriation and re-interpretation of historical facts and data. *Beloved* is a special kind of historical novel in two respects. It is not only concerned with the depiction of history but also with its banishing, and it presents a history which has never been official or public.

The postmodern and/or postcolonial features of MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *The English Patient* (1992) as well as its political implications are thrown into bold relief when the novel is read in comparison with Anthony Minghella's highly acclaimed film adaptation, argues Jutta Zimmermann. While some view the novel as a postcolonial statement, others view the novel as typically postmodern in the liberties it takes with historical facts and in its obfuscation of moral responsibility. Turning an alleged Nazi collaborator into a tragic hero whose actions are the result of a web of circumstances is viewed as a politically questionable, even immoral, act. Ondaatje questions the concept of history as a "continuous progression", while the sense of apocalyptic doom, which some critics take for the novel's predominant mood, is counter-balanced by the narrator's creative impulse.

Set largely in 1998, the summer of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, and narrated by Nathan Zuckerman, PHILIP ROTH'S *The Human Stain* (2000) is

the story of an allegedly Jewish Professor of classics at a fictitious college. Jens-Martin Gurr argues that with the tension between individual freedom and the demands of a larger community, questions of ethnic identity, and the impact of historical forces on the individual, this novel brings together many of Roth's themes. *The Human Stain* thus also appears as an unobtrusively and yet consistently self-reflexive novel: In addition to the numerous references to the writing of *The Human Stain* by Nathan Zuckerman and his reflections on what one can know about another human being, Roth occasionally uses or alludes to characters from his own previous novels. Beyond its engagement with classical drama, *The Human Stain* is fraught with intertextual references and allusions. The novel can also be read as an engagement with the canon of American literature and some of its classic themes such as self-reliance, individuality and personal freedom.

An interpretation of ARUNDHATI ROY'S *The God of Small Things* (1997) with its various narrative and thematic strands will always need to focus on an exemplary selection of topics, is the opinion of Laurenz Volkmann. One of these is globalization, as the novel quite adamantly describes the phenomenon: deeply intertwined with and even rooted in historical forces shaping and forming India's society and its individuals. In a more critical vein, this contribution argues that Roy's sophisticated version of primitivism seems to endorse time-honoured traditions of focusing on the male Other's physical attractiveness, a tradition dating back to Robinson Crusoe's famous description of Friday's noble, quasi-European features.

While JOHN UPDIKE'S novel *Terrorist* (2006) about the growing up of a New Jersey Islamic terrorist certainly assimilates details that refer to non-fictional terrorism, the thriller elements are decidedly pushed to the margins of a theological plot concept. Jörg Thomas Richter argues that as a thriller, *Terrorist* draws much of its suspense from references to terrorist incidents in the context of the 9/11 attacks. However, the thriller plot deceptively introduces a theological problem in the unsettling historical spectacle of terrorism, and Updike takes contemporary terrorism as an occasion to raise the theological issue of theodicy in a time marked by pluralism, globalization and hedonist consumer culture.

Virginia Richter writes that at the core of JANE URQUHART'S *The Stone Carvers* (2001) is the figure of Klara Becker, a third-generation descendant of German immigrants to Canada, and the inheritor of two traditions of craftsmanship handed down from the paternal and maternal sides of her family respectively: the art of woodcarving and the art of tailoring. Klara's story is embedded within two larger historical narratives: the founding of Shoneval in the nineteenth century and Canadian participation in the First World War. Urquhart's work can thus be placed

in the context of transcultural writers although Urquhart focuses more exclusively on European immigration. Thanks to its thematic richness, *The Stone Carvers* can be included in different ways into a university syllabus.

Annette Kern-Stähler discusses RUDY WIEBE'S *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994) as an example of historiographic metafiction, arguing that the novel scrutinizes colonialist texts and challenges the world view inherent in the expedition narratives and the colonialist conception of the Arctic as a *terra nullius*. Significantly, however, Wiebe does not exclude the English point of view. As a multi-voiced novel, *A Discovery of Strangers* includes various perspectives: the animals of the land, the native Dene and the British explorers. Wiebe's novel lends itself perfectly to teaching intercultural competence and to raising the students' awareness of ecocultural interrelationships.

How to Use this Book

In keeping with the transnational concept of the volume, we have abandoned traditional compartmentalizations and structurings along geographical demarcations and present the contributions in mere alphabetical order. Where, for example, would Kureishi's or Gunesekera's works be positioned? Doubtless, these are novels that fit into a variety of categories such as Black British, Commonwealth literature of Indian origin, or *Bildungsroman*. And where, for example, would we have to put Ondaatje's *The English Patient*? – a novel written by a Sri-Lankan born, Canadian author that deals with memories of a Hungarian count, stranded somewhere in Tuscany and being cared for by a Canadian nurse? Many of the novels included here defy facile compartmentalization. To the editors, it seems much more appropriate to group the novels according to a variety of dominant and recurring themes explored in them. Naturally, there are overlaps. A novel dealing with political involvement may also tackle generation conflicts. A novel dealing with gender will also raise issues of identity formation. Hence, it seems appropriate to suggest clusters broad enough to cover the range of topics dealt with in the novels.