

Ansgar Nünning, Vera Nünning, Alexander Scherr (eds.)

Literature and Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century

Cultural Concerns – Concepts – Case Studies

Ansgar Nünning und Vera Nünning (Hg.)

ELCH

Studies in English Literary and Cultural History

ELK

Studien zur Englischen Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft

Band 85

Ansgar Nünning, Vera Nünning,
Alexander Scherr (eds.)

Literature and Literary Studies
in the Twenty-First Century

Cultural Concerns – Concepts – Case Studies

 Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Nünning, Ansgar; Nünning, Vera; Scherr, Alexander (eds.):
Literature and Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century:
Cultural Concerns – Concepts – Case Studies /
Edited by Ansgar Nünning, Vera Nünning, Alexander Scherr. -
Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2021
(ELCH ; Band 85)
ISBN 978-3-86821-926-5

Umschlaggestaltung: Brigitta Disseldorf

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2021
ISBN 978-3-86821-926-5

Alle Rechte vorbehalten.
Nachdruck oder Vervielfältigung nur mit
ausdrücklicher Genehmigung des Verlags.

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier
Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503, Fax: (0651) 41504
Internet: <http://www.wvttrier.de>
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de
www.facebook.com/wvttrier

CONTENTS

Preface & Acknowledgements..... ix

ANSGAR NÜNNING, VERA NÜNNING & ALEXANDER SCHERR

Passion, Pleasure, Problem-Solving and Purpose:
Reinvigorating Literary Studies for the Twenty-First Century and Coping
with Challenges, Changing Contexts, Concerns and New Concepts 1

I. NEW ORIENTATIONS AND APPROACHES IN LITERARY STUDIES

JAN ALBER

Towards a Critical Ethical Narratology:
Narrative Strategies and World Views.....51

SIBYLLE BAUMBACH

“Only Connect”: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation and
Mindful Literary Studies.....73

VERA NÜNNING

Empathy as a Key Twenty-First-Century Issue:
Disciplinary Challenges and the Value of Literature.....93

ELIZABETH KOVACH & IMKE POLLAND-SCHMANDT

The Cultural Work of Forms:
Methods of New Formalism in the Twenty-First Century117

II. EMERGING TRENDS, FORMS AND GENRES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

ELIZABETH KOVACH

Absurdly on the Job: A New Spirit of Humour, Work Ethics
and Narrative Aesthetics in Twenty-First-Century Office Fictions.....137

ALEXANDER SCHERR

Cultural Concerns in Twenty-First-Century Plotless Fiction:
Everyday Experience, Form and ‘Possibilitarianism’ in Ben Lerner’s
Leaving the Atocha Station (2011).....151

ALEXANDRA EFFE

Autofiction in the Anthropocene: Ben Lerner's *10:04* (2014).....167

CHRISTINE SCHWANECKE

Crashing Finances, Clashing Genres: David Hare's
The Power of Yes (2009) as an Analysis of the 2007/8 Financial Crisis
in 'Journalist-Academic-Narrative-Dramatic' Terms185

III. KEY CULTURAL CONCERNS IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERATURE (I):
POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

IMKE POLLAND-SCHMANDT

Gauging the State of the Nation in 'BrexLit':
Literary Negotiations of Resurgent Nationalism and Regionalism.....203

CLAIRE EARNSHAW

Groups and Group Identities in Contemporary British Fiction.....221

GESINE BOWEN

Rituals and Ritual Change in the Twenty-First-Century Novel.....233

CHRISTINA JORDAN

Staging Britain's (A)Political Leader: Queen Elizabeth II
in Peter Morgan's Play *The Audience* (2015)245

MARIE-THERES STICKEL

How Publishing Houses Are Defying the Highly Digitalised Twenty-First
Century: Strategies of Branding and Designing Classic Books Series261

IV. KEY CULTURAL CONCERNS IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERATURE (II):
IMPERCEPTIBLE CHALLENGES FROM ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS TO MENTAL HEALTH

HANNAH KLAUBERT

Radiotoxic Flows in the World Risk Society:
New Fictions of Nuclear Disaster281

LIZA B. BAUER

Eating Kin or Making Kin?
Farm Animal Representations in Twenty-First-Century Fiction297

RAHEL SIXTA SCHMITZ

The Network Apocalypse in Twenty-First-Century Weird Fiction:
Narratives of Interconnectedness, Cosmic Horror and the End of Mankind315

JENNIFER KAPPE

The ‘Monster’ of Depression in Adam Haslett’s *Imagine Me Gone* (2016).....329

MARIJA SPIRKOVSKA

(Dis)Embodied Minds: Postmetropolitan Psychasthenia
in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2003).....343

V. KEY CULTURAL CONCERNS IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERATURE (III):
TRANSCULTURAL NARRATIVES AND DIASPORIC IDENTITIES
IN ANGLOPHONE WRITING

NADIA BUTT

New Approaches to the Concepts of Memory in Twenty-First-Century
Literature: Multiple Modes of Transcultural Memory in
Vikram Seth’s Memoir *Two Lives* (2005).....359

SNEŽANA VULETIĆ

Time and Its Potentialities in Twenty-First-Century South African Fiction
in English: A Case Study of Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2000)375

DARIA STEINER

Literary and Cultural Interventions in Twenty-First-Century
Global Migration Crises: The Trope of Famine Walks in
Irish Fiction during and after the Celtic Tiger Period389

THERESA KRAMPE

Translocal Places in Twenty-First-Century British Migrant Literature:
Elaine Proctor’s *Rhumba* (2011).....403

ELEONORA RAPISARDI

Changing Forms in Twenty-First-Century Caribbean Novels: Representing
Otherness in Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)415

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present volume has emerged from the conference on “Literature and Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Cultural Concerns – Concepts – Case Studies”, which was held at the wonderful conference centre of JLU Giessen, the unique Castle of Rauschholzhausen, from 25th to 27th June 2018. Since the conference took place, the work on the publication has been accompanied by two crises: the IT crisis at Justus Liebig University, which started in December 2019 after a cyberattack against the university; and the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains a serious global concern. Looking back on the impact of these crises today, we cannot help but to see the way in which they have each left their stamp on this publication as closely linked to the volume’s major objective: examining the role of literature and literary studies in a century characterised by a plethora of crises and catastrophes.

In their engagement with a broad range of the pressing concerns of our age, the 24 contributions in this collection are united in their effort to rethink both the role of literature and the institution of literary studies in the 21st century. How does literature respond to the key challenges of our era, such as digitalisation, climate change, terrorism, animal rights, urbanisation, fake news, the ever-looming financial crisis, and global migration flows, to name but a few? And how can we innovate the theoretical and institutional frameworks under which we study literature, seeing that the latter remain, by and large, surprisingly averse to cultural change? Questions like these are addressed, in theoretically and methodologically different ways, in the articles in this collection.

The publication of the volume would not have been possible without the help of many individuals. First and foremost, we would like to thank our wonderful colleagues Hannah Klaubert and Theresa Krampe for the excellent job they did in organising the conference at Castle Rauschholzhausen, and in coordinating the ensuing publication process, respectively. We are also immensely grateful to Anna Tabouratzidis and to our former student assistants – Nele Grosch and Marie-Theres Stickel – for supporting the editorial work on this volume. Furthermore, we are greatly indebted to Elizabeth Kovach, Kate Oden and Louise Louw, who proofread the articles with a watchful eye on language and style. Our biggest thanks, however, goes to our contributors for bringing to life the volume’s vision of a ‘project literary studies makeover’, and for patiently bearing with us through the editing process and the series of crises that have delayed the publication of this volume.

Ansgar Nünning, Vera Nünning & Alexander Scherr
September 2021

PASSION, PLEASURE, PROBLEM-SOLVING AND PURPOSE:
REINVIGORATING LITERARY STUDIES FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY AND COPING WITH CHALLENGES, CHANGING CONTEXTS,
CONCERNS AND NEW CONCEPTS*

ANSGAR NÜNNING, VERA NÜNNING & ALEXANDER SCHERR

1. Literature and Literary Studies in an Age of Crises:
Reconfiguring Literary Studies for the Twenty-First Century

Academic disciplines and educational institutions are relatively slow in responding to new challenges, changing contexts and real-world crises. In that respect they are a bit like the stereotype of the elderly who are said to be set in their ways, preferring not to change their habits, routines and rituals. Scholars in the humanities sometimes unwittingly resemble that stereotype, preferring to stay within the comfort zone of their areas of expertise and specialisation rather than being overly enthusiastic about theoretical or methodological innovation. As a result, humanistic disciplines and academic institutions tend to be relatively limited in their ability to deal with the complex challenges of the 21st century. While students in economics have managed to launch a global network “in their demand for economics to catch up with the current generation, the century we are in, and the challenges ahead” (Raworth 2017: 2), no such initiatives have been started by students or scholars in the humanities (at least none that we know of). Literary studies have therefore not only yet to catch up with the new generation dubbed “iGen” (Twenge 2017) but also with the manifold challenges and crises that have occurred since the turn of the century.

Well before the plethora of crises that have followed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 21st century had already witnessed a considerable series of crises. Ever since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the media around the world have been in constant crisis mode. The ill-advised crisis narrative about the alleged ‘weapons of mass destruction’, disseminated by the Bush-administration in order to legitimise the so-called ‘war on terror’ (see Nünning/Nünning 2017), generated a whole series of new and totally unnecessary crises rather than resolve any existing ones. Since then, the new millennium has been overshadowed by a wide range of financial, health, political and social crises, and we have witnessed a concomitant proliferation of factual and fictional crisis narratives across various media. One could even go so far as to argue that the hitherto prevailing stories of unlimited growth, innovation and progress that were regarded as hallmarks of moder-

nity and modernisation have been substituted by a history of catastrophes and crises. In one of the relatively few articles written by a literary studies scholar on the topic of crises, Anne Fuchs provides a concise history of some of the most important crises that have occurred in the 21st century:

The global economic crisis unleashed in 2008 has been followed by the Syrian war and the ensuing refugee crisis, the Yemeni crisis, the crisis of the Rohingya Muslims who were driven out of Myanmar, various crises in international relations, the chronic Brexit crisis, the perceived crisis of democracy, and the ever threatening global environmental crisis. Domestic economies such as the UK's are afflicted by many recurring crises: lack of affordable housing, precarious employment, ageing populations, the capacity of the National Health Service and other public health services to cope, and the perennial funding crises in the public sector. (2019: 804)

Given the growing real-world crises from climate change, global inequality and the refugee crisis to the environmental, financial, health, political and social crises that have dominated the century so far, one might initially presume that the crisis of a scholarly discipline like literary studies may just as well pale into insignificance. Yet, while the hotly debated crises of literary studies and the humanities at large certainly do not pose existential threats equal to the crises just mentioned, they are real and daunting enough for both scholars and students working in that area and closely linked to the funding crisis in the public sector. Notwithstanding these challenges to our profession, there are many other good reasons for engaging the various concerns that have emerged in the new millennium, and for rethinking the goals and trajectories of literary studies.

Two of the main goals of this volume are to make a modest attempt at reconceptualising and reinvigorating literary studies, and to explore new avenues, concepts and texts that deal with 21st-century challenges. In pursuing these aims, the editors and contributors follow in the footsteps of scholars who have addressed the real and alleged crises in and of the humanities. A pioneering essay by the renowned American critic and literary historian Marjorie Perloff deserves to be singled out because it is one of the earliest and most convincing attempts at responding to the "Crisis in the Humanities", and at "Reconfiguring Literary Study for the Twenty-first Century", as the title and subtitle of the essay succinctly put it. Perloff (2004: 2) does not only reject practical solutions revolving around suggestions for job prospects; she also questions the prevailing assumption that "we have a clear sense of what the humanities do and what makes them valuable", because unfortunately we do not. She does an excellent job of reminding us what the term 'humanities' means today, and what the real strengths of "one of the central branches of the humanities: the study of literature" (ibid.: 5) actually are. Perloff concludes her overview of rhetorical, philosophical, aesthetic, cultural and formalist approaches to literature by suggesting that "the alignment of poetic and