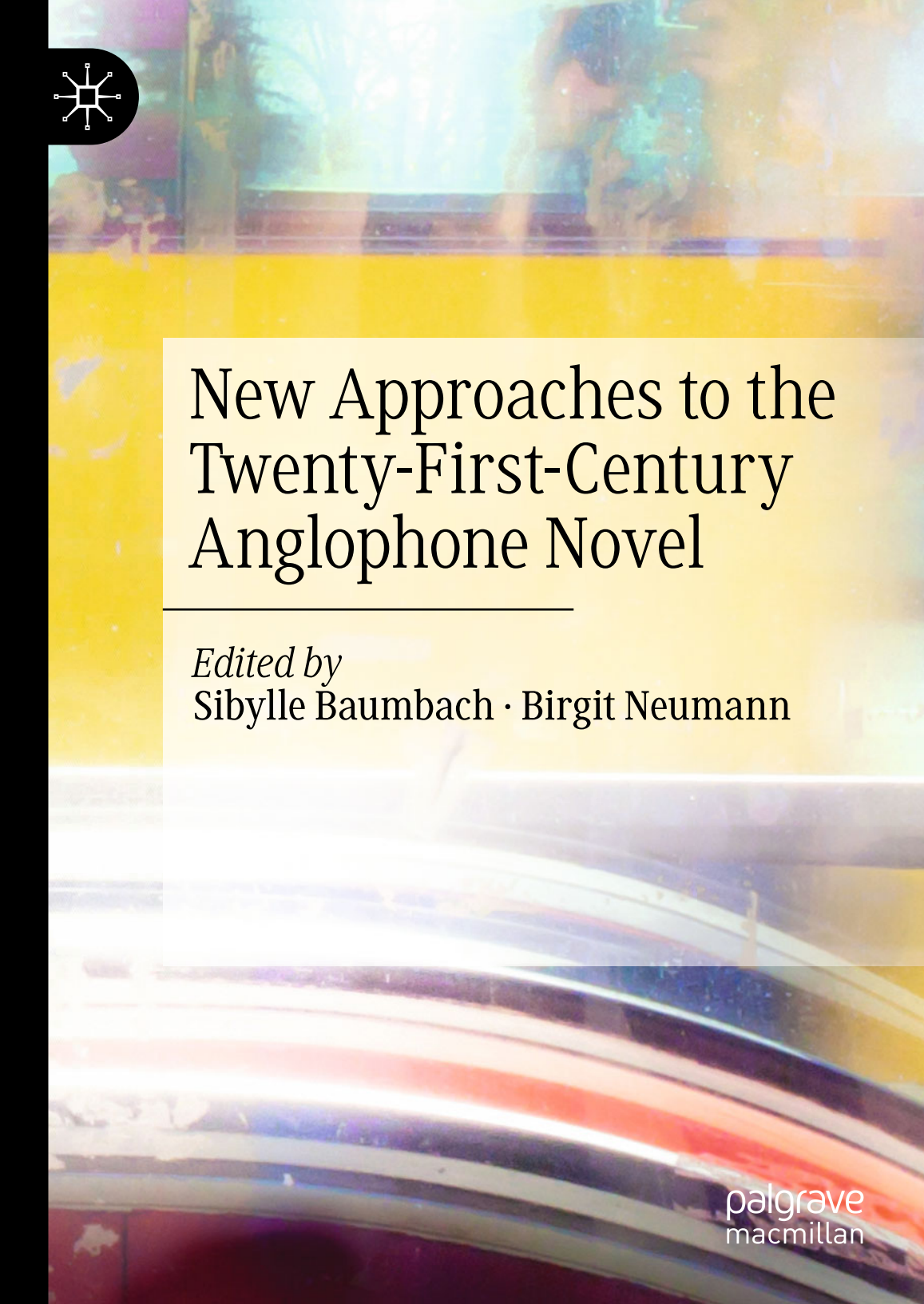

New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel

Edited by
Sibylle Baumbach · Birgit Neumann

palgrave
macmillan

New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel

Sibylle Baumbach · Birgit Neumann
Editors

New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Sibylle Baumbach
English Literatures and Cultures
University of Stuttgart
Stuttgart, Germany

Birgit Neumann
Anglophone Literatures
Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf
Düsseldorf, Germany

ISBN 978-3-030-32597-8 ISBN 978-3-030-32598-5 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32598-5

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

Our special thanks go to Yvonne Liebermann, Miriam Hinz, and Rebecca Kos, for their editorial assistance in preparing this volume for publication. Above all, we thank all contributors for supporting us in our endeavour by engaging in this book project, for their feedback and discussions on individual approaches, and also for their patience during the editing process. Finally, we would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful feedback and the editors at Palgrave Macmillan for their continuous support and assistance throughout the publication process.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Roman Bartosch is Associate Professor at the University of Cologne, Germany, where he teaches Anglophone Literatures and Cultures and ELT methodology. He has published on the environmental humanities, sustainability, posthumanism, human–animal studies, and education and currently works on a book project on approaches to teaching literature in the Anthropocene. His latest publications include *Beyond the Human-Animal Divide: Creaturely Lives in Literature and Culture* (co-edited with Dominik Ohrem, 2017), *Teaching Environments: Ecocritical Encounters* (co-edited with Sieglinde Grimm, 2014), and *EnvironMentality: Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction* (Rodopi, 2013).

Sibylle Baumbach is Professor of English Literatures at the University of Stuttgart, Germany. Her research interests include Early Modern literature and cognitive literary studies with a focus on the aesthetics of fascination and literary attention. She has published monographs on *Literature and Fascination* (2015) and *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (2008) and (co-)edited volumes on *Regions of Culture—Regions of Identity* (2010), *Travelling Concepts, Metaphors, and Narratives* (with Ansgar Nünning and Beatrice Michaelis, 2012), *Cognitive Literary Studies* (*Journal of Literary Theory*, with Ralf Haekel and Felix Sprang, 2017), and *The Fascination with Unknown Time* (with Lena Henningsen and Klaus Oschema, 2017).

Arne De Boever teaches American Studies in the School of Critical Studies at the California Institute of the Arts, where he also directs the M.A. Aesthetics and Politics program. He is the author of *States of Exception in the Contemporary Novel* (2012), *Narrative Care* (2013), and *Plastic Sovereignties* (2016), and a co-editor of *Gilbert Simondon* (2012) and *The Psychopathologies of Cognitive Capitalism* (2013). He edits *Parrhesia* and the Critical Theory/Philosophy section of the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and is a member of the *boundary 2* collective. His most recent book is *Finance Fictions* (Fordham University Press, 2018).

Lukas Etter holds a research and teaching position at the University of Siegen, Germany, where his postdoctoral research project (since 2015; Christoph Daniel Ebeling Fellowship, 2016) bears the title *'Word Problems': Popular and Educational Discourses on Mathematics in the Pre-Civil War United States*. His previous research project was dedicated to the study of alternative comics/graphic narrative, with a primary focus on artistic style (monograph manuscript in preparation; recent article in *Subjectivity across Media*, ed. Reinerth/Thon, Routledge 2017).

Michael C. Frank holds the chair of Literatures in English of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. The author of *The Cultural Imaginary of Terrorism in Public Discourse, Literature, and Film* (Routledge, 2017), he has co-edited the volume *Literature and Terrorism: Comparative Perspectives* (with Eva Gruber, Rodopi, 2012) as well as a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies* on *Global Responses to the "War on Terror"* (with Pavan Kumar Malreddy, 2018).

Suzanne Keen Professor of Literature, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College (New York, USA), works on narrative empathy. Her books include *Thomas Hardy's Brains: Psychology, Neurology, and Hardy's Imagination* (2014), *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), *Narrative Form* (2003, revised and expanded second edition, 2015), *Romances of the Archive in Contemporary British Fiction* (2001), and *Victorian Renovations of the Novel* (1998). A critic of the English novel, since *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), she has expanded on her theory of narrative empathy in articles and chapters.

Roger Lüdeke is chair of Modern English Literature at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf (Germany). His research focusses on literary theory (theory of fiction, politics of the writing scene, text/

image relations, concepts of world literature, and popular culture) and on methods of textual analysis. He has published on Renaissance and Contemporary Drama, Romanticism, and the eighteenth- and twentieth-century novel.

Birgit Neumann is Professor of English Literature and Anglophone Studies at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf (Germany). Her research focuses on Anglophone world literatures, postcolonial studies, memory studies, ekphrasis, and ecocriticism. She has published monographs on memory in Canadian novels (2005) and on nationalist xenophobia in eighteenth-century British literature (2009). She has recently co-edited special issues and volumes on *Anglophone World Literatures* (with Gabriele Rippl, 2017), *Ecocriticism—Environments in Anglophone Literatures* (with Sonja Frenzel, 2017) and *Global Perspectives on European Literary Histories* (with César Dominguez, 2018). A monograph (co-authored with Gabriele Rippl) on intermediality and ekphrasis in Anglophone literatures is forthcoming in 2020 from Routledge.

Ansgar Nünning is Professor of English and American Literature and Cultural Studies at Justus Liebig University, Giessen (Germany). He is the founding and managing director of the "Giessener Graduiertenzentrum Kulturwissenschaften" (GGK), of the "International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture" (GCSC), and of the European Ph.D. Network "Literary and Cultural Studies." He has published widely on English and American literature, narratology, cultures of memory, genre theory, and literary and cultural theory, having (co-)authored 16 monographs and (co-)edited more than 40 collections of essays. Among his most recent book publications is a co-edited volume on *The British Novel in the Twenty-First Century* (with Vera Nünning, WVT 2018).

Sangina Patnaik is Assistant Professor of English Literature at Swarthmore College in the United States. She researches and teaches in the areas of global Anglophone literature, human rights, and law and literature.

Alexander Scherr is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of English at Justus Liebig University, Giessen (Germany). His research interests include narrative theory, the history of the novel, literature and science, eighteenth- to twenty-first-century British literature, and twentieth- and twenty-first-century American literature. He has published a monograph entitled *Narrating Evolution* (WVT, 2017) and about ten articles

which have appeared in edited volumes and journals. He is co-editor of a volume on *Literature and Literary Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (forthcoming with WVT in 2019, together with Ansgar and Vera Nünning).

Will Slocombe is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Liverpool, UK. He is co-director of the Olaf Stapledon Centre for Speculative Futures. His research focuses on representations of Artificial Intelligence, particularly in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature, but he is also interested in various topics relating to sf and technology more broadly, as well as "states of mind," metafictions, narratology, and postmodernism. He is currently working on his second monograph, *Emergent Patterns: Artificial Intelligence and the Structural Imagination* (Peter Lang, forthcoming 2019), on representations of Artificial Intelligence, and the ways in which such representations function.

Jan-Noël Thon is Associate Professor of Media Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Guest Professor of Media Studies at the University of Cologne, Germany, and Professorial Fellow at the University for the Creative Arts, UK. Recent books include *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels* (co-edited with Daniel Stein, 2013/^{2}2015), *Storyworlds across Media* (co-edited with Marie-Laure Ryan, 2014), *Game Studies* (co-edited with Klaus Sachs-Hombach, 2015), *Transmedial Narratology Contemporary Media Culture* (2016/^{2}2018), *Subjectivity across Media* (co-edited with Maike Sarah Reinerth, 2017), and *Comicanalyse* (co-authored with Stephan Packard, Andreas Rauscher, Véronique Sina, Lukas R.A. Wilde, and Janina Wildfeuer, 2019).

Pieter Vermeulen is an Associate Professor of American and Comparative Literature at the University of Leuven, Belgium. He is the author of *Romanticism After the Holocaust* (2010) and *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form* (2015), and a co-editor of, most recently, *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets* (2015) and *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (2017). He is currently writing a book for Routledge's Literature and Contemporary Thought Series entitled *Literature and the Anthropocene*.

Jennifer Wawrzinek researches and teaches English Literature and Postcolonial Studies at the University of Potsdam (Germany). She is the author of numerous essays on transnational and diaspora writing, and co-editor of the collection *Negotiating Afropolitanism* (Rodopi, 2011). Her most recent monograph, *Beyond Identity: Romanticism and Decreation*, examines the decreated subject as an ethical and political strategy in Romantic writing at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Kari Weil is University Professor of Letters at Wesleyan University. Her publications include *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (University Press of Virginia, 1992), *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now* (Columbia University Press, 2012) and numerous essays on issues of gender, feminist theory and, most recently, animal otherness and human–animal relations. With Lori Gruen, she co-edited of a special issue of *Hypatia* on *Animal Others* (Volume 27, Number 3, 2012) and her current book project, *Horses and their Humans in Nineteenth-Century France: Mobility, Magnetism, Meat*, is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press.

Russell West-Pavlov is Professor of Anglophone Literatures at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and a Research Associate at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Recent book publications include *Eastern African Literatures* (Oxford University Press, 2018), *German as Contact Zone* (Narr-Francke-Attempto, 2018), *ˈtɛmp(ə)rərɪnəs* (with John Kinsella; Narr-Francke-Attempto, 2018), and the edited volume *The Global South and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Laura Wright is Professor of English at Western Carolina University (USA), where she specializes in postcolonial literatures and theory, ecocriticism, and animal studies. Her monographs include *Writing Out of All the Camps: J. M. Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement* (Routledge, 2006 and 2009), *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), and *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror* (University of Georgia Press in 2015). Her edited collection *Through a Vegan Studies Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism* was published by the University of Nevada Press in February of 2019.

The Novel: An Undead Genre

Sibylle Baumbach and Birgit Neumann

1 The Several Lives of the Novel

The novel is dead, long live the novel! In the twentieth and twenty-first century, almost each decade seems to have mourned the demise of the novel as "an irretrievably exhausted and dying genre" (Boxall and Cheyette 2016, 1). And yet, the novel continues to thrive. Its enduring success can be explained by a combination of different factors: The most basic explanation is that the novel caters to our desire for narratives; we are, after all, 'story-telling animals' (Gottschall 2012). Narratives are an essential part of our everyday world-making: They help us navigate our increasingly complex environments, structure our experiences, and "may offer not just immediately relevant social information but also general instances of human behavior to guide our reflections and decisions" (Boyd 2009, 169). As a site

S. Baumbach (✉)
English Literatures and Cultures, University of Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany
e-mail: sibylle.baumbach@ilw.uni-stuttgart.de

B. Neumann
Anglophone Literatures, Heinrich Heine University
Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany
e-mail: Birgit.Neumann@uni-duesseldorf.de

S. Baumbach and B. Neumann (eds.),
New Approaches to the Twenty-First-Century Anglophone Novel,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32598-5_1

for the modelling of cultural, social, and affective knowledge and experiences, the novel proves indispensable for our being-in-the-world and our understanding of ourselves, however provisional and fleeting that sense of understanding might be. As Guido Mazzoni states in his *Theory of the Novel*, "only in mimesis and fiction do human beings become aware of themselves as individual, particular beings, thrown into time, located in a world, and placed among others" (2017, 13). Paradoxically, in the face of the looming climate catastrophes and biophysical changes of the Anthropocene, the novel also increasingly serves as a way of registering the possible end of human life and of imagining new posthuman configurations (cf. Vermeulen 2017).

The novel's great success and longevity also derives from its immense flexibility. As is well-known, Virginia Woolf has fittingly compared the novel to a "cannibal," because it "has devoured so many forms of art" that "[w]e shall be forced to invent new names for the different books which masquerade under this one heading" (1966, 224). Each form, trend, or topic the novel consumes makes it stronger, more robust and more resilient and confirms its ability to easily adapt to the rapid changes and challenges that continue to shape post-millennium culture and society. Its vampiric and protean qualities make the novel a truly 'undead' genre, or, following Terry Eagleton, an "anti-genre," as the novel "not just […] eludes definitions, but […] actively undermines them" (2004, 1) in the process of reinventing itself with every cultural, political, and technological development it encounters. Displaying enormous generic flexibility and offering ample room for stylistic experimentation, the novel incessantly pushes the boundaries of established narrative techniques and genres to their limits.

Novelty and innovation have always been the driving force of the novel. This is already suggested by the term 'novel,' which promises 'newness' (Latin *novus*—'new'). Accordingly, a 'novelist' is essentially "[a]n innovator (in thought or belief); someone who introduces something new or who favours novelty" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, "novelist," 1). As Michael Schmidt underscores in his monumental history of the novel, "[t]he novel takes in and takes on invention like no other literary form" (2014, 14). Being devoid of "a set of stable thematic preoccupations, habits of address, or social functions" (Kurnick 2009, 228), the novel is best understood in terms of its formal and thematic "possibilit[ies]" (228), which allow it to respond creatively to contemporary changes and an unfinished present. Designating possibility, change, and innovation, the novel, Peter Boxall notes, "both shapes the world and resists its demands" (2015, 12).

Pervasive cultural, political, and technological changes at the dawn of the century have created radically new contexts and predicaments for narratives. The financial crash of 2008 and the rise of neo-liberal politics, the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11 and the so-called War on Terror, climate catastrophes, the increase in migration and mobility, rapid globalisation, the rise of populism, and a crisis of the European Union following the Brexit referendum have had, and continue to have, a deep impact on literary cultures across the Anglophone world. Broader discussions on artificial and human intelligence, on the virtual and the real, or the human and the posthuman add a technological dimension to these concerns and challenge us to reconsider the shifting meanings of 'human life.' We are inhabiting, as Daniel Lea (2017, 4) puts it, "an era of truly dizzying uncertainty." The array of labels that have been invented to come to grips with the changes of the first decades of the twenty-first century provide ample evidence of such uncertainty: The new millennium has been labelled as the age of "the digimodern, the altermodern, the hypermodern, the meta-modern, the exomodern" (Lea 2017, 4), the Anthropocene, the posthuman, and many more.

Critics have noted that many postmillennial novels reflect this complexity and the ensuing "sense of the uncontrollability and uncertainty" (Adiseshiah and Hildyard 2013, 2) by conveying "[a] destabilised realism" (12). This particular inflection of realism makes use of "[t]emporal disordering [...] to disorient the conventional ideological structuring of experience" (12) and express the unbridled temporality of "a sleepless" (Lea 2017, 17) global capitalism. It frequently combines "uncertainty, helplessness and deep pessimism" with a "utopian vision, ethical responsibility and attention to the local and the unnoticed" (Adiseshiah and Hildyard 2013, 12). According to Sian Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard, destabilised realism is marked by "neo-modernist" elements (2013, 12), which pull together realist and modernist modes of writing in expressly disjunctive ways. Even as the postmillennial novel struggles to come to terms with reality and expresses a new "reality hunger" (Shields 2011), it continuously emphasises the failures of language and of narrative to represent reality. Many novels uneasily oscillate between confirming and undermining the power of narrative in coping with reality as they seek to invent new symbolic devices with which to grasp that reality (cf. Boxall 2013, 11–12). It is this peculiar co-presence of "hope and melancholy," "naïveté and knowingness," "empathy and apathy," "totality and fragmentation" (Vermeulen and Van den Akker 2010, 6) from which twenty-first-century novels by writers such as

Ben Lerner, Jennifer Egan, Ali Smith, and David Mitchell derive their narrative dynamics. Hovering between presenting "books of life" and "games of truth" (Mazzoni 2017, 3 and 5), the novel, one could argue, has become an arena for negotiating different concepts of 'reality' and 'responsibility,' while self-reflexively marking narrative's failures in propelling change and coping with life.

Technological advancements and new communication channels will continue to impact developments of the novel and pose new challenges to literary studies, starting with the task anticipated by Woolf, e.g. to "invent new names" (1966, 224) to do justice to the various shapes in which the novel will present itself in the future. At the same time, the materiality of the novel and the problem of recording and restoring stories—which will be intensified in the face of an expanding digital network of storytellers—continue to be matters of concern. A growing number of twenty-first-century novels suggest that "the narrative mechanics which have allowed us to negotiate our being-in-the-world, to inherit our pasts and to bequeath our accumulated wisdom to the future, have failed" (Boxall 2013, 217). In his study *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel* (2015a), Pieter Vermeulen maintains that many contemporary novels increasingly register their own "powerlessness" (3) and limits in responding to the political, ecological, and economic demands of the present. Rather than self-consciously claiming their power to intervene into contemporary socio-political constellations, novels such as J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man* (2005) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) "imagine weak forms of affect and life" (Vermeulen 2015a, 3). Inevitably, such "weak forms of affect and life" put pressure upon habitual narrative forms and notions of narrativity. Time and again, the exploration of "weak forms of affect and life" refuses to congeal into narrative structure and gives rise to loose, fragmentary, and discontinuous modes of representation. A number of twenty-first-century novels illustrate that the narrative forms of the last millennium are no longer capable of adequately responding to the changed notions of life, body, and agency (cf. Boxall 2013, 217). While this reflection upon the changes and even breakdown of narratives could point to an instance of (self-) awareness of the precarious status of the novel in post-millennium society, it simultaneously reinforces the role of the novel as an agent that preserves and disseminates (cultural) knowledge of the past and present and thus opposes its own effacement by absorbing even the failure of narratives (cf. Vermeulen 2015a, 3).

One of the effects of the novel's attempt to come to terms with the present moment is the imagination of new forms of temporality that disrupt the neat divisions between past, present, and future. These alternative, non-linear temporalities, in which past, present, and future intermingle and which create a sense of unknown time (cf. Baumbach et al. 2017), do not so much articulate a sense of temporal disorientation ensuing from the pressures and frictions of our accelerated present (cf. Lea 2017, 17). Rather, the multi-layered and spiraling temporalities underlying novels such as Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* (2014) and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* (2013) make available a "new set of historical possibilities" (Boxall 2013, 81). They undo "the classical time of succession" (Virilio 2008, 27), including notions of linear progress underpinning western modernity, to bring to the fore the latent, possible pasts inscribed in the present, and open up new trajectories into the future. As these early twenty-first-century novels fluidly blend different temporal dimensions and endlessly shift between several plotlines, they create a sense of temporal simultaneity, a kind of "untensed, perpetually self-creating time" (Boxall 2013, 58). What emerges from these narrative endeavours is a weak, horizontally structured plot that thrives on openness and possibility to give expression to what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2014) calls "our broad present" and that thoroughly challenges teleological progress. The broad present is not grounded in the unifying regime of abstract time. Rather, it emerges from the specificities of material circumstances and the frequently unpredictable and multidirectional fluidities of embodied subjectivity, which invite us to "think […] disjunctively about the human" (Chakrabarty 2012, 2).

The subversion of many traditional narrative forms is often accompanied by strategies of defamiliarisation that are played out on the level of the plot to reflect on constructions of alterity. As processes of migration and globalisation have pushed the English novel into the direction of Anglophone novels, such critical reflections frequently take issue with the standards of colonial and Euro-American orders. One of the results of this questioning is the emergence of a number of new postcolonial and transcultural subgenres, such as the black British *Bildungsroman*, postcolonial detective fiction, and transcultural life writing. As writers, including Monica Ali, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Dinaw Mengestu, have appropriated the *Bildungsroman* to accentuate the subjectivity of those who were previously represented as silenced objects, they have introduced new concepts of *Bildun*g, agency, subjectivity, and community. At the same time, they have instigated several formal innovations, such as less teleologically structured plot models

and different modes of characterisation, which frequently clash with both the forms and norms of classical, western models. It seems that the dialectic of appropriation and "exappropriation" (Derrida 2002, 37) is vital to securing the long-term survival of the novel and the creation of ever new subgenres. But this dialectic also lays bare some of the ideological premises inscribed in the traditional *Bildungsroman* and shows the extent to which forms and generic conventions are implicated in political issues (cf. Levine 2015). Joseph Slaughter (2007) has convincingly illustrated how the genre of the *Bildungsroman* has produced idealised imaginations of human rights, including normative concepts of the human, which regulate representation and authority in the legal sphere. What studies like Slaughter's underline is that literary forms are indeed seminal in constituting, but also challenging and transforming epistemic, social, and symbolic orders. In a similar vein, Caroline Levine (2015, 5) notes that *"[f]orms do political work in particular historical contexts."* Though there is certainly no homology between form and function, the importance of forms in regulating what Jacques Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," understood as "the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (2004, 13), deserves critical attention in the study of the twenty-first-century novel.

As our previous remarks indicate, the development and updating of the Anglophone novel thrive on the global circulation of generic conventions, literary forms, and topical concerns. The novel's multiplicity of subgenres and narrative forms travel across cultures and periods (cf. Levine 2015), while taking shape in distinct contexts. Franco Moretti, in "Conjectures on World Literature" (2000), has famously argued that the modern novel has only emerged from processes of exchange between locally distinct contexts and respective literary traditions. According to Moretti, the modern novel "arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a Western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials" (2000, 58). While Moretti, who makes heavy use of world-system theory, is certainly right in highlighting the importance of circulation to the development of the novel, the west can by no means be regarded as a privileged site of creative innovation (cf. Neumann and Rippl 2017). As scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman (2012, 502) have argued, it is erroneous to reduce non-western contributions to the adding of what Moretti calls "local materials." In our contemporary world literary sphere, such rigid divisions between centre and periphery have lost their epistemic validity. More than ever, the novel comes into being in transculturally entangled, though clearly unevenly structured spaces, which cannot be contained by

any single cultural context. A range of critics, including Wai-Chee Dimock (2006), Jahan Ramazani (2009), Susan Stanford Friedman (2006), Peter Hitchcock (2009), and Caroline Levine (2015), have shown that certain narrative forms—such as free indirect discourse, modes of characterisation, and representations of time—sprawl, spread, and travel across cultures and time periods, entangling literatures from different parts of the world into patterns of mutually transformative exchange (cf. Levine 2015, 5). From this perspective, the Anglophone novel emerges as a polycentric network of exchange between different creative practices across the world (cf. Schulze-Engler 2007, 29); it is a node within a network of travelling forms, which take shape in distinct local contexts (cf. Neumann 2018). Traditional national approaches to literature can hardly do justice to this multifaceted network of interconnections, and it becomes increasingly difficult to come to terms with the contemporary novel without taking into consideration the interrelations between locally distinct literary cultures and creative practices (cf. Moretti 2000). What is needed, Jessica Berman rightly argues, is a multidirectional perspective of the Anglophone novel that reveals movements of literary forms and "circles of interconnection" (2009, 69), while remaining attuned to "specific local modes" (69) of writing and reading.

The novel's long-term survival is also guaranteed by strategic marketing: This includes literary prize culture and the regular publication of bestseller lists, which, despite some exceptions, are predominantly geared towards the novel and continue to draw considerable public attention. Literary prizes also tend to shape scholarly approaches to the novel, as they are occasionally taken as an overall reliable guideline in the endeavour to map twenty-first-century British fiction. James Acheson's recent volume on *The Contemporary British Novel Since 2000*, for instance, is based entirely on prize-winning authors whose acclaimed oeuvre seems to indicate "where the twenty-first-century British novel [is] headed" (Acheson 2017, 1). Regardless of whether literary prizes are a sign of literary value or an attempt to "confer value on that which does not intrinsically possess it" (9), as suggested by Edward St. Aubyn's (ironically prize-winning) novel *Lost for Words* (2014), which exposes the prestige- and publicity-machinery surrounding the Booker Prize, the increasing importance of the awards industry and the dynamics of the international book market can hardly be disputed. Vermeulen's suggestion that we should read contemporary literature not "against" but "alongside the market" (2015b, 273–74) needs to be taken seriously.

The ever-closer links between the market and the literary sphere, however, do not mean that literature can be reduced to the status of a mere cultural commodity. In her seminal study *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (2015), Rebecca Walkowitz illustrates how writers turn their awareness for the conditions of the international book market into a creative literary force and how novels accordingly are "written for translation from the start" (3). In so-called born-translated novels, translation is not a secondary activity but a poetic and thematic principle, which bears on the structure of the novel: "These works," Walkowitz maintains, "are *written for translation*, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often *written as translations*, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have [...] been composed" (2015, 4). The point is that born-translated novels make creative use of their inevitable embeddedness in the logic of an international book market precisely to self-consciously show that they cannot be contained within that logic and call for different models (cf. Neumann and Rippl 2017, 12).

2 The Novel in the Digital Age

One of the most significant developments in the past decades, which has deeply affected the literary market, reading practices, and techniques of communication, and has consequently led to radical changes of the novel, was initiated by the rise of interactive digital technologies. Once again, the novel has confirmed its status as vibrant shape-shifter that can frame its form to all occasions to even successfully adapt to the "Age of Amazon" (McGurl 2016). Prompted by new modes of communication, commodification, and consumerism after the digital turn, post-millennium literary culture not only saw an increase in self-published fiction and "genre fiction" (McGurl 2016, 460): Also new forms of the novel emerged, for which novel terms had to be coined, such as the 'digital novel,' 'internet novel,' or 'Twitterature.' The latter, which condenses the plot of a novel into tweets of 140 characters disseminated either online or re-mediated in print, draws attention to "[t]he principle of the economy of words" (Williams 2015, 22), which, as Raymond Williams argued, might serve as a point of departure for new approaches to the novel.

On the one hand, these new forms of the novel modernise traditional genres by adapting them to new modes of communication, for instance by replacing letters with emails and thus updating the epistolary novel to the 'email novel.' On the other hand, they respond to increasingly participatory

modes of literary production and reception. Prompted by online reading groups and review platforms such as Goodreads, which Microsoft advertises as "the world's largest social network for readers" (Microsoft Goodreads 2018), twenty-first-century readers progressively engage in what has been described as 'shared' or "social reading" (Cordón-García et al. 2013), or "networked reading" (Allred 2014, 123) and become attuned to a new "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006, 11), in which they act as 'prosumers,' as both producers and consumers, of narratives. These changes in reading practices, as well as a generational shift from "deep attention," that is the ability to "concentrat[e] on a single object for long periods, […] preferring a single information stream" to "hyper attention," that is the rapid "switching [of] focus […] among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams" (Hayles 2007, 187), have inspired new forms of the novel, including the 'interactive novel' or 'web novel' where readers shape the narrative, based on which hyperlinks they choose to follow.

Despite growing anxieties regarding the future of the printed novel, a possible decline of the book market (as a result of the growing digitalisation of fiction), and shortened attention spans in readers accustomed to digital communication (cf. Hayles 2007), the past decades have also seen the rise of several serial novels and mega-novels, which counter these concerns, including J.K. Rowling's immensely successful *Harry Potter* (as Ashley Dawson quite rightly stated, "[n]o discussion of English literature in the new millennium can ignore the impact of Rowling's Harry Potter series," 2015, 77), and Eleanor Catton's prize-winning *The Luminaries* (2013).

Disregarding the fact that they also owe some of their commercial success to a vast marketing and media machine (including movie adaptations), these works testify to the ongoing attraction of the novel and the high demand for narratives that, in part, seem surprisingly traditional in both theme and style. In its depiction of the rise (and fall) of a totalitarian regime, represented by Lord Voldemort, Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels, for instance, construe parallel worlds that resonate with key anxieties in the twenty-first century in the face of growing populism, xenophobia, and persistent threats to democratic structures across the globe. The fact that these novels were first marketed as young-adult fiction, but became highly successful among adult readers, might be regarded as pointing to a growing infantilisation of contemporary culture or an escapist tendency to withdraw into an imaginary world. What it ultimately confirms, however, is that the

desire to get lost in a book persists, partly because novels provide opportunities for deceleration and for disengaging, at least temporarily, from the ever-accelerating pace of our digital age in the private space of reading.

3 New Approaches to the Novel in the Twenty-First Century

Deliberately avoiding the controversial term 'contemporary' (on the concepts of the contemporary and the contemporaneity, cf. Brouillette et al. 2017) and fully aware that the twenty-first century is not "a fixed, calendrical defining point" but rather an "imaginative, taxonomical, or marketing shorthand" (Lea 2017, 4), this volume focuses on novels published after the millennium to investigate how they explore pressing topical concerns of the first two decades of the twenty-first century and how these narrative microcosms connect to key developments, hopes, and anxieties that drive our environment. Many post-millennium novels, for instance, tend to confront us with our own "Anthropocene disorder" (Clark 2015, 140), with "a mismatch between what we see and what is really happening" (Bracke 2018, 3), challenging habitual categories of understanding the world. Other novels engage with human rights, transcultural justice, and cosmopolitanism in the broader landscape of capitalist globalisation, pointing towards new ways of organising "the world of nations in some more self-implicating and ethically balanced way" (Robbins 2012, 4). Though novels such as Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) are far from offering answers to the question of how local loyalties can be reconciled with a cosmopolitan ethos, they frequently make available narrative forms by means of which open and non-identitarian ways of community building become possible.

The novels that are discussed in this volume clearly differ in themes, styles, and socio-political commitment. Neither do they share an ethical agenda, nor is there any consensus about their role in the world. What they share instead is a more general concern with "the novel situation we are in" (Clark 2015, 3)—though the questions of how to identify "the novel situation" as well as the "we" are themselves part of their concern. How can global predicaments be explored in the fictional realm of the novel? What kind of cultural power and agency can the novel exercise in the face of the enormous political, economic, meteorological, and microbiological changes of the present? Can novels teach us something about climate change and justice and can they even nudge us to different actions?

And which new narrative forms does the engagement with urgent political concerns bring into being? These are only some of the questions that the following chapters will address.

While it would be presumptuous to predict the possible (and seemingly impossible) futures of "the cannibal," i.e. the novel, especially in view of the rapid technological developments and the profound economic, social, and political changes we experience today, the first two decades of the post-millennium novel already compel us to reconsider (more or less) widely-established methods for analysing the novel and adapt our approaches to the poetics and politics offered by our object of study. One of the key tasks of this volume is to foreground the potential of the novel to respond creatively to today's global challenges and, considering the powerful effects of literary texts, also discuss the responsibilities of literature (and literary studies) (cf. Jernigan et al. 2009). Pressing cultural concerns regarding migration and cosmopolitanism, posthumanism and ecosickness, human and animal rights, affect and biopolitics, the war on terror, and human cognition have increasingly found their way into narratives. This volume seeks to examine the power of the twenty-first-century novel to negotiate, through its formal characteristics and substance, such large-scale predicaments. Rather than aiming to provide a more or less exhaustive overview of the twenty-first-century Anglophone novel, it tests new conceptual approaches that can account for the changed make-up of the novel. The interest in conceptual approaches and the novel's responses to changed notions of human and animal rights, democracy and war, climate change and neo-liberalism does, however, not mean that the volume pays no attention to literary forms and "the singularity of literature" (Attridge 2004). The volume promotes neither a "political functionalism" (Felski 2008, 9) nor "ideological styles of reading" (6), that is, readings that reduce literature to the "status of a symptom" (6)—be it of political concerns, technological developments or "social structures" (6). To the contrary, all chapters stress the need to accentuate the politics of form and are devoted to revealing the open and sometimes conflictual interplay between form and content. If novels have any impact on readers, and if they can exercise any socio-political power—however limited and unpredictable that power may be—this is also due to their narrative features and stylistic devices. Moreover, some chapters—for instance those on documentary formal realism and transmedia storytelling—are explicitly designed to chart new formal developments of the post-millennium novel. Taken together, the contributions seek to map some particularly striking

thematic and formal developments of the twenty-first-century novel and to open up new avenues for future studies of the novel.

In discussing thematic and formal features of novels by contemporary writers, including Aravind Adiga, Margaret Atwood, Teju Cole, J. M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Kiran Desai, Ian McEwan, Zadie Smith, and many more, the volume also offers an outlook on future forms, functions, and frictions of the novel and hopes to encourage new critical discourses in the field. Because twenty-first-century novels are increasingly produced in transnational spaces, which exceed the limits of any single cultural context, many of the new developments that are identified in the individual chapters are global in scope and travel the literary world in rapid speed. The approaches presented in the contributions to this volume can, therefore, also claim some relevance for other literatures.

We use the term 'Anglophone novel' in a broad, inclusive sense, designating the spectrum of narrative literary texts written "in English around the globe" (Dharwadker 2016, 48). Today, as a consequence of British colonialism and Anglo-American globalisation, English has assumed the status of a global language: Literature written in English is "a planetary affair with diversified traditions and histories in very different parts of the world" (Eckstein 2007, 13). While this global expansionism has produced an enormous variety of different creative traditions and literary practices across the Anglophone world, it is also responsible for global strictures and hierarchies. Aamir Mufti (2016), in his seminal study *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, is right in reminding us that while the global circulation of English has given rise to diversified, locally inflected literary traditions, it has also confirmed many of the inequalities of the colonial past. According to Mufti, the English language could rise to dominance because, in the course of modern histories of globalisation, it has assumed "an aura of universality and transparency" (2016, 16), which allows it to fulfil various mediating functions. As a seemingly "neutral or transparent medium," English has also become the global language of literature, which organises "world literary relations" (16). That is to say that texts written in English usually travel much further and faster than, say, texts written in Arabic, Mandarin, Spanish, or French.[1] Numbers of the chief twenty-five source and target languages for translation (provided by UNESCO; qtd.

[1] David Damrosch points out that "[t]he power of global English is marked in part by the speed with which popular authors such as Stephen King and J.K. Rowling are translated into dozens of languages" (2018, 83).

in Beecroft 2015, 255) unmistakably evince this difference in outreach: Whereas English ranks at the very top of the source languages, Chinese and Spanish, the world's most spoken languages, are degraded to rank 16 and six respectively (cf. Beecroft 2015, 255). The term 'Anglophone' acts therefore also as an ample reminder of the colonial and neo-colonial histories inscribed in the English language. Our selection of Anglophone novels was driven by the new approaches they represent and is by no means exhaustive. If the volume strives towards any representativeness, it is in terms of thematic and formal developments of the twenty-first-century novel.

Responding to today's global challenges, the novel offers a vibrant arena for negotiating conflicting social, political, and normative tendencies. The recent return of "protest novels" (Clark 2017) written in response to the Brexit referendum, such as Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), or the election victory of Donald Trump, such as Howard Jacobson's satirical novella *Pussy* (2017), testify to the role of the novel as both an arena for literary activism and a kind of 'social glue' (cf. Fuller and Sedo 2013, 192) that offers the opportunity to engage in a shared (counter-)narrative. To reassess the social, political, and affective dimensions of the novel and its role in our environment is essential particularly at a time when the humanities experience various crises across the globe (cf. Ahlburg 2018) and the value of literary studies and literature is increasingly assessed according to neo-liberal standards.

But, despite their pronounced political thrust, the novels clearly "lack the power to legislate their own effects" (Felski 2008, 9). As Rita Felski reminds us, "the internal features of a literary work tell us little about how it is received and understood, let alone its impact, if any, on a larger social field" (9). It is commonplace that meanings of the novel hinge on the contexts in which it is read and that literary value is not simply a transcultural given, but contested and in the making (cf. Felski, 9). The interactions between texts, interpretive communities, and individual readers are indeed "varied, contingent, and often unpredictable" (Felski 2008, 9). The extent to which reading literary narratives, novels in particular, might shape the ways in which we perceive and respond to our environment, even train our cognitive and emotional capacities, aid "the growth of human mental flexibility" (Boyd 2009, 176), and ultimately help refine our ability to connect to other people, and where to draw the line (if at all) between 'fact' and 'fiction' based on the real emotions we feel while reading (cf. Kidd and Castano 2013; Oatley 2017) have been hotly debated issues over the past decades. They will continue to spark new approaches for the analysis

of literary narratives at the nexus of cognitive psychology and "cognitive literary science" (Burke and Troscianko 2017), some of which are outlined in this volume. But whatever insights these approaches will produce, it is clear that they will only offer partial truths. The twenty-first-century novel is too complex and varied to be understood from one single perspective. The approaches presented in this volume, therefore, should not be read as separate, even less as exhaustive gateways to the novel: Instead, they offer the keys to unlock different, yet closely interconnected chapters of the twenty-first-century novel, which help illuminate the eminent role of storytelling in our culture and open up new (cross-disciplinary) avenues for future studies of the novel. As the full story of the twenty-first-century novel remains to be written, however, this volume can only provide first perspectives on the breadth of approaches that will be needed to tackle newly emerging forms of the undead genre of the novel whose greatest era might be yet to come.

Works Cited

Acheson, James. 2017. "Introduction." In *The Contemporary British Novel Since 2000*, edited by James Acheson, 1–16. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Adiseshiah, Sian, and Rupert Hildyard. 2013. "Introduction: What Happens Now." In *Twenty-First Century Fiction: What Happens Now*, edited by Sian Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard, 1–14. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ahlburg, Dennis, ed. 2018. *The Changing Face of Higher Education: Is There an International Crisis in the Humanities?* London: Routledge.

Allred, Jeff. 2014. "Novel Hacks: New Approaches to Teaching the Novel Genre." *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy* 24 (1–2): 121–37.

Attridge, Derek. 2004. *The Singularity of Literature*. London: Routledge.

Baumbach, Sibylle, Lena Henningsen, and Klaus Oschema, eds. 2017. *The Fascination with Unknown Time*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beecroft, Alexander. 2015. *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day*. London and New York: Verso.

Berman, Jessica. 2009. "Imagining World Literature: Modernism and Comparative Literature." In *Disciplining Modernism*, edited by Pamela Caughie, 53–70. New York: Palgrave.

Boxall, Peter. 2013. *Twenty-First Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2015. *The Value of the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boxall, Peter, and Bryan Cheyette. 2016. "Introduction: The Life and Death of the Post-War Novel." In *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Vol. 7—British*

and Irish Fiction Since 1940, edited by Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette, 1–16. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boyd, Brian. 2009. *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Bracke, Astrid. 2018. *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Brouillette, Sarah, Mathias Nilges, and Emilio Sauri. 2017. "Introduction." In *Literature and the Global Contemporary*, edited by Sarah Brouillette, Mathias Nilges, and Emilio Sauri, xv–xxxv. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Burke, Michael, and Emily T. Troscianko. 2017. *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues Between Literature and Cognition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2012. "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 43 (1): 1–18.

Cordón-García, José-Antonio, Julio Alonso-Arévalo, Raquel Gómez-Díaz, and Daniel Linder. 2013. *Social Reading: Platforms, Applications, Clouds and Tags*. Oxford: Chandos Publishing.

Clark, Alex. 2017. "Writers Unite! The Return of the Protest Novel." *The Guardian*, March 11. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/mar/11/fiction-as-political-protest-can-a-novel-change-the-world.

Clark, Timothy. 2015. *Ecocriticism on the Edge*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Damrosch, David. 2018. *How to Read World Literature*. 2nd ed. Malden and Oxford: Wiley.

Dawson, Ashley. 2015. "The 2000s." In *A Companion to the English Novel*, edited by Stephen Arata, Madigan Haley, J. Paul Hunter, and Jennifer Wicke, 71–86. Malden and Oxford: Wiley.

Derrida, Jacques. 2002. "Right of Inspection. Interview with Bernard Stiegler." In *Echographies of Television*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, 31–40. Oxford: Blackwell.

Dharwadker, Vinay. 2016. "Anglophone World Literature." In *The Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz, Vol. 1, 48–56. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dimock, Wai Chee. 2006. *Through Other Continents: American Literatures Across Deep Time*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eagleton, Terry. 2004. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Eckstein, Lars. 2007. "Introduction." In *English Literatures Across the Globe: A Companion*, edited by Lars Eckstein, 13–19. Paderborn: Fink.

Felski, Rita. 2008. *Uses of Literature (Blackwell Manifestos)*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 2006. "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies." *Modernism/Modernity* 13 (3): 425–43.

———. 2012. "World Modernism, World Literature, and Comparaticity." In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, edited by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, 499–525. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fuller, Danielle, and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. 2013. *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. London: Routledge.

Gottschall, Jonathan. 2012. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. 2014. *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 2007. "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes." *Profession* 2007 (1): 187–99.

Hitchcock, Peter. 2009. *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jernigan, Daniel, Neil Murphy, Brendan Quigley, and Tamara S. Wagner, eds. 2009. *Literature and Ethics: Questions of Responsibility in Literary Studies*. Amherst: Cambria.

Kidd, David Comer, and Emanuele Castano. 2013. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science* 342: 377–80.

Kurnick, David. 2009. "The Novel (in Theory)." *Literature Compass* 6 (1): 228–43.

Lea, Daniel. 2017. *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: Contemporary British Voices*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Levine, Caroline. 2015. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mazzoni, Guido. 2017. *Theory of the Novel*. Translated by Zakiya Hanafi. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

McGurl, Mark. 2016. "Everything and Less: Fiction in the Age of Amazon." *Modern Language Quarterly* 77 (3): 447–71.

Microsoft Goodreads. 2018. https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/p/goodreads/9nblggh1zpgd. Accessed 1 December 2018.

Moretti, Franco. 2000. "Conjectures on World Literature." *New Left Review* 1: 55–67.

Mufti, Aamir R. 2016. *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Neumann, Birgit. 2018. "Vernacular Cosmopolitanism in Anglophone World Literatures: Comparative Histories of Literary Worlding." *Arcadia. Special Issue Global Perspectives in Literary History* 53: 239–57.

Neumann, Birgit, and Gabriele Rippl. 2017. "Rethinking Anglophone World Literatures—An Introduction." In *Anglophone World Literatures*, edited by Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl. *Special Issue of Anglia* 135 (1): 1–20.

Oatley, Keith. 2017. "On Truth and Fiction." In *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues Between Literature and Cognition*, edited by Burke and Troscianko, 249–78. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ramazani, Jahan. 2009. *A Transnational Poetics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London and New York: Continuum.

Robbins, Bruce. 2012. *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Schmidt, Michael. 2014. *The Novel: A Biography*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Schulze-Engler, Frank. 2007. "Theoretical Perspectives: From Postcolonialism to Transcultural World Literature". In: *English Literatures Across the Globe: A Companion*, edited by Lars Eckstein, 20–32. Paderborn: Fink.

Shields, David. 2011. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*. London: Penguin.

Slaughter, Joseph R. 2007. *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Vermeulen, Pieter. 2015a. *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

———. 2015b. "Reading Alongside the Market: Affect and Mobility in Contemporary American Migrant Fiction." *Textual Practice* 29 (2): 273–93.

———. 2017. "Future Readers: Narrating the Human in the Anthropocene." *Textual Practice* 29 (5): 867–85.

Vermeulen, Timotheus, and Robin van den Akker. 2010. "Notes on Metamodernism." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 2 (1): n. p.

Virilio, Paul. 2008. *Open Sky*. London: Verso.

Walkowitz, Rebecca L. 2015. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Williams, Raymond L. 2015. "New Approaches to the Novel: From *Terra Nostra* to Twitter Literature." *Coherencia* 12 (22): 13–23.

Woolf, Virginia. 1966. "The Narrow Bridge of Art" [1927]. In *Virginia Woolf: Collected Essays*, edited by Leonard Woolf, Vol. 2, 218–29. London: Hogarth Press.