

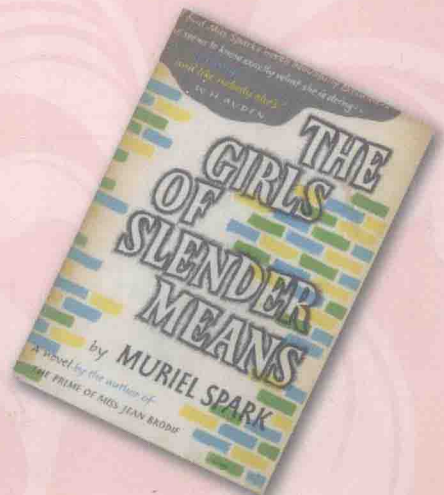
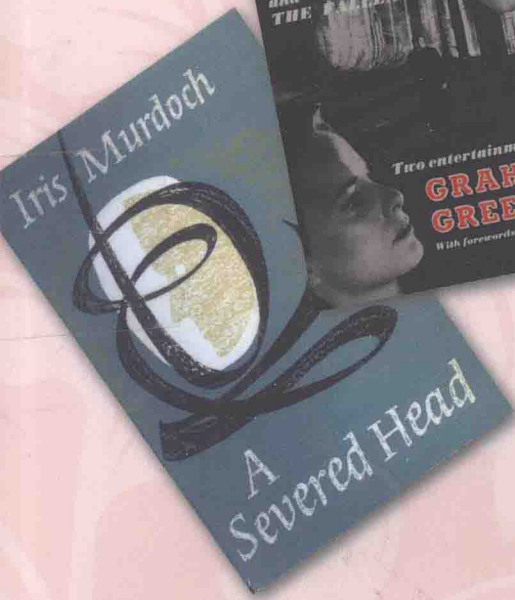
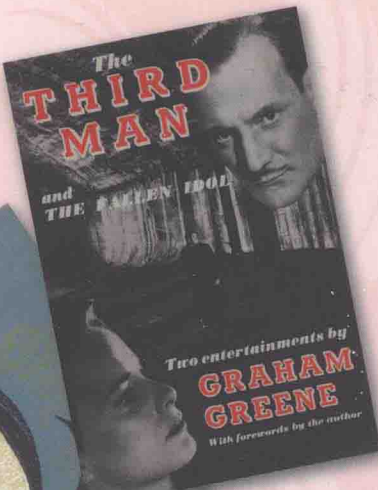
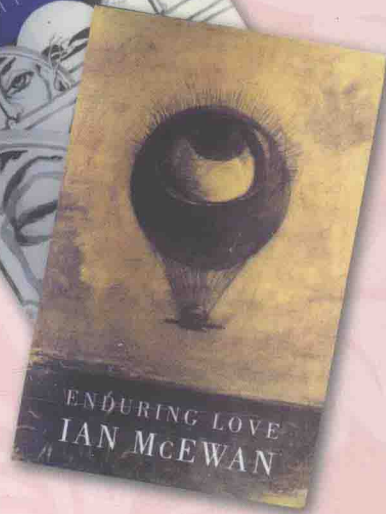
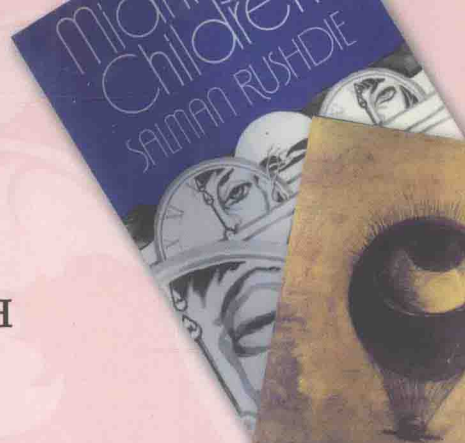
OXFORD

THE OXFORD HISTORY OF  
THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH

VOLUME 7

# British and Irish Fiction since 1940

EDITED BY  
Peter Boxall and  
Bryan Cheyette



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The volume was shaped initially in conversation with scholars at a conference in 2009 entitled 'Narrative Dominions', and we would like to thank the participants of that conference for informing not only our volume, but the *Oxford History* more generally. Colleagues at OUP, particularly Jacqueline Baker, Rachel Platt, and Phil Dines, have been remarkably supportive and efficient throughout. Friends and colleagues at the University of Reading and University of Sussex have also offered enthusiastic assistance at every stage of this project. We are also particularly grateful to Simon F. Davies for his meticulous work on the indexes, and to Lydia Shinoj and Elizabeth Stone for their care with the proofs. Finally, we both owe a great deal to our families and spouses for tolerating our long telephone conversations and our editorial absences when there were more urgent things to be done. We are only sorry that Bryan's sister Nicola is no longer with us to enjoy the fruits of our collective labour with her customary love and generosity. We dedicate this volume to our children, Jacob, Ava, Laurie, and Iris.

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## General Editor's Preface

UNLIKE poetry and drama, the novel belongs entirely within the sphere of recorded history. Novels, like historical records, are written texts superseding the worlds of myth, of epic poetry, and oral storytelling. Typically they are commercial products taking advantage of the technology of printing, the availability of leisure time among potential readers, and the circulation of books. The growth of the novel as an art form would have been unthinkable without the habit of silent, private reading, a habit that we now take for granted although its origins are much disputed among scholars. While novels are not always read silently and in private, they are felt to belong in the domestic sphere rather than in the public arenas associated with music, drama, and the other performance arts. The need for separate histories of the novel form has long been recognized, since the distinctiveness of fictional prose narrative is quickly lost sight of in more general accounts of literary history.

The *Oxford History of the Novel in English* is a multi-volume series offering a comprehensive, worldwide history of English-language prose fiction, and drawing on the knowledge of a large, international team of scholars. Our history spans more than six centuries, firmly rejecting the simplified view that the novel in English began with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prose fiction has, in fact, been surveyed by many earlier historians, including Ernest A. Baker, whose *History of the English Novel* appeared in ten volumes between 1924 and 1939. Unlike Baker's strictly chronological account, the *Oxford History* broadens out as it approaches the present, recognizing the spread of the English Language across the globe from the seventeenth century onwards. The 'English' (or British) novel becomes the novel in English. While we aim to offer a comprehensive account of the anglophone novel, our coverage cannot of course be exhaustive; that is a task for the bibliographer rather than the literary historian. All history has a commemorative function, but cultural memory is unavoidably selective. Selection, in the case of books, is the task of literary criticism, and criticism enters literary history the moment that we speak of 'the novel' rather than, simply, of the multitude of individual novels. Nevertheless, this *Oxford History* adopts a broader definition of 'the novel' than has been customary in earlier histories. Thus we neither focus exclusively on the so-called literary novel, nor on the published texts of fiction at the expense of the processes of production, distribution, and reception. Every volume in this series contains

sections on relevant aspects of book history and the history of criticism, together with sections on popular fiction and the fictional subgenres, in addition to the sequence of chapters outlining the work of major novelists, movements, traditions, and tendencies. Novellas and short stories are regarded for our purposes (we would stress 'for our purposes') both as subgenres of the novel and as aspects of its material history.

Our aim throughout these volumes is to present the detailed history of the novel in a way that is both useful to students and specialists, and accessible to a wide and varied readership. We hope to have conveyed our understanding of the distinctiveness, the continuity, and the social and cultural resonance of prose fiction at different times and places. The novel, moreover, is still changing. Reports of its death—and there have been quite a few—are, as Mark Twain might have said, an exaggeration. At a time when new technologies are challenging the dominance of the printed book and when the novel's 'great tradition' is sometimes said to have foundered, we believe that the *Oxford History* will stand out as a record of the extraordinary adaptability and resilience of the novel in English, its protean character, and its constant ability to surprise.

Patrick Parrinder

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# Introduction: The Life and Death of the Post-War Novel

PETER BOXALL AND BRYAN CHEYETTE

OUR history begins with the ‘death of the novel’ and ends with the ‘future of the novel’. This may give the impression that the volume is constructed around a redemptive narrative; out of the ashes of the post-war British and Irish novel arose a revitalized contemporary novel which is newer and more ‘novel’ than ever. But it is precisely this kind of sanguine linearity which we are at pains to avoid. In fact, it could be argued that the very conception of the ‘death of the novel’, in the post-war period, has been elided with a lost ideal of linear progress which, in an English context at least (and we will see below a marked difference in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales), took a global form in relation to the waning empire. As has long been recognized, in every decade in the twentieth century the novel has been perceived as an irretrievably exhausted and dying genre (Bradbury 1993: xii–xiii). We believe that there are three main periods post-1940 when these multiple ‘deaths’ (and presumed Lazarus-like rebirths) can be related to the material conditions of a world which has ‘shaken itself into a new shape’ (Orwell 1940: 50). These three periods were, firstly, during the Second World War and the immediate aftermath; secondly, during the global ‘oil crisis’ caused by the 1973 Arab–Israeli war in the Middle East and subsequent restructuring of the publishing industry; and, finally, the 2008 economic recession which accelerated the rise of the e-book and growth of electronic booksellers. Our collection is organized around these periods of extraordinarily rapid social, technological, and economic change so as to stress the discontinuities, as well as the continuities, within the post-war novel form.

## ‘Sitting on a Melting Iceberg’

At the height of the Second World War Graham Greene, E. M. Forster, Desmond McCarthy, and Rose Macaulay made up a ‘Brains Trust’ under the rubric ‘Is the novel

dead?'. The trust met in the Churchill Club in 1944, but this was a rather tired debate, with Forster especially demurring from the funereal consensus (Forster 2008: 288–92). The decades after the war were steeped in equivalent discussions and it is perhaps not a coincidence that the period up until the 1970s is known as the 'golden age of criticism' (McDonald 2007: 96, 111), not least with regard to the growth and hegemony of the novel. On the one hand, the life-enhancing properties of the English novel and its historical connection to 'formal realism' (Watt 1957: 32–5) were shored up by F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948) and Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957), only for the form to be perceived to be in perennial 'crisis' in Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1948) and, later, in Bernard Bergonzi's *The Situation of the Novel* (1970), which mapped out diligently the main critical work on the decline of the novel since the war. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf had died in 1941, signifying a modernist literary tradition which, according to Cyril Connolly in *The Unquiet Grave* (1944), had 'finished off the novel' (Connolly 1944: 22). The term 'modernism' paradoxically came to prominence in our period when the history of modernism was said to have ended (Rainey 2005: xxi). At the same time, Leavis's championing of what a later generation would call the 'classic realist novel' set up an unhelpful polarity between literary 'realism' and 'experimentalism' that has not yet been overcome (Gąsiorek 1995: 179–93). For Leavis, it was the death of D. H. Lawrence in 1930 that heralded the decline of the novel in England.

The debates on the 'death of the novel' reached a crescendo in the three decades after the war. The tone was set by Connolly, who reinforced a mournful view of the contemporary novel by arguing in a *Horizon* 'Comment' in 1946 that 'no new crop of novelists has risen' to match the work of Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, and Graham Greene (qtd in Bradbury 1993: 277). George Orwell had also been writing the novel's obituary in the 1930s to the extent that he opened 'In Defence of the Novel' (1936) with 'it hardly needs pointing out that at this moment the prestige of the novel is extremely low' (Orwell 1936: 281). By the time of 'Inside the Whale' (1940), he had a fully fledged theory to revive the novel's fortunes which particularly persuaded Lionel Trilling, a fellow *Partisan Review* contributor. Trilling argued influentially in 1948 that it was 'impossible to talk about the novel' without questioning whether it is still a 'living form' (Trilling 1950: 255). He offered three main reasons for this state of affairs. Firstly, that the genre was 'exhausted' and would eventually be engulfed by mass media such as film and television; secondly, that the 'cultural circumstances' which gave rise to the novel no longer existed after the horrors of the Second World War and threat of nuclear catastrophe; and, thirdly, that there was little 'value' in the 'answers' (256) the post-war novel could offer in the context of an increasingly globalized marketplace. Each subsequent 'death of the novel' echoes one or more of these suppositions, as can be seen in the most recent version of this jeremiad

by Will Self: 'if you accept that . . . the vast majority of texts will be read in digital form on devices linked to the web . . . then the death of the novel is sealed out of your own mouth' (Self 2014).

What is most crucial about Trilling's argument is the abiding connection between the decline of the liberal imagination and this perceived 'death': 'In the nineteenth-century the novel followed the great lines of political thought, both the conservative and the radical . . . with an original and brilliant sociology' (262). The underlying liberal humanism in the nineteenth-century novel, which reflected mainstream political reality ('brilliant sociology'), was, however, no longer tenable after the war as 'society's resistance to the discovery of depravity has ceased' and there is 'no possible way of responding to Belsen and Buchenwald' (264–5). Orwell, at the end of 'Inside the Whale' (1940), also makes the connection between the death of the novel and a defunct liberal humanism: 'The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable. As for the writer, he is sitting on a melting iceberg; he is merely an anachronism' (Orwell 1940: 48).

The well-known conclusion to Orwell's essay is that the only response to this period of interregnum, between liberalism and totalitarianism, is a Jonah-like escape 'inside the whale'. Andrzej Gąsiorek has rightly warned that this over-focus on the tradition of English liberalism and the realist novel is reductive not least because there are a variety of novel traditions, as our volume above all shows, and 'formal realism' or 'classical realism' is but 'one element in the novel's chequered history' (Gąsiorek 1995: 8). What is more, the association of the 'death' of the realist novel with the decline of liberal ideology (a connection made especially in the three decades after the war) confuses liberalism as an 'economic or political creed' (7) with liberalism as a humanist 'sensibility' (7). But this confusion of culture and creed only makes sense when we take account of the anxieties caused by the rise of communism and fascism which were thought of, by Orwell and Trilling at least, as an attack on mainstream European liberal culture signified by the realist novel. In the light of such tectonic shifts in power, Orwell argued that future novelists would choose the 'quietism' of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) rather than a politically engaged literature. As there is 'seemingly nothing left but quietism' (our emphasis), the novelist, when inside the whale, can '[rob] reality of its terrors by simply submitting to it . . . Give yourself over to the world-process, stop fighting against it or pretending that you control it; simply accept it, endure it, record it' (48–9).

Paradoxically, this version of realism, with the writer deemed to be an empty conduit merely 'submitting' to reality, is not unlike T. S. Eliot's version of modernism in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919) with the individual writer also acting as an impersonal medium with regard to European literary tradition. But Orwell champions Miller's quietism—which is the 'formula that any sensitive novelist is now *likely* to adopt' (our emphasis, 49)—specifically in the context of the rise of Nazism. Writing at a time when 'another European war has broken out', which will most probably 'tear Western

civilization to pieces' (47), Orwell famously lists what needs to be 'accepted', 'endured', and 'recorded' by the novelist from 'inside the whale':

To say 'I accept' in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films, and political murders (17).

This position, taken up by Trilling, is not dissimilar to Theodor Adorno's—'after Auschwitz no lyric poetry'—as Orwell is well aware of the dangers of the facile transcendence (even 'inside the whale') of the age of 'concentration camps'. The 'death of the novel' and the death of 'western civilization' are here equivalents. Orwell's seemingly random list of 'realities', which the writer should ideally submit to, brings together the history and excesses of fascism, Stalinism, and colonialism ('rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin') and places them alongside global warfare ('submarines'), the dehumanizing industrial production line ('Bedaux belts'), and the collapse of the democratic liberal state ('machine guns, putsches, purges, slogans'). Such is Orwell's sense of an ending, which culminates in the 'temporary death' of the 'literature of liberalism' and makes the English novelist anachronistic.

Tyrus Miller has utilized 'Inside the Whale' as a means of conceptualizing the 'new literary dispensation' of 'late modernism' (Miller 1999: 7–9), an argument which is expanded in Chapter 9 of this volume. This new dispensation can also be related to the material context in which Orwell was writing. Andrew Nash notes in Chapter 1 that, when paper rationing was introduced in March 1940, publishers were restricted to 60 per cent of their paper consumption in the twelve months prior to the war. While the demand for the diminishing number of novels was extremely high, Orwell concludes that 99 per cent of these books were 'tripe' (50) because their authors had 'no experience of anything except liberalism' (36). For the novel to be of value novelists would have to reflect a world beyond European liberal humanism such as Orwell's experience of colonialism in Burma or of fascism and Stalinist communism in Spain. The irony here is that most subsequent literary critics assume a seamless progress in the democratization and diversity of the novel from post-war to the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thus reinstating a Whiggish narrative which restricts as well as sustains our understanding of the British and Irish novel after 1940.

Our volume is organized sequentially (from 1940 to 1973 and from 1973 to the present), but also generically and contextually so as to cut across a linear narrative and to avoid a too rigid periodization. The reason for this approach is to highlight both the continuities within the period, especially between authors and within particular genres and novel forms, as well as the specific material conditions which lead to some important discontinuities. Above all, we wish to challenge the critical orthodoxy which argues that the post-war English novel was 'parochial and inward looking' (Bergonzi 1970: 56) or

'tended to be restrictive rather than extensive' with a 'natural desire to withdraw from the large world into the little one' (Karl 1963: 4, 293). This supposed inwardness was often couched in the language of neurosis, as when Adrian Mitchell summarized in 1967—'the disease of the British artist since 1945 has been a compulsion to stay small'—or, as Bergonzi echoed, 'English writers, and some of the most talented among them, have exhibited the classical neurotic symptoms of withdrawal and disengagement' (Bergonzi 1970: 57). The 'disease' of the English novelist, in other words, was that it was neurotically 'small' and inhibited and no longer part of a healthy imperial *Weltanschauung*.

The argument for the 'smallness' of the post-war English novel assumes a withdrawal back in time to the 'classical realist' Victorian and Edwardian novel and a withdrawal back in space to a little Englandism. Such was the grim paradox of being 'inside the whale', inward and yet part of a huge whale-like set of traditions and histories. But the impression of post-war literature as essentially insular—anti-modernist or, alternatively, anti-cosmopolitan—wrongly assumes an 'undisturbed sense of Englishness' (Connor 1996: 2) or what George Steiner has called a 'continuum . . . of liberal imagining in British politics' (Steiner 1988). The conventional reception of the post-war novel has meant that a 'new' literary voice has been identified periodically (such as working-class writers in the 1950s, Jewish writers in the 1960s, women writers in the 1970s, or postcolonial writers in the 1980s) which supposedly reinvigorates a core literary canon. In this way, the canon is continually renewed and supplemented from the assimilable margins. The post-war English novel can be divided into 'novelists of expansion' and 'novelists of contraction', as Patrick Parrinder has argued, with both types of novel reinforcing the mainstream, whether it be an ever-expanding canon or a narrow form of 'English' liberal humanism (Parrinder 2006: 341).

As Zachary Leader notes in Chapter 8, one characterization of English novelists such as Kingsley Amis, D. J. Enright, Anthony Powell, V. S. Pritchett, C. P. Snow, John Wain, and Angus Wilson who were associated to a greater or lesser degree with Movement poetry, was a quest for 'happiness . . . without tragic consequences' (142) which refers back implicitly to the Second World War. There is, in other words, an unspoken sense of the tragic at the heart of the Englishness of these novelists, a whistling in the dark which structures and complicates any sense of quietism. As Leader makes clear, the figure of Orwell, not least in his belief in the nation as an extended family, is crucial for this group of writers, particularly when he speaks of the contemporary novelist as a 'passive acceptor of evil' or a 'Whitman among the corpses' (Orwell 1940: 50). To this extent, even the most *English* of English novelists are deeply implicated in the feeling of rupture and discontinuity, a loss of national futurity, which followed the Second World War and the era of decolonization.

In her well-known essay 'Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch' (1961), Iris Murdoch, who articulated this sense of rupture better than anyone, characterized dryness as 'smallness, clearness, self-containedness' (28) and contrasted it with a more expansive

humanism which focused on 'real, impenetrable individuals' (30). Her call for a literature which can 'give us a new vocabulary of experience and a truer picture of freedom' (31) is, as Robert Eaglestone argues in Chapter 3, directly related to her sense (echoing both Orwell and Trilling) of living in a culture which, as she puts it, had 'not recovered from two wars and the experience of Hitler' (23). The contemporary novelist, Murdoch believes, has to negotiate between two extremes of modernity: 'Our inability to imagine evil is a consequence of the facile, dramatic and, in spite of Hitler, optimistic picture of ourselves with which we work' (30). Both the birth of the welfare state, articulated in the expectant optimism of the Beveridge Report (1942) which sold more than 600,000 copies, and the celebratory national narratives after the Second World War, reinforced a feeling of continuity and progress which was countered by 'Hitler' and the threat of nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War. In Murdoch's terms, the 'crystalline or journalistic' (27) contemporary novel was unable to address adequately the 'question of evil' which for her, as well as William Golding, Muriel Spark, and J. R. R. Tolkien, was 'the only problem' (Spark 1984: 19) after the war. For Murdoch, the return to the classical humanist nineteenth-century novel, rather than being a form of 'smallness' or little Englandism, was a way of engaging with the largest of questions.

As Liz Sage contends in Chapter 7, Murdoch's rewriting of the nineteenth-century novel from the margins, not unlike Doris Lessing and Rose Macaulay, and, later, A. S. Byatt and Margaret Drabble, could be read as a form of subversive feminization of a conventionally masculine form. Murdoch's dual consciousness of both the victims of 'Hitler' and the countervalues of liberal humanism can also be understood in relation to her Irish background. Murdoch was well aware of Ireland as a victim of English colonialism. As Barney argues in *The Red and the Green* (1965), Ireland had been destroyed 'slowly and casually, without malice, without mercy, practically without thought, like someone who treads upon an insect' (Murdoch 1965: 216). Alongside this victimized form of Irishness, Murdoch also thought of herself as an Irish writer in a Yeatsian sense. Here she included a more masculinized version of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy and Irish romanticism and perceived her birthplace as an other-realm beyond modernity. In adopting an Anglo-Irish identity Murdoch followed Elizabeth Bowen, whom she befriended in 1956, and perceived herself as 'caught between two worlds and at home in neither' (Conradi 2001: 25): 'Irish when it suits them, English when it does not' (qtd in Conradi 2001: 23), as Bowen acerbically characterized the Anglo-Irish. The violent resolution of such non-national in-betweenness meant that Murdoch understood other historic insider/outsiders, not least German-Jewish refugees, equally as fonts of creativity and as the embodiment of victimhood, as can be seen in her novels such as *The Nice and the Good* (1978) and *The Message to the Planet* (1989). Michael Cronin shows in Chapter 11 the extent to which these different versions of Irishness (premodern, modern, and postmodern) were in dialogue with each other in the work of, for instance, John McGahern, Kate O'Brien, and Frank O'Connor.



Murdoch's sense of living with the trauma of fascism and of English colonialism in Ireland (particularly in relation to the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising) is not that far removed from other Irish, Scots, and Welsh writers who also found it impossible to disentangle a history of English liberalism from English oppression. As Liam Connell shows in Chapter 21, complemented by Matthew Hart and Scott Hames in Chapters 28 and 29, an engagement with the diversity of Scottish, Welsh, and Irish regionalism, however 'small', was perceived to be a means of challenging the dead hand of English history. At the same time, Connell expands our understanding of regionalism by including the working-class writing of John Braine and Stan Barstow, who are discussed at length by Nicola Wilson in Chapter 4. We would add that black and Asian writing (Chapter 27), Jewish fictions (Chapter 20), and women's literature of the period (Chapters 7 and 26) also rewrite and unpack the very notion that the 'smallness' of their experience is somehow detached from larger, more universal or global concerns. Such cultural renewal from the margins, critiquing a mainstream English liberal canon, can be found in a range of generic fictions such as science fiction (Chapter 22), children's literature (Chapter 18), and the imperial novel (Chapter 5), as well as formally experimental fictions (Chapter 12). The supposed smallness of the post-war novel has become widely accepted, but what our volume shows is that fiction in this period, in a wide variety of genres and forms, contested the very notions of smallness and liberal continuity, offering different histories and traditions of the novel form. For this reason, we would want to propose a dialogue between the earlier and later decades in our volume, so that chapters are read not as pre- and post-histories within particular periods but dialectically in relation to each other. To this extent, as we shall now argue, we wish to challenge the binary of 'smallness' (related to English liberal continuity) in the post-war period and 'enlargement' (related to the globalization of the British and Irish novel) in the later twentieth century which has shaped most received critical orthodoxies concerning the fiction under discussion. Only by contesting this binary can we begin to engage historically with the post-war period as a whole.

'Crisis is a way of thinking about one's moment, and not inherent  
in the moment itself' (Kermode 1967: 101)

It is now widely accepted that the history of the novel after 1940 is divided into three distinct periods—the post-war, the later twentieth century (often referred to at the time as the 'contemporary'), and the twenty-first century. But there is not a consensus on when the post-war period ends and the 'contemporary' period begins, so that such distinctions are by no means as clear-cut as those deploying them assume. Most critics contend that on or about the 1970s the history of the novel changed, but go on to relate this period of transformation too broadly to the election of Margaret Thatcher's government in 1979—