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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi

INTRODUCTION 1

Surveys the important questions and debates that have formed the basis for much of the criticism of contemporary British fiction including the nature of the 'contemporary' as a literary category and issues surrounding periodization; the use of the term 'British' in literary categorization; the idea of a canon of contemporary British fiction; the dismantling of the high/popular divide in terms of the 'literary' and the 'popular' novel; and the impact on fiction of cultural phenomena such as literary prizes, new media, and cultural theory. Identifies some important historical contexts informing the period including the 'death of the novel' debate of the early 1970s; the intersection of contemporary fiction and cultural politics in terms of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age and disability during the period; and the reconceptualization of new national and cultural identities. Includes a summary of the content of the chapters in the rest of the book.

CHAPTER ONE 12

Studying Form: Realism, Modernism, Postmodernism and After

Discusses the varieties and legacies of modes and forms of fiction in the contemporary British novel, including the relationship between realism, modernism and postmodernism. Examines major critical interventions in this debate during the period from the 1970s onwards and explores the usefulness of modal terms as ways of describing contemporary fiction. Examines the concept of post-postmodernism as a marker of a shift in critical discourse after the high point of postmodernism in the late twentieth century. References a range of critical theorists including Linda Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and Philip Tew. This is followed by a survey of the formal criticism of three novelists' work: Angela Carter, Julian Barnes and David Mitchell.

## CHAPTER TWO 29

## Politics and Contemporary Fiction

Explores important political contexts of the period from the 1970s to the present informing contemporary British fiction and in particular those writers who were responding to Thatcherism and its immediate legacy in the 1980s and 1990s, and to New Labour in the late 1990s and 2000s. Examines the critical response to novelists whose work responds variously to these political contexts, namely Jonathan Coe, Alasdair Gray and David Peace.

## CHAPTER THREE 42

## Class

Introduces debates around class and classlessness that resurface in political and social discourse at various points from the 1950s onwards. Examines the problematic category of the working-class novel and how it relates to other categories of British fiction. Discusses the development of the recent terms such as 'underclass', 'the precariat' and 'chavs' as ways in which class politics resurfaces in the fiction of the 1990s and 2000s. The relationship between fiction and middle-class culture more broadly is also discussed. The fiction and criticism of Martin Amis, James Kelman and Zadie Smith is explored in the context of new narratives of class.

## CHAPTER FOUR 58

## Black and Asian British Fiction

Highlights the range of criticism that has developed over the last 30 years that focuses on writing by British authors who engage with issues of post-colonialism, multiculturalism, ethnicity and 'race'. Establishes some key historical contexts and examines important terms within the theoretical field that have influenced critics, such as hybridity, diaspora, hospitality and 'bare life', drawing on theories from Giorgio Agamben, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Simon Gikandi, Paul Gilroy and Edward Said. Discusses criticism on three important writers in this field: Monica Ali, Andrea Levy and Salman Rushdie.

## CHAPTER FIVE 76

## Gender and Sexuality

Offers a summary of the main critical terms and historical contexts in the field of gender and sexuality including feminism and post-feminism, *écriture féminine*, queer theory, and the concept of gender as performative. Introduces theories developed by Judith Butler, Hélène Cixous, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Judith Halberstam, David M. Halperin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Explores criticism of novels by Alan Hollinghurst, Ali Smith and Jeanette Winterson.

## CHAPTER SIX 92

## Contemporary Historical Fiction

Addresses some of the issues related to the interconnected terms of history, the past, and memory as presented in contemporary fictional narratives. Discusses key terms and theories in this area with reference to work by Linda Hutcheon, Georg Lukács and Alan Robinson. Examines the way in which several contemporary British novelists have sought to reclaim submerged histories and identifies the importance of the 'neo-historical' in contemporary fiction. Discusses criticism of two novels: A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Sarah Waters's *The Night Watch*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN 108

## Geographic Space and National Identity

Examines the importance of cultural and geographic spaces in contemporary British fiction in terms of urban and national geographies. Identifies the focus on London in contemporary fiction as a cultural and historical site for novelists exploring urban landscapes and the postmodern city. Introduces important theories of space from Jean Baudrillard, Michel de Certeau, Fredric Jameson and Edward Soja. Examines J.G. Ballard's *Kingdom Come* in this context. Discusses the regional and national context for fiction in the United Kingdom as it is manifest in articulations of Englishness, Irishness, Scottishness and Welshness as well as how those national identities have been further complicated by discourses of post-colonialism, diaspora and multiculturalism. Explores the criticism of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Iain Sinclair's *Downriver*.

CHAPTER EIGHT 125  
Literature and Science (Fiction)

Introduces key terms and historical contexts on the relationship between contemporary literature and science, including cyberpunk, the neurological turn, the rise of ecocriticism, and the concept of the posthuman. Examines a variety of modes of science fiction, including soft and hard SF, dystopian fiction and the post-apocalyptic novel. Surveys theories important to contemporary fiction in this context as developed by Peter Boxall, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles. Criticism of Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is examined.

CHAPTER NINE 142  
Contemporary Trauma Narratives

Explores the importance of trauma theory for contemporary British fiction and introduces theories developed by writers such as Cathy Caruth, Dominic LaCapra and Roger Luckhurst. Focuses on 9/11 as a focal point for trauma narratives drawing on concepts of trauma culture (Roger Luckhurst) and the traumatological (Philip Tew) as they relate to contemporary British fiction. Examines the criticism of novels that include trauma as a theme: Martin Amis's *Yellow Dog*, Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy and Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*.

CONCLUSION 157

Offers speculation for future directions of contemporary British fiction and identifies possible themes in literary criticism that will become prominent in the coming years.

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