

BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION, 1980–2000: ACCELERATED TIMES

The literature of twentieth-century Britain's final twenty years represents a crash course in transitional history. In the aftermath of the 1970s, the nation's hopes of becoming more efficient were high, leading to the fundamental domestic shake-up that was Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal revolution (1979–90). Following the end of the Cold War, Europe was undergoing radical rejuvenation, while the world as a whole began to thrive on new levels of connectivity and proximity brought through rapid advances in communication technology. Later, in the 1990s, Britons were asked to countenance not only internal devolution, but also the crystallisation of a brand-new European and global order. This volume shows how British literature recorded contemporaneous historical change. It traces the emergence and evolution of literary trends as well as enduring transitional shifts in genre, tone, style and thematic preoccupation.

EILEEN POLLARD is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Chester. Her interview with Hilary Mantel was published by *Textual Practice* in 2015 and she is the co-editor of the forthcoming collection of essays *Hilary Mantel: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*.

BERTHOLD SCHOENE is Professor of English and Faculty Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange for Arts and Humanities at Manchester Metropolitan University. His books include *The Making of Orcadia* (1995), *Writing Men* (2000), *Posting the Male* (2003), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007), *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009) and *The Edinburgh Companion to Irvine Welsh* (2010). He has co-edited special journal issues on 'Texting Obama: Politics, Poetics, Popular Culture' for *Comparative American Studies* (2012) and 'Cosmopolitanism as Critical and Creative Practice' for the Open University's *Open Arts Journal* (2013).

BRITISH LITERATURE IN TRANSITION SERIES

Editor

Gill Plain, *University of St Andrews*

British Literature in Transition maps a century of change. It also seeks to change the way we think about British literary history by reconsidering the canonical certainties and critical norms that shape our understanding of twentieth-century writing. Breaking down the century into twenty-year blocks, each substantial volume surveys, interrogates and challenges prevailing assumptions of critical memory to create a vibrant picture of literary culture in its time. Importantly, this revisionary series both recognises the contingency of the ‘experimental’ and argues that long-established canons do not do justice to the many and various forms that innovation took across the breadth of the twentieth century. As a result, Transitions reinstates lost complexities and reanimates neglected debates, its authoritative new essays setting familiar figures alongside forgotten voices to generate a rich and provocative picture of a transformative century. Exploring transitions in writing, performance, publication and readership from the fin de siècle to the new millennium, the series offers new routes to an understanding of how British literature arrived in the twenty-first century and what made the nation’s writing what it is today.

Books in the Series

British Literature in Transition, 1900–1920: A New Age? edited by JAMES PURDON

British Literature in Transition, 1920–1940: Futility and Anarchy edited by CHARLES FERRALL AND DOUGAL MCNEILL

British Literature in Transition, 1940–1960: Postwar edited by GILL PLAIN

British Literature in Transition, 1960–1980: Flower-Power edited by KATE MCLOUGHLIN

British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000: Accelerated Times edited by EILEEN POLLARD AND BERTHOLD SCHOENE

BRITISH LITERATURE IN
TRANSITION, 1980–2000:
ACCELERATED TIMES

EDITED BY
EILEEN POLLARD
University of Chester

BERTHOLD SCHOENE
Manchester Metropolitan University



Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12142-3 — British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000
Edited by Eileen Pollard, Berthold Schoene
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107121423
DOI: 10.1017/9781316344071

© Cambridge University Press 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Pollard, Eileen, editor. | Schoene-Harwood, Berthold, editor.
TITLE: British literature in transition, 1980–2000 : accelerated times / edited by Eileen Pollard,
Manchester Metropolitan University ; Berthold Schoene, Manchester Metropolitan University.
DESCRIPTION: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2019. | Includes
bibliographical references and index.
IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018042459 | ISBN 9781107121423 (hardback)
SUBJECTS: LCSH: English literature – 20th century – History and criticism. | Literature and
society – Great Britain – History – 20th century.
CLASSIFICATION: LCC PR478.S57 B85 2019 | DDC 820.9/00914–dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018042459>

ISBN 978-1-107-12142-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12142-3 — British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000
Edited by Eileen Pollard , Berthold Schoene
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

*Accelerated Times is dedicated to Shafqat Nasir and Adrian
Dodd.*

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-12142-3 — British Literature in Transition, 1980–2000
Edited by Eileen Pollard , Berthold Schoene
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	xi
<i>General Editor's Preface</i>	xv
Introduction	I
PART I: TRANSITIONS	23
1 The Ends of Postmodernism <i>Peter Boxall</i>	28
2 Historical Fiction and Political Regeneration <i>Dougal McNeill</i>	42
3 Strategies of Survival in Experimental Poetry <i>Luke Roberts</i>	58
4 Dramatic Evolutions/Bodily Violations <i>Nadine Holdsworth</i>	76
5 No Such Thing as Society: The Novel under Neoliberalism <i>Eileen Pollard and Berthold Schoene</i>	91
PART II: NATION	107
6 Black British Writing: From Gulags to Ships <i>Hengameh Saroukhani</i>	115
7 Working-Class Writing and the Decline of Class Consciousness <i>Nick Bentley</i>	131

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
8	Northern Radical Theatre and Community Performance <i>Phil O'Brien</i>	146
9	'Pit Closure as Art': Poetry from the North of England <i>James Underwood</i>	162
10	The Road to Tollund: Northern Ireland's Literature of Transformation <i>Richard Kirkland</i>	178
11	Entangled (K)nots: Reconceptualising the Nation in Scottish Devolution Writing <i>Carla Sassi</i>	192
	PART III: SOCIETY	209
12	Inter-Feminism/s: Women Writing Back to the Future <i>Diana Wallace</i>	215
13	The Rise of Ladlit and Chicklit <i>Imelda Whelehan</i>	230
14	'A Gay Story, a History': Gay Male Liberation and Queer Ruminations <i>Allan Johnson</i>	244
15	'Searching for Something': The Post-Secular Faiths of British Fiction <i>Andrew Tate</i>	259
16	Dystopia and Euphoria: Time-Space Compression and the City <i>Alexander Beaumont</i>	273
	PART IV: ACCELERATION	289
17	Coded Networks: Literature and the Information Technology Revolution <i>Anna McFarlane</i>	293
18	Nature's History? Environmentalism and the British Nature Novel <i>John Parham</i>	309

	<i>Contents</i>	ix
19	Like Any Other Commodity? Literary Prize Culture, Commercialisation and the Rise of a New Reading Public <i>Caroline Edwards</i>	325
20	Making Sense of the World: Literature and Globalisation <i>Philip Leonard</i>	341
	<i>Index</i>	356

Figures

- 6.1 Joseph Johnson in John Thomas Smith's *Vagabondiana; or, Anecdotes of Mendicant Wanderers through the Streets of London* (1817). Courtesy of Guildhall Library, City of London.

Notes on Contributors

ALEXANDER BEAUMONT is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at York St John University. He is the author of *Contemporary British Fiction and the Cultural Politics of Disenfranchisement* (2015), as well as essays on Hanif Kureishi, Maggie Gee, J. G. Ballard and David Mitchell. He has co-edited special issues on ‘Ballard’s Island’ for *Literary Geographies* (2016), ‘Melancholy Islands’ for *C21 Literature* (2017) and ‘Freedom After Neoliberalism’ for the *Open Library of Humanities* (2018).

NICK BENTLEY is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Keele University. His books are *Contemporary British Fiction: A Reader’s Guide to the Essential Criticism* (2018), *Martin Amis: Writers and Their Work* (2015), *Contemporary British Fiction* (2008) and *Radical Fictions: The English Novel in the 1950s* (2007). He is the editor of *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005), and is the co-editor of *Teenage Dreams: Youth Subcultures in Fiction, Film and Other Media* (2018) and *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (2015). He is currently working on his next monograph: *Making a Scene: Youth Subcultures in Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*.

PETER BOXALL is Professor of English at the University of Sussex. He has written books on Samuel Beckett and Don DeLillo. His two most recent monographs are *Twenty-First Century Fiction* (2013) and *The Value of the Novel* (2015). He is currently in the early stages of a new project on the history of the novel, entitled *The Prosthetic Imagination: A History of the Novel as Artificial Life*.

CAROLINE EDWARDS is Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London. She is the author of *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel* (Cambridge, 2019). She has also co-edited two critical volumes on contemporary authors: *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays* (2015) and *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (2015).

NADINE HOLDSWORTH is Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick. Her publications include *Theatre and National Identity: Reimagining Conceptions of Nation* (2014), *Joan Littlewood's Theatre* (2011) and *Theatre & Nation* (2010).

ALLAN JOHNSON is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Surrey. He is the author of *Alan Hollinghurst and the Vitality of Influence* (2014) and *Masculine Identity in Modernist Literature: Castration, Narration, and a Sense of the Beginning, 1919–1945* (2017).

RICHARD KIRKLAND is Professor of Irish Literature and Head of the Department of English at King's College London. He has published widely on modern Irish literature and culture and is currently working on a monograph about nineteenth-century Irish London.

PHILIP LEONARD is Professor of Literature and Theory at Nottingham Trent University. He is the author of *Literature after Globalization: Textuality, Technology, and the Nation-State* (2013). His book *Orbital Poetics: Literature, Theory, World* will be published in 2018. He is also co-editor of a special issue of *Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* on Digital Literary Production (2015).

ANNA MCFARLANE is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Glasgow researching traumatic pregnancy and science fiction. She is the co-editor of *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* and *Adam Roberts: Critical Essays* (2016).

DOUGAL MCNEILL is Senior Lecturer in the School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. He is the co-editor of volume two in the *Transitions* series. His recent publications include chapters on contemporary fiction in *A History of New Zealand Literature* (2016), the *Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2017) and *Writing the 1926 General Strike* (2015). He is currently working on a history of Tokyo in English literature.

PHIL O'BRIEN is Secretary of the Raymond Williams Society and a member of the editorial board of *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*. He has published in *Textual Practice* and *Literature and History*.

JOHN PARHAM is Professor of Environmental Humanities at the University of Worcester. He is the author of *Green Man Hopkins: Poetry and the Victorian Ecological Imagination* (2010) and *Green Media and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (2015). He is also the co-

Notes on Contributors

xiii

editor of Cambridge University Press's *A Global History of Literature and the Environment* and he co-edits the journal *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*.

EILEEN POLLARD is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Chester. Her interview with Hilary Mantel was published by *Textual Practice* in 2015 and she is the co-editor of the forthcoming collection of essays *Hilary Mantel: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*.

LUKE ROBERTS is Lecturer in Modern Poetry at King's College London. He is the author of *Barry MacSweeney and the Politics of Post-War British Poetry* (2017), and editor of Barry MacSweeney, *Desire Lines: Unselected Poems, 1966–2000* (2018). His essays have been published in *Textual Practice* and *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*.

HENGHAMEH SAROUKHANI is Assistant Professor in Literatures and Cultures of the Black Atlantic at Saint Mary's University, Canada. She has published essays on dub poetry, contemporary black British literature and the cultural politics of the car. Her work has appeared in *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Études Anglaises*, *Caribbean Quarterly* and *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*. She is currently working on a monograph that examines the cosmopolitics of twenty-first-century black British texts.

CARLA SASSI is Associate Professor of English Literature at the University of Verona in Italy. Her publications include *Why Scottish Literature Matters* (2005), *Caribbean Scottish Relations* (2007), *Within and without Empire: Scotland across the (Post)Colonial Borderline* (2013) and *The International Companion to Scottish Poetry* (2015).

BERTHOLD SCHOENE is Professor of English and Faculty Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange for Arts and Humanities at Manchester Metropolitan University. His books include *The Making of Orcadia* (1995), *Writing Men* (2000), *Posting the Male* (2003), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007), *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009) and *The Edinburgh Companion to Irvine Welsh* (2010). He has co-edited two special journal issues on 'Texting Obama: Politics, Poetics, Popular Culture' for *Comparative American Studies* (2012) and 'Cosmopolitanism as Critical and Creative Practice' for the Open University's *Open Arts Journal* (2013).

ANDREW TATE is Reader in Literature, Religion and Aesthetics in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. His books include *Contemporary Fiction and Christianity* (2008), *The New Atheist Novel* co-authored with Arthur Bradley (2010) and *Apocalyptic Fiction* (2017).

JAMES UNDERWOOD is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Huddersfield, where he works on the Ted Hughes Network. He is currently completing a monograph on *Early Larkin*.

DIANA WALLACE is Professor of English Literature at the University of South Wales. Her publications include *Christopher Meredith* (2018), *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic* (2013), *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900–2000* (2005) and *Sisters and Rivals in British Women's Fiction, 1914–39* (2000).

IMELDA WHELEHAN is Dean of Higher Degree Research at the Australian National University. She has published widely in the areas of feminism, screen adaptation and popular fiction. Her publications include *Modern Feminist Thought* (1995), *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (2000), *Helen Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary* (2002) and *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005). She is the co-author of *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (2010) and *Key Concepts in Gender Studies* (2017). She has recently co-edited *Reading Lena Dunham's Girls* (2017) and is now working on post-war screen adaptations.

General Editor's Preface

British Literature in Transition maps a century of change. It is a project of revision and reappraisal that aims, through innovative juxtaposition and ambitious realignments, to reconsider the habitual practices and critical norms that shape our understanding of twentieth-century writing.

Each volume is distinctively the work of its editors and contributors: there has been no attempt to impose theoretical or methodological conformity. Rather, the aim has been to create a space of possibility for the reimagining and reconfiguring of twentieth-century literature. The century has been broken down into twenty-year blocks, with a view to disrupting habits of periodisation (most obviously, the decade). Twenty-year blocks are no less arbitrary or problematic, but, by moving to this model, British Literature in Transition is able to ask new questions of the boundaries, books and narratives, the critical perspectives and the canons, through which the century has come to be known. Crucially, the volumes seek to build a picture of literature *in its time*. This historical focus gives new impetus to old questions, while also requiring us to interrogate the selective picture of the century that survives in publishers' catalogues and the reading lists of academia. The multiple volumes of the British Literature in Transition series ask, then, questions as diverse as: what is the modern and whose writing exemplifies it? Does the First World War represent a break in the development of literary practice? Why, habitually, have we come to see the literature of the 1920s and the 1930s as radically different? Why has the writing of the first age of austerity seemingly disappeared without a trace? What were the effects on literature of decolonisation and mass immigration? What did the Cold War do to British literary culture, and how did one woman – Margaret Thatcher – come to have such a profound influence on the writing of a generation?

As these questions suggest, this series pays close attention to the dynamic relationship between literature and history, asking questions not just about the canon that has survived but also about the writing that has been

unjustly forgotten or excluded. The series examines both the prestigious and the popular and aims to understand literature's role in mediating the developments of the past hundred years. *British Literature in Transition* argues for the importance of both politics and aesthetics and it seeks to understand the constraints and generative possibilities of challenging cultural contexts. An acknowledgement that the outside world shapes literary creativity, or that literature engages in a process of 'world-making', is hardly new, but the seeming onset of an age of historical amnesia suggests it is acquiring fresh significance. What, we might ask, in the aftermath of the 2016 'Brexit' vote, will *British* literature come to mean in the next decades of the twenty-first century? The evidence of the vote suggests that a significant proportion of the nation had forgotten why a European Union was once so urgently needed and desired. It also suggests the instability of narratives of progress, tolerance and integration, exposing the fears of a world that – at the end of the twentieth century – seemed to be becoming inescapably global. At the time of writing, the political and economic consequences of the Brexit decision remain mired in uncertainty, but statistics already reveal its profound social impact. The rhetorical register of the campaign, suffused with a misplaced nostalgia for the 1940s, has given new legitimacy to the violent expression of prejudice. Reasserting a firmly bounded concept of the island nation has equally reinstated discredited discourses of xenophobia, racism and homophobia.

The 'contemporary' thus tells us that transition itself is unstable, unpredictable and even – disturbingly – cyclical. Its manifestations across the twentieth century are far from uniform, and there is no necessary correlation between historical event and literary transition. The years 1940–60, for example, a time of almost unimaginable geopolitical change and social upheaval, emerge as a period of relative stasis – full of radical innovations, but uncertain in direction and beset by more or less readily acknowledged nostalgia. It is hard here to detect a paradigm shift in *literary* form. Quite the opposite might be argued of 1920–40, where 1922 stands out as a defining year in the literary understanding of the modern. But is 1922 an end or a beginning? Should the game-changing literary outputs of that year – *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, *Jacob's Room* – be taken as the zenith of a modernity evolving since the nineteenth century, or do they represent a year zero, the moment that literature took a decisive turn – a transition – that criticism would herald, and thus enshrine, as an aesthetic watershed? The answer, of course, is both, and more. Consequently, as each volume in the series approaches its subjects, it does so with multiple concepts of

General Editor's Preface

xvii

transition in mind. Transition might mean movement – some notion of progress, transit or return – or it might mean flux, indeterminacy and the liminal. Transition is equally a change of state, a recognition of the unsettled and the refusal to occupy a fixed or determined place. In literary terms, this means that the innovative and the experimental might take radically different forms – and, to expose this, the Transitions series changes both the *dramatis personae* of literary history and the company they keep. The usual suspects of the twentieth-century canon are here, but they appear in different contexts and in dialogue with unexpected others. These realignments are not the product of editorial whim, but rather an attempt to reconstruct a historical context that recognises the worlds in which these writers wrote, and in which their work was received. The five volumes of the Transitions series thus seek to reinstate the often complex and disingenuous relationship between literature and its contexts. Previous critical work is scrutinised and debated, and fossilised canons are cracked apart and enlarged, to provide readers at all levels, from undergraduate to research professional, with a richer picture of the possibilities of a transformative century.

I began by suggesting that British Literature in Transition was a mapping project, but no map is ever definitive. Cartographers revise their work in the light of emergent knowledge, fresh technologies and new ways of seeing; they fill in blank spaces and reveal occluded paths. To function effectively, critical maps must also periodically be redrawn, and this is one such re-plotting that forges new routes through territory we have, perhaps erroneously, long thought familiar.

Gill Plain
University of St Andrews