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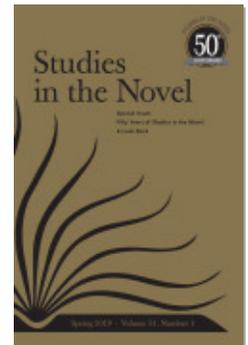
Introduction: Everything Old Is Novel Again

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FIFTY YEARS OF *STUDIES IN THE NOVEL*: A LOOK BACK

INTRODUCTION: EVERYTHING OLD IS NOVEL AGAIN

NORA GILBERT

I've always thought it was a dirty trick, naming a literary genre after a temporal status. There was, no doubt, a point in time when the idea of reading “a long fictional prose narrative, usually filling one or more volumes and typically representing character and action with some degree of realism and complexity” (*OED*) seemed so exciting and revelatory and new that calling it a “novel” felt like the right thing to do. But how was the genre supposed to retain its novelty? On a certain level, of course, it can be said that the novel is constantly renewing and reinventing itself—formally, stylistically, thematically. As is the case with snowflakes, no two novels are alike. Still, the “long fictional prose narrative” has been with us for several hundred years now, and the name with which it was christened at birth has begun to feel, at times, like a bit of an oxymoron. For those of us working in the field of novel studies, there is a similarly inherent tension between the need to be retrospectively, reflectively oriented and the drive to be theoretically cutting-edge. In putting together the special issue that follows—an issue whose purpose is to memorialize fifty years of thinking and writing about “the new”—I have tried to embrace the inner oxymoron of novel studies. How, this collection of essays invites us to consider, can looking *backward* help us to think *forward*?

To start, let's look back to the summer of 1965. It was at some point during this summer that a handful of faculty members working in the English department of what was then called North Texas State University decided that they wanted to start a new scholarly journal. They formed an impromptu, informal committee to decide what kind of journal it should be, and soon settled on the idea of focusing exclusively on the literary genre that they considered to be the most influential of the twentieth century. The committee drew up a formal proposal and submitted it to NTSU's then-president James

Carl Matthews in the fall of 1965, but Matthews sent the proposal back to them and said he would reconsider it in another two years. In 1967, the proposal was revised and resubmitted, at which point Matthews agreed to start funding the journal another two years down the line. After four years of prepping and planning, the first issue of *Studies in the Novel* was published in the spring of 1969, with James Lee appointed as editor, Gerald Kirk as managing editor, and Lee Miller as business manager. While a four-year delay is not a terribly long one in the grand scheme of higher education bureaucracy, it did make a difference in terms of the journal's "novelty" bragging rights: two years after the concept of *SitN* was first floated at NTSU, faculty members at Brown University hit on a similar idea and began publishing *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* in 1967. As disheartening as the news of a rival, Ivy League-funded journal must have been to the founding editorial members of *Studies in the Novel*, they were determined to put their own stamp on the field of novel studies nonetheless. Fifty years, 196 issues, and 1,337 articles later, it is safe to say that that determination has paid off.

Over the course of the journal's five-decade run, there have been six editors-in-chief: James Lee (1969-1975), Gerald Kirk (1975-1993), Scott Simpkins (1994-2003), Jacqueline Foertsch (2004-2012), Stephanie Hawkins (2013-2017), and myself (2017-present), all of whom have been faculty members of the formerly-NTSU/currently-University of North Texas English department. The fact that the journal has managed to grow and flourish in spite of all the cuts to library budgets and public university funding that have been increasingly implemented over the past few decades is a testament to the shrewdness, resourcefulness, and hard work of the five editors and numerous staff members (including its present, inimitable managing editor Timothy Boswell) who came before me. Taking over the stewardship of the journal just as it was entering into Golden Jubilee-preparation mode in 2017 meant that it fell to me to think of a way to celebrate and commemorate fifty years' worth of my predecessors' achievements. An inveterate fan of greatest-hits albums, top-ten lists, and tributary retrospectives, I decided to put together a fiftieth-anniversary special issue that would combine elements of the three. I knew that I wanted to choose approximately ten articles from our archival repository to spotlight and reprint in the issue, but didn't want my own personal preferences or areas of expertise to determine what those ten articles would be. I wanted, instead, for a wide range of literary scholars working in a wide range of novel studies subfields to participate in the nomination process; and so, I hit upon the idea of canvassing the journal's current cohort of editorial board members and book review editors to see which of them might be interested in selecting and introducing a stand-out article from *Studies in the Novel's* past.

I purposefully invited scholars working in subfields as geographically and chronologically diverse as possible, although the range of scholars who wound up agreeing to participate was admittedly influenced by the degree to which

their particular subfields had been represented on the pages of the journal over the years. One of the more glaring ways this influence can be seen is in the anniversary issue's dearth of scholarship on novels written in languages other than English; indeed, with a few brief exceptions, *Fifty Years of Studies in the Novel* is a decidedly Anglophone affair. The lack of linguistic range in the issue highlights one aspect of the journal (among others) that I hope and expect will continue to evolve as the years go on, so that by the time the journal finds itself celebrating another major milestone—a platinum jubilee, perhaps, or even a diamond?—there will be a rich corpus of essays on multilingual novels for the nominating committee to choose from. But there was one other kind of range I wanted my retrospective collection to have that was entirely out of my control, due to the structure of the nomination process: I wanted the original publication dates of the reprinted articles to span all five of the decades that the journal has been in business. Serendipitously, the issue's contributors just so happened to be drawn to essays from the 1970s, '80s, '90s, and the first two decades of the twenty-first century; my vision of a fifty-year-long stroll down memory lane was, it seemed, meant to be.

I gave the contributors *carte blanche* in terms of how they wanted to approach the writing task at hand, and was excited, once again, by the wide variety of approaches taken. Priyamvada Gopal and Deidre Lynch both look at essays from the journal's early years—K. S. Narayana Rao's "The Indian Novel in English: A Search for Identity" (1972) and Alice Chandler's "'A Pair of Fine Eyes': Jane Austen's Treatment of Sex" (1975), respectively—and highlight the ways in which those essays can be seen to anticipate, with remarkable prescience, key shifts in the critical landscape that took place in the 1990s and beyond. Timothy Parrish, by contrast, introduces our collection's most recently published nominee, Lydia R. Cooper's "Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative" (2011), arguing that its distinctive reading of McCarthy's novel "helps us to understand...why this book speaks so powerfully to ordinary readers in ways that most novels discussed in this journal's pages do not" (171). Gabriel Cervantes uses his nomination of Janine Barchas's "Prefiguring Genre: Frontispiece Portraits from *Gulliver's Travels* to *Millennium Hall*" (1998) as an opportunity to think through the past, present, and future implications of the "material turn" in novel studies that is exemplified by Barchas's essay, while Angela Calcaterra uses her nomination of Nancy Van Styvendale's "The Trans/historicity of Trauma in Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash* and Sherman Alexie's *The Indian Killer*" (2008) as an opportunity to think about how the "intergenerational, collective, and enduring" (145) forms of trauma that Van Styvendale sees in Armstrong's and Alexie's texts play out in novels by other Indigenous authors as well. Walton Muyumba and Albert J. Rivero focus their attention more directly on the nominated articles themselves, Michel Fabre's "Richard Wright: The Man Who Lived Underground" (1971) and Margaret Anne Doody's "Shakespeare's Novels: Charlotte Lennox

Illustrated” (1987), sketching out the essays’ main points and paying tribute to Fabre’s “serious, commanding studies of twentieth-century black American writing” and Doody’s “ground-breaking, polemically exuberant essay” (8, 69). Annette Federico takes a more personal approach, explaining that even though Elizabeth Langland’s “A Perspective of One’s Own: Thomas Hardy and the Elusive Sue Bridehead” (1980) may not be “a landmark in 1980s criticism or a pioneering work of theory,” it nonetheless models “a nuanced ethical intelligence” that speaks strongly to her own “ruminations about how we write about and teach the novel today” (51).

Two of our invited contributors asked if they could nominate a particular special issue instead of a particular article; to accommodate this request, we are reprinting the introductions to those special issues here and refer our readers to *Studies in the Novel*’s online archives for the individual articles appearing in each. Mark Wollaeger’s introduction to Charles Rossman’s “A Special Issue on Editing *Ulysses*” (1990) has taken on something of a life of its own, inspiring him to reach out to the primary actors in the tumultuous “Joyce Wars” drama that the issue lays out and resulting in an expositional essay that falls somewhere between academic scholarship, investigative journalism, and colorful storytelling; as Wollaeger himself puts it, “My interest in this dispute is both scholarly and, in a fundamental sense, novelistic: a significant opportunity for literary scholars to learn about theories of textual editing was missed owing to the kind of personal conflict that is the stuff of fiction” (86-87). Last but by no means least, Dorothy Hale opens her introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Queerer than Fiction” special issue (1996) by observing that the great “surprise” of the issue is that “returning to it feels so little like retrospection” (104). The question that Hale focuses on in her prefatory remarks is why Sedgwick’s trailblazing call for “reparative reading” first entered the critical lexicon in a journal focused exclusively on *the novel*. What is it about the novel form, in other words, that makes it especially fertile ground for the kind of “culturally transformative and personally nurturing” (105) analysis that Sedgwick and her collection’s contributors set out to perform two decades ago, and that so many scholars continue to think about and work towards today?

Ultimately, Hale’s pleasant sense of surprise in finding Sedgwick’s mid-nineties expostulations to be “as relevant as ever” (104) is the kind of sentiment that reverberates most strongly throughout the introductions in this anniversary issue. While the mandates of secondary research and citational practice do, of course, require literary critics to look back at the scholarship that came before their own on a regular basis, many of the contributors to this volume commented on the relative uniqueness of the assignment they were given here: the assignment to cast a long look back over a heterogeneous list of articles and write a full essay devoted to considering and articulating the impact that one of those articles has had and continues to have on the field of novel studies to this day. In addition to paying homage to the landmark journal that James Lee

and his colleagues worked so hard to bring into being fifty years ago, then, this special issue also pays homage to the shaping and staying powers of the article form itself. At once timely and timeless, the best journal articles that our field has to offer are as oxymoronic as the centuries-old novel tradition upon which they continually manage to shed new light.

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