



Contemporary Fiction: A Very Short Introduction

Robert Eaglestone

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Contemporary fiction is a wide and diverse field, now global in dimension, with an enormous range of novels and writers that continues to grow at a fantastic speed.

In this Very Short Introduction, Robert Eaglestone provides a clear and engaging exploration of the major themes, patterns, and debates of contemporary fiction. From genre, form, and experimentalism to the legacies of modernism and postmodernism, the relationship between globalization and terrorism, and the impact of technology, Eaglestone examines how works both reflect the world in which we live and the artistic concerns of writers and readers alike.

About the Series:

Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

Contemporary Fiction: A Very Short Introduction Details

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From Reader Review Contemporary Fiction: A Very Short Introduction for online ebook

Daniel Wright says

One of the reasons I try to read lots of Old Books is that their quality is already self-selected. No-one reads the bad Old Books any more, so you don't have a glut of things to choose from. If you try to read the coming thing all the time, and stay at the cutting edge, you'll just end up reading the occasional gem in a pile of shoddy rubbish. Moreover, it is likely that the overall trends and the under-currents of unquestionable assumptions will be completely invisible to you anyway - it is only with hindsight that these things can be seen. From these arguments you might gather that I am thoroughly averse to the entire concept of studying 'contemporary fiction'.

In fairness to him, the author of this book candidly admits that it is likely to be out of date in as little as ten years after being written. Indeed, some parts are showing their age in as little as two. So why bother writing it? Or reading it? (Or writing reviews about it on the internet?)

The author is an academic literary critic, and the culmination of this essay is essentially a defence of his craft and what it is good for. (He includes a number of cynical comments about critics, but for some reason omits the traditional jibe about critics being failed writers with chips on their shoulders...) He has a number of perceptive things to say about the contemporary novel, although inevitably it is really a history of the novel in the last century or so. These things, as well as the fact that he is a clear and engaging writer, slightly redeem the book in my eyes, even if it is ultimately doomed, like so many, to a speedy oblivion.

Chapter 1: Saying everything

Chapter 2: Form, or, what's contemporary about contemporary fiction?

Chapter 3: Genre

Chapter 4: The past

Chapter 5: The present

Chapter 6: The future

Chapter 7: Conclusion: 'Hey everyone, look at that beautiful thing' / 'Yes, but...'

Lisa says

This Very Short Introduction to Contemporary Fiction is a very interesting little book!

From the first words of the introduction to the last chapter about literary criticism, I found myself constantly nodding in agreement, with only an occasional demurral in between because I wasn't keen on some of the books he lauds:

Literature thinks.

Literature is where ideas are investigated, lived out, explored in all their messy complexity. Sometimes these ideas look quite simple: What if you fell in love with someone who seems quite unsuitable for you? What happens if there is a traitor in your spy network? Sometimes

they might appear more complicated: How can I reconstruct my memory of an event I can't recall? Perhaps, too, 'think' is not the right word: 'think' is too limiting a description of the range of what a novel can do with ideas. In any event, the way literature thinks is bound up with what it's like to be us, to be human. Literature is how we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves. And contemporary fiction matters because it is how we work out who we are now, today.

I believe the novel is the best way of doing this. Of all the arts, the novel is the most thoughtful, the closest, the most personal. Unlike the visual arts or music or computer games, the novel uses only language. Nearly every one of us is an expert user of language and, more importantly, nearly everyone is an expert creator in language. Every day we use words to express ourselves and to tell stories, to make patterns out of our reality. We all share and thrive in language: we are much more intimate with the novel's medium than we are with theatre or film. Unlike much poetry or painting, fiction has narrative, sometimes in complex ways. We share this with the novel too, because each of us, in the stories we tell every day, is a skilled author and weaver of narrative. We can all judge a novel by the high and demanding standards of our own use of words and stories and by our own patterns of reality. Because it takes longer to read a novel than it does to see a film or listen to a piece of music and because novels demand more time and energy, they are more immersive. This is the origin of phrases like 'losing yourself in a book' or 'the book speaks to me' as if a novel was more than just ink on a page or words on a screen. We live in novels more than any other art form, and after reading them, they stay with us (an after-reading). The novel is still the art form most deeply and directly engaged with us. (p.1-2)

Eagleton pays homage to the variety of forms that contemporary fiction can take, and he says that because a novel might go anywhere or do anything it's not possible for anybody to be an expert in the usual sense of the word. He also admits that anything he says is going to be out-of-date within a decade.

His chapter headings show the directions he takes:

Chapter 1: Saying everything

Chapter 2: Form, or, what's contemporary about contemporary fiction?

Chapter 3: Genre

Chapter 4: The past

Chapter 5: The present

Chapter 6: The future

Chapter 7: Conclusion: 'Hey everyone, look at that beautiful thing' / 'Yes, but...'

I enjoyed the chapter on form, where Eagleton acknowledges that contemporary authors make more demands on readers than authors of previous eras.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/08/03/c...>

Hameed Younis says

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Ineffablyschmoo says

An excellent and thought-provoking introduction to contemporary fiction.

This book was short, succinct, and refreshingly clear about its place and what it offers the reader. It takes a somewhat personal yet illuminating approach to introducing contemporary fiction, by talking through ways to define it, ways to problematize definitions of any kind, and the themes that occur in contemporary fiction under the headings of "the past", "the present" and "the future". It doesn't pretend to be comprehensive, or to be affirming any notion of a canon of contemporary fiction; in fact, it positions contemporary fiction as something which acts against any definitive and normative views of what fiction is or should be. It left me with a reading list as long as my arm to follow up on, and with a sense of greater confidence to engage in literary criticism and with literary theory.

Ally Shand says

Lucid and insightful.

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[illegible][illegible]

My library should then grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
The minor works of *Casimiro Paiz*;
We'd have such long years to behold,
We'd even re-read *Alice Sebold*;
O Literature, my one obsession!
One single life is *drear compression*.
And at my back I always hear
Time's supermarket trolley hurrying near;
My credit card is almost dead;
My TBRs are *still unread*.
The grave to which we all must dwindle
Does not, I'm told, allow a *Kindle*
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
Now let us read us while we may;
And now, like geeky birds of prey,
Rather *at once* our books devour,
Don't go to work but seize the hour!
So let us all *spontaneously*
Read all books *simultaneously!*

With apologies to *Andrew Marvell*

Mohammed Alsoufi says

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Mattia Ravasi says

Three Very Short Introductions to Literary Criticism

It does favor a few key topics and features over other possible ones (as these things, inevitably, must do, let alone one of this size), and I'm not that sold on that chapter about genres, but that said, it acknowledges the conundrums of criticism in a very honest way while managing to move past them and make a convincing and heartfelt case for how good criticism is needed in today's world.

Patrick Neylan says

At first I didn't like this book. It's certainly a short introduction, but it didn't seem very simplified. I've got a degree in English (albeit not modern English literature), so I was surprised to find it as difficult as I did. Eaglestone seems to be in awe of Sarah Waters; the attention he gives her in the early chapters seems disproportionate, but thankfully he gives other authors equal attention later on and the book recovers its balance.

Eaglestone makes some bold assertions without feeling the need to back them up. The most glaring of these is that modern people have far more complex and difficult lives than their ancestors. This is arguable, to say the least.

But it's worth persevering. Eaglestone does know his stuff, and the occasions when his political bias intrudes are rare enough to be forgiven. A good critique enables a reader to form an opposite opinion, and his praise for Nicola Barker's Darkmans is enough to convince me that this is a terrible example of up-its-own-backside literature to be avoided at all costs. Elsewhere, his takedown of Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer for its use of a child narrator - simplifying and thus avoiding the issues - seems spot-on.

I wasn't convinced till I read the final chapter on criticism, which added something new (to me) and put the rest of the book into proper context.

Marc Nash says

Nice, simply written overview of where we currently sit with the contemporary novel. Considers the step back from the high experimentalism of both Modernism & post-modernism that fiction seems to have taken with a modicum of humility & an awareness that it can't really effect change anymore (unlike the consciousness raising of say "Uncle Tom's Cabin" or "The Grapes Of Wrath").

It considers the contemporary approach to time, of past, present & future & in doing so nail historical novels as really offering so little, the present concerns with migration/the immigrant experience and terrorism and the future through technology, both our actual gadgets but he also brilliantly analyses as 'technical thinking' and just where art and literature fits in to that.

All in all a very good, quick summary.

Leonard Mollusks says

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#MpL_BookReport

chantel nouseforaname says

I love this A Very Short Introduction series! So good. I'm gonna read my way through all of them one day.

This piece of the series was fantastic. I really enjoyed the critical look into Contemporary Fiction of the past and present. I liked that there was deep questions and insight into Intersectional frameworks that may have existed in early contemporary fiction but was hidden/disguised by different authors for one reason or another.

I like that reading this expanded my personal read list and explained elements to popular and obscure contemporary fiction that I had long been curious about.

Reading about one topic in detail is also comforting for some reason. I experienced a sense of peace, oddly enough, reading this in the early mornings on the way to work.
