15

The Novel Sequence

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THE novel sequence has been an important part of British literary output in the period since 1940 with examples in all the major genres and modes of fiction. As Steven Connor has argued, the post-Second World War period represents a revival of the novel sequence as a particularly appropriate literary form to 'assimilate the processes of historical duration' (Connor 1996: 136). It is, however, nothing new, and most of its practitioners in the post-war period can be linked to specific precursors. The immediate influences from the early decades of the twentieth century are John Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* (1906–21); Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* trilogy (1910–16); and Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* (1924–28); and in the Victorian period Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels (1855–67) and the Palliser sequence (1865–80). In addition, the Victorian three-decker novel and the serialization of fiction in the literary magazines has an influence on what we now recognize as the novel sequence. In fact, the idea of individual novels being part of a sequence goes back to the origins of the form in the eighteenth century: Daniel Defoe, for example, quickly wrote two sequels to *Robinson Crusoe* on the back of the success of his first novel. The novel sequence can be driven by forces that extend beyond the purely aesthetic, and the desire to continue the life of a popular character can be formed as much by the audience (and eager publishers) as it is by the writer. The sequential nature of fiction is, of course, one of the basic principles of narrative, so the sequence can be seen as an extension and formalization of this process. As Catherine Maxwell writes on the experience of reading George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in instalments: 'Any novel that cannot be read in one sitting demands some sustained integration into the rhythm of its readers' lives. A lengthy novel, especially one published in parts, inevitably draws out that contact so that both the time and the substance of reading interact more persuasively with a period of lived experience' (Maxwell 1996: 116). Formally, the sequence can be seen to delay, at least temporarily, the sense of an ending, both in terms of the story and the reading experience. In this sense the suspension of closure parallels our desire for the deferral of death; as Michel Foucault suggests in his essay 'Language to Infinity': 'The most fateful decisions are inevitably suspended during the course of a story'

(Foucault 1977: 53). Novel sequences do eventually end of course, but they are distinctive in that they rehearse that ending a number of times before the final closure. Another distinctive thing about sequences, especially the long sequences of Anthony Powell, C. P. Snow, and Doris Lessing, is that the author grows with their central characters, especially in the case of sequences that are published over several years. This maturation of the author, and often the style, can map that of the reader who sticks with the sequence from the beginning.

The temporary evasion of closure also goes to the heart of a central paradox of the representation of time passing in narrative fiction. One of the traditional functions of the realist novel is to represent events that take place in a recognizable timeframe, even if the presentation of those events rejects a linear narrative by using analeptic and proleptic moments. In this way the novel mirrors the process of time passing, of ageing, and of moving between distinct periods of life. But the novel is also an aesthetic form that imposes frames on that mimetic function by including beginnings, middles, and ends, and a particular ordering of events. The novel sequence goes to the heart of this aesthetic and mimetic tension in fiction. The closed, single novel marks out the limits of the art object, and whereas modernist open endings attempt to suggest a continuation and resistance to resolution, formally they end when the writing closes. The novel sequence evades that ending by projecting to a continuation of life beyond the closure of the single novel. This attempt to fill out the space of narrative beyond a single historical juncture is something Steven Connor has highlighted as distinctive of the form as 'an exercise in world-making' (Connor 1996: 136). This chapter will offer a summary of some of the main examples of novel sequences produced after 1940 in which this attempt to represent the passage of real time in an aesthetic form is an important element. There are too many to discuss in great detail, so the following inevitably represents a selection of what are the most important and influential.

One of the most important is C. P. Snow's eleven volume *Strangers and Brothers* sequence, which was published between 1940 and 1970 and follows the life of Lewis Eliot. The novels deal with the time period from 1914–1968, although some of them overlap as they focus on the personal narratives of some of Eliot's peers. Eliot's career path from lawyer, to Cambridge don, to the military during the Second World War, and finally to civil servant allows Snow to comment on a variety of professions, for example, academics in *The Masters* (1951), nuclear scientists in *The New Men* (1954), and politicians in *The Corridors of Power* (1964). Snow focuses primarily on the pursuance of ambition and power, and the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals within closed worlds. His work was associated with the trend in 1950s British fiction of a return to traditional forms of English realism, which was grounded on a suspicion of the excesses of modernist experimentation championed by a previous generation of writers. As Geoffrey Heptonstall observes: 'the fiction of C. P. Snow is the territory of reason in an age of excess' (Heptonstall 2008: 224). Snow worked as a physicist while writing and is now widely known for his 1959 essay, *The Two*

Cultures and the Scientific Revolution which advocated greater cross-fertilization between the arts and sciences, which he felt were too often operating in unconnected spheres. His scientific method can be seen to influence his fiction in terms of his empirical observation of British society, filtered as it is through Eliot's perspective. However, this is not to underestimate the emotional content of the novels, and the narrative of a central character reassessing their past relationships and behaviour, and developing fresh insight about themselves and the world, becomes the pattern that links the approaches in each of the novels in the sequence. George Watson suggests Snow's intention was to show 'how power interacts with personality', and that his main literary influence in this endeavour was Anthony Trollope's Palliser novels (Watson 2002: 597). Indeed Snow produced a biography of Trollope after he had finished the sequence, and although Snow's novels do not match the comic brilliance of his nineteenth-century precursor, their empirical attention to the forms of discourse and codes of behaviour undertaken in different spheres of life mark the overall achievement of the sequence.

Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951–75) shares with *Strangers and Brothers* the use of a first-person narrative perspective throughout its twelve novels. It follows the experiences of Nicholas Jenkins during his schooldays at a thinly disguised representation of Eton; his period at Oxford University; his acceptance into upper-middle-class English society; his experiences during the war; and as a middle-aged man in the post-war period. Within the twelve-novel structure, a further division can be identified with the four seasons, mapping Jenkins's various periods of life as he moves from youth into middle and old age. The title of the sequence is drawn from the painting by Nicolas Poussin, which portrays in its four dancing figures a division of the human condition into poverty, labour, wealth, and pleasure. For Powell this dance reflects a kind of patterning to life, but it also suggests something of the pleasure-seeking flightiness of upper-class English society in the 1920s and 1930s. *The Acceptance World* (1955) contains two dance parties that frame this motif: one constituting 'respectable' upper middle-class society, the other including more radical figures on its fringes. These two loosely formed and overlapping groups establish the range of society Jenkins moves through in the rest of the sequence and the various interactions between its vast array of characters. Despite the large cast, the majority are drawn from a fairly narrow band of upper-middle class society, and this helps to explain what sometimes seem to be overworked coincidences. Indeed one of Powell's themes is the way in which an underlying patterning of social life lies behind what appear to be chance (re-)encounters, or as Jenkins puts it in *A Buyer's Market* (1952) that 'extraordinary process that causes certain figures to appear and reappear in the performance of one or another sequence of a ritual dance' (183). The main qualities of Powell's sequence lie in his control of plot, exemplified in the various reappearances of great comic creations such as Widmerpool and Jenkins' Uncle Giles, and his exploration of narrative perspective within the first-person framework. Jenkins often introduces

sections by imagining the way in which other characters would have perceived the situation, thus emphasizing his extension of empathy, a virtue that increases as the sequence moves forward, reflecting his increasing maturity. As James Tucker has also noted, one of the significant aspects of Powell's style is his control of language, in which he often uses serious and Latinate forms to describe what are essentially quotidian and often mundane situations; as Tucker puts it, 'the presentation of fatuously trivial or even degraded subject matter in elevated language' (Tucker 1976: 91). It is largely from this bathetic style, derived perhaps from P. G. Wodehouse, that the sequence attains much of its comic power.

The sequences by Snow and Powell span several decades in their publication and are good examples of the way the form represents a maturing of style and theme that mirrors a similar maturing in the implied reader. This sense of development is also a feature of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy. In the middle section of *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), Guy Crouchback encounters a Catholic priest while stationed in Egypt. He asks the priest if he can take his confession, but during the meeting Guy becomes suspicious when the priest asks him if he is about to embark on a military mission. This seemingly minor episode reveals one of the central concerns of Waugh's trilogy: the relationship between the spiritual world and the realities and expediencies of war. Guy is initially attracted by the romanticism of war and enlists as soon as it starts in 1939, despite being nearly thirty-six. The first novel in the sequence, *Men at Arms* (1952), sees him training with the Halberdiers, a regiment that forges a deep spirit of camaraderie. By the end of the novel, however, any romantic attitudes Guy might have had for military life have been removed. The second novel, *Officers and Gentlemen*, is split into two main parts, the first of which confirms the feeling that the preparation for military engagement is a mixture of rumour, disappointment, and boredom: 'In the war of attrition which raged ceaselessly against the human spirit, anticlimax was a heavy weapon' (Waugh 1964: 111). It is not until the second half of the novel that Guy sees serious military action in the failed campaign to free Crete from the Nazis. By the end, the ignominy of defeat and the petty squabbles, egos, incompetence, and cowardice revealed in some quarters of the army make the novel's title ironic. The third in the trilogy, *Unconditional Surrender* (1961), confirms the anticlimax of Guy's war experience. It traces his experiences back in London after the Crete fiasco and then in Yugoslavia fighting with the partisans. This last section details Guy's complete disillusion with the principles on which he initially felt the war was advancing and reveals something of Waugh's conservative politics. In a sense, the trilogy's critique of the course of the war is part of a wider discontent with the modern age, in which the values of honour and nobility, and the ordered society Guy (and Waugh) celebrate is seen to be in terminal decline. Waugh's trilogy, although less ambitious in scope, operates broadly within similar social frameworks to Powell and Snow. Although also written in a realist mode, it differs in narrative technique by deploying a third-person narrator, which allows Waugh greater scope for ironic

detachment from his central character, adding emphasis to what can be seen by the end of the sequence as Guy's initially overly romantic naïvety.

Samuel Beckett's trilogy of novels *Molloy* (1955), *Malone Dies* (1956), and *The Unnamable* (1959) (first published in French in 1950, 1951, and 1952 respectively) uses a palpably different form from the realism employed by Powell, Snow, and Waugh. Beckett's corpus has many intertextual references, so although the trilogy is clearly connected, each of his works develops themes and makes references to characters from a number of his other novels, such as *Murphy* (1938), *Watt* (1945), and *Mercier and Camier* (1946). The textual world inhabited by Beckett's characters shows the influence of modernism on his work and represents an extension to the formal experiments undertaken by James Joyce, Beckett's main influence in the 1920s and 1930s. *Molloy* is divided into two parts, the first narrated in retrospect by Molloy, which tells of his futile search for his mother; the second, a similarly futile attempt by a second character, Moran, to locate and complete a report on Molloy. *Malone Dies* is presented as a written monologue by the eponymous hero, who is stuck inside a single room, and engaged in writing while waiting for death to overcome him. *The Unnamable* is the end point of Beckett's experimentation with narrative fiction and consists of a speaking figure that reflects on the futility of existence. All the normal architecture and machinery of a conventional novel have been stripped away to leave very little other than this voice contemplating death. There are, however, 'delegates' who talk of stories from the world outside (although the notion of outside in Beckett's fiction is fraught with ontological problems). The rejection of stable characters, the evocation of non-realistic landscapes, and the focus on the very textuality of literary writing are determining features of Beckett's style, and each of the novels includes characters who are compelled to write their own histories, often for what appear to be spurious reasons. It is Beckett's distinctive style of modernism to interrogate the existential and linguistic contexts for the very notion of fiction: his characters simultaneously construct and deconstruct themselves in the writing itself and it becomes apparent that the 'real' entities upon which these descriptions are based have no corporeal reality. In all the novels, however, the imperative to write is set against the futility of any human action in the face of death, and each has a character who is impelled to carry on living, when existence appears futile and meaningless. This sounds very bleak; however, Beckett's art is filled with word play, puns, clownish and slapstick humour, and the very comedy to be found in the absurd. He juxtaposes the comic absurdities of existence with the grim inevitability of death, and his decision to use the sequence form draws out this inevitability, increasing the impact of its final paradox: 'you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on' (Beckett 1979: 382).

Lawrence Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* shares Beckett's experimental approach to narrative fiction, but does so with different emphases. In the Preface to the single volume edition of the quartet of 1962, Durrell writes that the form of the work has adopted 'the relativity principle' and that the whole 'was intended as a challenge to the serial form of

the conventional novel' (Durrell 1968: 5). This is manifest in Durrell's treatment of time, which broadly rejects a linear narrative and replaces it with recollections drawn randomly by the central narrative voice, L. G. Darley. The first novel in the sequence, *Justine* (1957) concerns the relationships between Darley, a schoolteacher and minor British secret agent in Alexandria; Melissa, a Greek prostitute with whom he has an affair; and Justine, a Jewish society woman who is in what at first appears to be an ideal marriage to a rich, Coptic businessman, Nessim. Although the narrative works in a rather Proustian way through recollection, a plot emerges in which Darley, Melissa, Justine, and Nessim form a complicated love quadrangle. In the subsequent two novels, *Balthazar* and *Mountolive*, both published in 1958, the relationships are further complicated by the introduction and development of other characters such as Pursewarden and Scobie. The first three volumes are all set during the period just prior to the Second World War, and the subplot of Egyptian colonial politics and espionage forms a backdrop for the sexual relationships. The last in the sequence, *Clea* (1960), is set later than the other three, when Darley returns to Alexandria in the early stages of the war, and forms a love attachment with Clea, a painter. Above all lies the pervading image of Alexandria, which more than being simply a setting appears to influence the aesthetic and erotic drives of the characters, as well as the political intrigue. There are orientalist tendencies in the sequence; nevertheless, Durrell's construction of the city is powerful and evocative: 'The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory. Why must I return to it night after night [. . .]?' (209).

Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy, published between 1946 and 1959, is often associated with fantasy sequences such as *Lord of the Rings* and the *Narnia* books, but in one fundamental way it is very different: rather than presenting the journey as the central motif, the three novels represent an enclosed, and often claustrophobic space. Gormenghast is a castle whose inhabitants represent the central force over the surrounding regions; and although there are journeys outside the castle, no character escapes its influence. The novel can also be read as a metaphor for Britain as it was emerging from the Second World War—a country steeped in the past and in tradition, but facing the fresh winds of a new world order. This is most clearly represented by the character of Steerpike, who initially appears to offer a form of socialism, but is revealed to be a self-fashioning, ambitious character, who has more in common with Machiavelli than Marx. The first novel in the trilogy, *Titus Groan* (1946), has a misleading title, as the novel only sees Titus as an infant, and details the actions and machinations undertaken by the adults around him. Titus does, however, provide a thematic chronology to the first text, in that it opens with news of his imminent birth and ends with his investiture as the new ruler of Gormenghast, after the death of his father. The second volume, *Gormenghast* (1950), details Steerpike's attempts to gain power in the castle and Titus's resistance to his plots, culminating in Steerpike's death; whereas the third, *Titus Alone* (1959), sees Titus journey beyond the castle to a modern city, which sets in relief the gothic archaisms of

Gormenghast. The sequence as a whole contains many surreal characters and situations and is perhaps comparable to the unreal, existential world found in Beckett's novels.

If Snow, Powell, and Waugh can be identified as realists and Beckett, Durrell, and Peake as writers continuing pre-war experimental modernism, then Doris Lessing's *Children of Violence* sequence represents a move from the former to the latter. In a 1957 essay, 'The Small Personal Voice', Lessing celebrates the 'great realists' and states 'I hold the view that the realist novel, the realist story, is the highest form of prose writing; higher than and out of reach of any comparison with expressionism, impressionism, symbolism, naturalism, or any other ism' (Lessing 1957: 14). Behind this statement is Lessing's commitment to politically committed realism. However, by the mid-1960s, Lessing's preference for the realist mode of writing had undergone a reassessment, documented in meta-critical form in her 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*. This transition sees her emerge with an interest in what she was beginning to call 'inner-space' writing, which often juxtaposed realistic sensibilities with scenarios drawn from fantasy and science fiction. The first of the sequence, *Martha Quest* (1952), introduces the central character at the age of fifteen and follows her progress to her first marriage. The prose style is often Lawrentian in tone, revealing one of Lessing's earlier influences, and this sometimes over-romantic voice sits very well with the heightened sensibilities of the adolescent moving through her teenage years. The next two novels in the sequence, *A Proper Marriage* (1954) and *A Ripple from the Storm* (1958), lose some of the romanticism of the first novel, and adopt a tone closer to the sentiment Lessing identified in the 'The Small Personal Voice' essay. In the latter Martha becomes closely involved with a communist group, who seem to share her desire for a better world, but who also frustrate her because of the in-fighting and internal ambitions of the members. The last two novels, *Landlocked* (1965) and especially *The Four-Gated City* (1969), show Lessing moving away from conventional realism. The former describes the period at the end of the Second World War and the political fallout in southern Africa, where communist elements (to which Martha is still attached) mix with an emerging black nationalist politics. Again, the political context of the novel is foregrounded but unlike *A Ripple from the Storm*, a new self-reflexiveness about writing and literary style emerges in this novel, an approach that is taken further in the final volume in the quintet. The 'four-gated city' of the title forms the backdrop for Martha's experiences when she moves to London at the beginning of the 1950s. The novel is a complex mix of realistic description, philosophical and existential thought, and speculation about the evolving nature of society and humanity. The novel moves beyond the realistic framework by projecting to a future society at the end of the twentieth century, and the last sections of the novel represent Lessing's adoption of 'inner-space' fiction. This move to speculative fiction can also be seen in her *Canopus in Argos* (1979–83), another quintet, set in a series of futuristic societies. Stylistically then, Lessing's sequence can be seen as one of the best examples of a writer developing her approach to narrative form through the course of the publication of the individual novels.

Recent attention has also been paid to the postcolonial context of Lessing's writing, and *Children of Violence* can be set alongside other sequences that address the British Empire, and its gradual dismantling after 1945. If Lessing can be seen as approaching this topic from a broadly left-wing perspective, then Anthony Burgess's *Malayan Trilogy* offers a more conservative outlook. The trilogy consists of *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958), and *Beds in the East* (1959), and details the experiences of Victor Crabbe, a history tutor working in Malaysia after the war. From a twenty-first-century perspective the trilogy often reads as outdated both in its attitudes to the cultural politics of race, and in its celebration of aspects of empire. As with Lessing, the sequence deals with the gradual shift of power away from colonial rule, but this is far from welcomed, and whereas Martha Quest saw the communist politics in southern Africa as a positive force in shaking colonial attitudes, Crabbe (and Burgess) are deeply critical of the communist-influenced independence movements in Malaysia. The novel captures the way in which Malayan society and politics is grounded in the variety of ethnic peoples in the area, and as Burgess states in the Introduction to the collected 1972 Penguin edition of the trilogy, 'My story is about the races of Malaya, as exemplified in characters who have, or had, counterparts in real life' (ix). This approach is part of the problem the sequence now produces in terms of its racial politics. By having characters as representative of their 'races', it runs the risk of stereotyping, and most of the 'character-races' are judged against the British model. This is not to say that the British characters emerge as exemplary, far from it: Crabbe is an adulterer and manipulator of others; his first wife Fenella is unwilling to adapt to life in Malaya, looking down on the 'natives' and going against the Bohemian outlook she cultivated in Britain; and one of the other main characters, Nabby Adams, is an alcoholic who spends most of his time juggling debts. But despite Burgess's success in conveying the richness of Malayan life and his engagement with the languages and cultures of the area, the overall outlook is that Malaya would be better off if it continued to be ruled by the British. In this sense, Burgess is closer to Rudyard Kipling than E. M. Forster, and it is perhaps Kipling's evocation of India that represents the primary model in Burgess's attempt to write the definitive fictional rendering of Malaya.

Another sequence that deals with the British abroad is Olivia Manning's *Balkan Trilogy*, which is largely set during the early days of the Second World War and follows the experiences of Harriet Pringle and her husband Guy, an English lecturer at the University of Bucharest. The first two novels, *The Great Fortune* (1960) and *The Spoilt City* (1962), are set in Romania and detail the period from the opening of the war to the fall of Paris, a period that in Bucharest sees the vacillations of the ruling monarchy and government between association with the British and Allied powers and support for the Nazis. Guy is presented as a benevolent socialist, keen to justify the position of the Soviet Union in the area as a bulwark against fascism. However, his desire to help various causes and individuals is often to the neglect of his wife, and the sections that focalize through Harriet's perception tend to offer a more realistic counterpoint to Guy's romanticism.

Through the course of the sequence Harriet is attracted to, or offered affairs with, a variety of men including Clarence, one of Guy's colleagues at the University; Sasha Drucker, a Jewish student; and in the third novel *Friends and Heroes* (1964), a soldier she meets in Greece. The subsequent *Levant Trilogy*, comprising *The Danger Tree* (1977), *The Battle Lost and Won* (1978), and *The Sum of Things* (1980) follows the Pringles' experiences in the Middle East in the second half of the war. Taken together, the two trilogies are often referred to as the *Fortunes of War* sequence and they represent a forthright, semi-autobiographical account of Manning's wartime experiences. The sequence is mostly realistic in tone, and its qualities lie in the juxtaposition of the personal with serious international events. Manning's style tends to be plot-driven, and accessible, with short paragraphs and plenty of dialogue, and although it does not attempt any formal experiment, it offers a distinctive account of the vicissitudes of a marriage set against the dangers of war.

Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* comprising *The Jewel in the Crown* (1966), *The Day of the Scorpion* (1968), *The Towers of Silence* (1971), and *A Division of the Spoils* (1975) is a wide-ranging, complex narrative of twentieth-century India which locates itself primarily in the years 1942–47. Scott's representation of colonial rule in India seems to borrow from E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) especially in the figure of Daphne Manners, whose initial attitude to India, subsequent affair with Hari Kumar, and rape by a group of Indian nationalists, appears to reconfigure the experiences of Adela Quested in Forster's novel. However, Scott's work extends the range of perspective by giving over large sections to several Indian characters, such as Lady Lili Chaterjee. The complexity of the book is established in its use of shifting narrative perspective; the use of letters, edited memoirs, lawyers' transcripts, and other documents; and by the control of time, where there is frequent use of analepsis and prolepsis. Its commentary on the politics of India during the period is also more detailed and astute than Forster's. As the quartet moves forward, events are returned to with differing perspectives that show the difficulty of arriving at any fixed understanding either of character motivation or of India itself. What emerges is an understanding of the inevitability of decolonization with an awareness of some of the injustices of colonial rule, alongside a critical engagement with the minutiae of Indian nationalist politics. The subsequent novels all return at some point to the central incidents of *The Jewel in the Crown* and the last novel of the sequence, *A Division of the Spoils*, which retraces the events of the previous three, offering fresh points of view and interpretations. Scott's sequence could be seen as the last in a line of novels on colonial India stretching back through Forster to Kipling, which predominantly offer a perspective from a white, British colonial position. However, its interrogation of that perspective and its formal complexity mark it as a liminal text between the colonial and postcolonial and make it comparable with the work of contemporaneous and later writers on India such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Salman Rushdie, and Vikram Seth. The sequence form allows Scott the space to tease out the complexities and multiple perspectives of this period of Anglo-Indian politics.

The opening of Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* describes workmen warming their hands around a brazier, an observation that makes Jenkins think of classical allusions, and the difference between his own experiences and those representatives of the working class. The sequence does not go on to consider the working conditions of those men; many sequences from the late 1950s, however, did just that, opening up representations of working-class lives with a seriousness that had only happened occasionally before in British fiction. In that sense, Alan Sillitoe's Seaton-family sequence can be said to be a forerunner. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958) is about twenty-one-year-old Arthur Seaton, and his rebellious attitude to all forms of authority. It provides a detailed description of his experiences, thoughts, ambitions, and political outlook, and balances the sense of the character's individualism with a collective 'working-class' position. His motto is 'don't let the bastards grind you down' and this unstructured defiance is directed at bosses, the army, the police, and union representatives alike, as well as nosey neighbours and those he feels have too easily given in to the system (Sillitoe 1994: 40). The novel also describes how the forces of society serve to contain him. Arthur works in a Nottingham bicycle factory and spends most of his time frequenting pubs and carrying on affairs with women. Although often regarded as a realist novel, it is distinctive in its incorporation of narrative techniques associated with modernism, such as free indirect discourse and interior monologue. It is also interesting in its use of the second-person pronoun, which produces a 'collective' narration that seems to incorporate Arthur's perspective with a shared working-class outlook. Arthur's narrative also defines some of the shifting generational contexts of the late 1950s, foreshadowing the cultural revolution of youth in the 1960s. In contrast, *Key to the Door* (1961) details the experiences of Arthur's older brother Bill. The working-class environment is again described with honest detail, but Bill's experiences in Malaya on National Service broaden the setting of the earlier novel. Again, Sillitoe uses the third person, but Bill is clearly the central consciousness of the text. The narrative ambivalences and distance from the reader are not as marked in *Key to the Door*, and gone is the technique of using the second person to suggest a form of collective experience. *The Birthday* (2000) reunites Arthur and Bill and details how their rebellious perspective has been curtailed somewhat by their life experiences of divorce and loss.

Most of the novel sequences so far discussed could be said to have taken one of the two paths David Lodge noted in his 1970 work of literary criticism, 'The Novelist at the Crossroads' of realism or experimentalism. Many of the sequences that emerge in the period after 1970 tend to engage, at some level, with the concept of postmodernism. The form of British postmodernism that gains prominence in the 1970s and 1980s tends to focus on the self-reflexive nature of fiction, while simultaneously interrogating and re-engaging with the tradition of the realist novel. A. S. Byatt's four-novel sequence can be seen to be operating in this way. Its publication spans two decades, a structure that was planned from the outset. *The Virgin in the Garden* (1981) introduces the Potter family and

focuses on two sisters, both of whom have a love of English literature, but whose life choices result in them occupying very different social positions. The elder sister, Stephanie, turns down the opportunity of a University career when she marries the clergyman Daniel Orton, and by the opening of the second novel, *Still Life* (1985), is pregnant with her first child. The younger sister, Frederica, opts to go to Cambridge to study English, and it is she who remains the main focus of the quartet, especially after the unexpected death of Stephanie at the end of the second novel. The sequence is set in the 1950s and 1960s, although there are disruptions to the linear narrative in the inclusion of authorial commentary and scenes from much later. A third main character is Marcus, Stephanie and Frederica's brother, but it is through the experiences of the female characters that Byatt develops her social history of a changing Britain. The sequence is not overtly feminist, but its exploration of the social constraints and emerging freedoms for women in the 1950s and 1960s contributes significantly to an understanding of the shifting gender politics of the period. Although the sequence as a whole produces an historical engagement with the near past, it simultaneously questions the possibility of capturing the essence of any period in fiction. Stylistically, *Babel Tower* (1996) is perhaps the most obviously postmodern in terms of its multiple suggested openings, and combination of different kinds of narratives (including long extracts from a fantasy novel, 'Babbletower'). *A Whistling Woman* (2002) is the final novel in the sequence and continues the stylistic complexity of *Babel Tower*. It brings the main narrative up to 1968 and finds Frederica taking on a job in television with Edmund Wilkie, the man she lost her virginity to in *The Virgin in the Garden*. The sequence is marked by a broad range of literary and artistic references, which reveal a central concern to be the relationship between reality and the aesthetic representation of that reality, a concern that is often at the forefront of the characters' understanding of their own identities and relationships with each other and the world. Similar to Lessing's *Children of Violence*, Byatt's sequence represents an extended performance of the relationship between realism, modernism, and postmodernism in the period.

Unlike Byatt's tetralogy, her sister Margaret Drabble's three-novel sequence developed after she had published what was initially intended to be a stand-alone novel, *The Radiant Way*, in 1987. This first novel opens with a party, hosted by Liz and Charles Headleand on the last day of the 1970s at their grand home in Harley Street in London. This party brings together an array of the couple's middle- and upper-middle-class friends and acquaintances, including people from the media, arts and business, and politicians and civil servants. The second chapter moves the setting to the fictional 'Northam' in the north of England, Liz's home town and where her sister, Shirley, is also having a New Year's Eve celebration, but on a much more modest scale. This combination of the metropolitan with the provincial and domestic establishes Drabble's ambitious aim to include a wide range of characters from English society, and marks out the work as being in a long tradition of Condition of England novels. The sequence centres on the lives of Liz and two friends who also moved from the North and met while studying at Cambridge in the

1950s: Alix Bowen and Esther Breuer. *The Radiant Way* follows the experiences of each of the three main characters, and the focus on female experience of the period from the 1950s to 1980s marks out the novel as an understated feminist perspective on women's lives and careers. Liz's job as a Harley Street psychiatrist is pertinent to the central discovery at the end of the first novel; after returning to Northam to attend her mother's funeral, she is prompted, by a child's learn-to-read book called 'The Radiant Way', to remember instances of being sexually abused by her father. This memory prompts a physical crisis for Liz, but she is able to overcome this by utilizing her knowledge of psychology and thereby come to terms with the return of this repressed childhood trauma. The trope of the 'radiant way' as a past vision of a better future is thus undermined by experience, and alongside the personal traumas encountered by the main characters, the sequence also engages with the wide-ranging social and political concerns of the 1980s. Drabble speaks from a broadly left-wing perspective and the focus tends to be on the changes being implemented by the new Thatcher government, where 'Class rhetoric flourishes. Long-cherished notions of progress are inspected, exposed, left out to die in the cold. Survival of the fittest seems to be the new-old doctrine' (172). Drabble's narrative style is realistic on the whole, although her use of shifting focalization often borrows from modernist techniques. The second and third novels in the sequence, *A Natural Curiosity* (1989) and *The Gates of Ivory* (1991), continue the stories of Liz, Alix, and Esther into the later 1980s in unexpected and often improbable ways, although both follow the similar formal approach and subject matter established in the first novel.

Pat Barker's *Regeneration Trilogy* is an example of what the Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon has described as historiographic metafiction, a form that interrogates received interpretations of the past, and self-reflexively questions the discursive conventions of both fiction and history (Hutcheon, 1998). Barker's trilogy is set during the First World War, but unlike many literary accounts of the war sets the scene away from the frontline in Craiglockhart, a recovery hospital near Edinburgh. It weaves together historical figures with invented characters and fictionalizes the experiences of the real-life psychologist William Rivers, and his coming to terms with the difficult ethical position of treating cases of mental illness precipitated by the war with the aim of sufficiently 'curing' them in order that they can be sent back to the trenches. In the first novel in the trilogy, *Regeneration* (1991), this ethical dilemma is exacerbated by the arrival of the poet Siegfried Sassoon, who is admitted to the hospital ostensibly because he is suffering from mental illness. The sequence also includes Wilfred Owen, and several sections detail the friendship he develops with Sassoon through their conversations about poetry. These historical characters are combined with fictional characters including Billy Prior, whose working-class background and pursuance of several bisexual relationships is developed in *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995). Rivers' technique is broadly Freudian, although he also challenges some aspects of psychoanalytic theory, and the novel combines late twentieth-century knowledge of psychological and sexual theory to the extreme situation

of the First World War. Indeed, the great success of the trilogy is its production of characters that appear to have contemporary sensibilities but are conditioned by the specific historical contexts in which they find themselves. Much of this achievement is due to Barker's narrative style, which places emphasis on dialogue and well-wrought scenes; her historical research into the period; and the broad range of class positions that are articulated.

Like Barker, David Peace's *Red Riding* tetralogy also weaves together fact and fiction and extends the novel-sequence form in interesting ways. The four novels describe corruption in the West Yorkshire and Manchester police forces in the years from the late 1960s to 1983, and reveals a hidden web of prostitution, pornography, child abuse, and murder. Peace's narrative combines a fictional plot with the investigation and media coverage of the 'Yorkshire Ripper' murders, producing a powerfully disturbing narrative. In formal terms, each novel employs one, or several different narrators including the journalists Eddie Dunford in the first in the sequence, *Nineteen Seventy-Four* (1999), and his older colleague Jack in *Nineteen Eighty* (2001). In the last novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Three* (2002), a three-way narrative is used that comprises the lawyer, John Piggott; detective inspector Maurice Jobson (nicknamed the 'Owl'); and BJ, a grown-up victim of the child abuse that is central to the whole sequence. Peace's prose style is stark and pared down to reflect the journalistic and investigative nature of the plot, although it manages to adapt itself to individual narrators. In the third in the series (*Nineteen Eighty*), Peace interweaves a series of stream-of-consciousness sections in which focalization appears to drift between Peter Sutcliffe, his victims, and news reports of the murders. This section includes phrases drawn from the other novels, and indeed repetition of motifs and phrases across the sequence is a distinctive feature of its internal structure. The novel can be identified as part of the crime genre, but Peace's control of narrative form and technique make it a serious literary intervention as well as popular entertainment. The subject matter is often dark, and it is far from the nostalgic celebration of 1970s Britain that is a feature of much popular fiction, film, and television of the early 2000s. It produces an explicit critique of the macho, patriarchal, and racist attitudes of the police and other institutions in the 1970s, encapsulated in its recurring phrase: 'This is the North, where we do what we want'.

As a number of the chapters in this book have shown, the post-war period represents a blossoming of the diversity and democratization of the novel in English, and the novel sequence has mapped that process. If Powell, Snow, and Waugh can be seen as representing the dominant centre of English realism in the 1940s and 1950s, and Beckett, Durrell, and Peake show a continuation of modernist experimentation, then the sequences taking colonial and postcolonial contexts by Scott, Burgess, Lessing, and Manning reflect the international scope of the novel sequence in English, whereas those sequences by Barker, Byatt, Drabble, Peace, and Sillitoe extend the form into areas of lower-middle and working-class representation and experience, often deploying

postmodern techniques. What is apparent is the diversity of styles and subject matter contained in the post-war novel sequence, and it is likely that the form will continue to develop and flourish in the twenty-first century.

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