Introduction: Contemporary Fiction

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Contemporary fiction has to address all manner of uncertainties. Those brought about by scientific developments and related social changes are possibly most acute in novels which experiment with the new science of cloning and reproductive technologies. Here there is often an explicit exploration of what it means to be human. As Eva Sabine Zehelein's article shows, the capability of science to replace sexual reproduction is explored as a potentially liberating idea by the scientist-author, Carl Djerassi. His novel provides a means of educating the reader about science as well as providing a testing-ground for the ethical issues which face today's scientists. Notably it is the long-term effects of scientific inventions in reproductive technologies which require hard thinking today. While these concerns will be considered by scientists and legislators, they are certainly being tested in the relative freedom of the novel. Thus Eva Hoffmann's *The Secret* demonstrates that, to some extent, it is the clone who exposes what is taken for granted as human. Susan Stuart illustrates here the critical perspective offered by this novel. Whatever scientific interventions and biological crafting are involved in the creation of new life, the complexity of the decisions and actions of the life created provides a rich source of narrative exploration, especially in the *bildungsroman* form.

The inhumanity of contemporary living, the viciousness and the potential for violence at work in the family, are most notably mapped out in the warnings of the post-war novel. Bethan Jones's article investigates Atwood's examination of the destructive powerplay in friendship. The metropolis is the setting for the last two papers in this collection. Lawrence Phillips reassesses Orwell's London while Richard Brown considers McEwan's recent London-based novel. In Ian McEwan's *Saturday* the ethical and political are dimensions of life which are inescapable, brought together in the unexpected dilemma facing the surgeon-protagonist, Perowne. Richard Brown

situates McEwan's novel in relation to its modernist antecedents, illuminating the possible allusions to poetic figures beyond the frame of knowledge of characters whether the highly educated Perowne or Baxter, schooled in the more effective criminal means of making a living. Gill Plain and Sabine Vanacker analyse the relationship between crime fiction and the contemporary world. Plain's article considers crime and contamination and the mechanisms for maintaining a sense of order. Vanacker explores the wilder side of family plotting in the popular crime fiction of P.D. James and Reginald Hill.

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