

## Call for book chapters

# REPRESENTATIONS OF REALITY IN THE POST-MILLENNIAL NOVEL IN ENGLISH, 2001–2025

edited by Bożena Kucała and Robert Kusek

Although most readers have an intuitive understanding of what realism is, in literary theory it has been an increasingly problematic concept to define – partly because of its contingency upon shifting ideas about reality and changing literary methods of rendering it. Chris Baldick signals some of its most contentious aspects when he defines realism as “a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life” (2004: 212). The apparent verisimilitude is, of course, a matter of literary conventions rather than a transparent mirror held up to reality. Following the twentieth-century linguistic turn, the question of representation appears much more complex. However, in her 2003 book *Realism* Pam Morris still asserts the viability of realist literature in the context of the perceived disjunction between language and reality; in Morris’s formulation, literary realism is “any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing” (2003: 6).

Despite its many antagonists, including modernist or postmodernist experimentation and ontological uncertainty, realism has survived and even proved receptive to certain new techniques. A number of different types of realism have emerged (Holland 2020: 31–32); however, as Mary K. Holland argues, there is “an important continuity running through all of these forms of realism: their belief in and commitment to representing a material world that is primary and defines human experience” (2020: 255). In her view, realism prioritises “the real, material, and physical over language and representation” (Holland 2020: 40), choosing descriptions of the empirical world over fantasy, idealisation, escapism, utopia, dystopia, and the supernatural. It also focuses on an intersubjective, communal, socially-made reality, “rather than splintering [human experience] into a compendium of subject positions” (Holland 2020: 256).

Krystyna Stamirowska argues that, despite being accused of naïveté and lack of sophistication, realist narratives “are – paradoxically – perhaps most significant through their acceptance of the major challenge – that of justifying their own role in the pattern of human life, and a refusal to be consigned to the status of a game or irrelevance” (1992: 9). Even though science and philosophy provide effective ways of describing reality, the uniqueness of literature, in Stamirowska’s words, resides in its capacity to offer “a product of an individual experience of the world, transformed by imagination” (1992: 8). More recently, Timothy Bewes has echoed this approach by asserting “the singularity of literature” as “a form whose truths and insights seem ever less transferable to, or comprehensible within, standard historical, scientific, or political vocabularies” (2012: 160).

The planned volume, *Representations of Reality in the Post-millennial Novel in English, 2001–2025*, will be a tribute to the late Professor Stamirowska’s scholarship, and a continuation of her work on contemporary realism. Her 1992 monograph, *Representations of Reality in the Post-war English Novel 1957–1975*, analysed selected fiction in relation to the

social and cultural context of postwar Britain. The editors of *Representations of Reality in the Post-millennial Novel in English, 2001–2025* invite articles on 21<sup>st</sup>-century fiction in English that seeks to represent the experience of living in the contemporary world, in a mode that may be broadly described as realistic. Suggested topics include:

- legacies of 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism in contemporary fiction
- precursors of contemporary realist fiction – realism after realism(s)
- genres and modes of contemporary realism
- historical events and their 21<sup>st</sup>-century representation
- class struggles, gender troubles, and racial tensions
- global crises, local responses, and their social implications
- migration, exile, and intercultural encounters
- self and community in contemporary fiction
- ecological catastrophes and health hazards – Anthropocene realism and pandemic fiction
- technological developments and new modes of communication

The monograph will be published by the Jagiellonian University Press or another internationally recognised publisher. Please send a 300-word proposal and a short bio to [robert.kusek@uj.edu.pl](mailto:robert.kusek@uj.edu.pl) or [bozena.kucala@uj.edu.pl](mailto:bozena.kucala@uj.edu.pl) by 30<sup>th</sup> June. Completed articles will be expected by 15<sup>th</sup> December 2026.

#### Works Cited

- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Bewes, Timothy. "Introduction: Temporalizing the Present." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2012, pp. 159-164.
- Holland, Mary K. *The Moral Worlds of Contemporary Realism*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Stamirowska, Krystyna. *Representations of Reality in the Post-war English Novel 1957–1975*. Kraków: Universitas, 1992.