



# Preface

*Twenty-First Century Novels: The First Decade* examines some of the most important fictional works published from 2000 to 2009. In order to help both students and casual readers develop a deeper understanding of these works, each title is covered in an entry that discusses style, characters, critical reception, and cultural and historical contexts, and provides recommendations of related materials and resources. With the participation of U.S. and international advisors, the list of titles has been developed to ensure broad coverage of world literatures, making *Twenty-First Century Novels* an excellent resource for multiethnic and multicultural curricula and communities.

In selecting titles for inclusion, we've worked to provide a snapshot of the novel in the first decade of this century, with an eye to identifying works that are suitable for inclusion in a high school or college reading list in addition to being of interest to the general reader of literary fiction. We have kept in mind the criteria set forth by the College Board for works studied in an Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition class, seeking out works that "invite and reward rereading and do not, like ephemeral works in such popular genres as detective or romance fiction, yield all (or nearly all) of their pleasures of thought and feeling the first time through" (*English Course Description, Effective Fall 2010*, p. 49). We hope and believe that many of the titles included here will still be read twenty or thirty years from now, and that each of them offers insights into the general human condition as well as the condition of the novel at the start of the 21st century.

In order to provide a broad view of the entire genre, we applied a number of additional criteria in making the final selections.

*Awards:* Winners of a small number of highly prestigious awards have been included by default. While there are many valid arguments both for and against the value of awards, we would be hard pressed to find individuals better qualified to judge fiction than the juries who make these selections. We also believe that much can be learned about the literary culture of a time by examining the creative works it chooses to honor. In assessing additional titles for inclusion, the short lists for these

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awards as well as other awards bestowed have also been taken into consideration. Lists of major award winners are provided in all three volumes.

*Genres:* Despite the injunction of the College Board cited above, we acknowledge that many works in the “popular genres” do offer much more than simple entertainment. For that reason, no novel has been excluded simply because it belongs to a popular genre. Similarly, young adult fiction has been considered so long as it has significant adult readership and meets the other selection criteria. Outstanding series that began before 2000 but concluded during the decade have been treated in single entries; for ongoing series, individual books have been considered if they stand as serious contenders on their own. Graphic novels that are works of fiction have also been included.

Finally, given that our primary audience will be English-speaking, we made the hard decision to include only works available in English at the time of compilation. Given that many very worthy works in other languages do not receive an English translation until years after they first appear, we reached that decision reluctantly. But we felt we would be doing the majority of our readers a disservice by pointing them at titles they could not in fact read. We hope the sampling of world literature provided here will whet English-speakers’ interest in international fiction and play some small role in stimulating the publication and teaching of novels in translation.

Identifying the “best” or “most important” items in any large group of works is always a challenging and somewhat subjective task. It is particularly daunting to select a relatively small number of works from a genre as rich, varied, and global as the novel. We have no illusions that we have arrived at a definitive list; indeed, we are sure we have left out innumerable excellent works. Nonetheless we feel confident that we’ve provided a valid and vibrant picture of the novel in the first decade of the century.

*The Editors*

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