



The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary

Stephen Clingman



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In our current world, questions of the transnational, location, land, and identity confront us with a particular insistence. The Grammar of Identity is a lively and wide-ranging study of twentieth-century fiction that examines how writers across nearly a hundred years have confronted these issues. Circumventing the divisions of conventional categories, the book examines writers from both the colonial and postcolonial, the modern and postmodern eras, putting

together writers who might not normally inhabit the same critical space: Joseph Conrad, Caryl Phillips, Salman Rushdie, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys, Anne Michaels, W. G. Sebald, Nadine Gordimer, and J. M. Coetzee. In this guise, the book itself becomes a journey of discovery, exploring the transnational not so much as a literal crossing of boundaries but as a way of being and seeing. In fictional terms this also means that it concerns a set of related forms: ways of approaching time and space; constructions of the self by way of combination and constellation; versions of navigation that at once have to do with the foundations of language as well as our pathways through the world. From Conrad's waterways of the earth, to Sebald's endless horizons of connection and accountability, to Gordimer's and

Coetzee's meditations on the key sites of village, Empire, and desert, the book recovers the centrality of fiction to our understanding of the world. At the heart of it all is the grammar of identity, how we assemble and undertake our versions of self at the core of our forms of being and seeing.



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