



The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolano's 2666

By Stefano Ercolino

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The Maximalist Novel sets out to define a new genre of contemporary fiction that developed in the United States from the early 1970s, and then gained popularity in Europe in the early twenty-first century.

The maximalist novel has a very strong symbolic and morphological identity. Ercolino sets out ten particular elements which define and structure it as a complex literary form: length, an encyclopedic mode, dissonant chorality, diegetic exuberance, completeness, narratorial omniscience, paranoid imagination, inter-semiocity, ethical commitment, and hybrid realism. These ten characteristics are common to all of the seven works that centre his discussion: *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon, *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace, *Underworld* by Don DeLillo, *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, *The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen, *2666* by Roberto Bolaño, and *2005 dopo Cristo* by the Babette Factory.

Though the ten features are not all present in the same way or form in every single text, they are all decisive in defining the genre of the maximalist novel, insofar as they are systematically co-present. Taken singularly, they can be easily found both in modernist and postmodern novels, which are not maximalist. Nevertheless, it is precisely their co-presence, as well as their reciprocal articulation, which make them fundamental in demarcating the maximalist novel as a genre.

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Editorial Review

Review

The Systems Novel. Mega-Novels. World Fictions. Have these terms and the characterizations they encourage had the effect of removing history and locatedness from our most ambitious literary fictions? To appreciate their significance, Stefano Ercolino urges us to reconsider contemporary fiction within literary history as a whole. A critical project no less ambitious than the big books under discussion, *The Maximalist Novel* offers new categories and a transatlantic context for current fiction in both its innovative and traditional aspects. (Joseph Tabbi, Professor of English, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA)

About the Author

Stefano Ercolino is Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Underwood International College, Yonsei University (Seoul, Korea). A former Fulbright Scholar at Stanford University (USA) and DAAD Postdoctoral Fellow in the Peter Szondi Institute of Comparative Literature at the Freie Universität Berlin (Germany), he is the author of *The Novel-Essay, 1884-1947*.

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