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978-0-521-06480-4 - Literature and Rationality: Ideas of Agency in Theory and Fiction

Paisley Livingston

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Although rationality is a central topic in contemporary analytic philosophy and in the social sciences, literary scholars generally assume that the notion has little or no relevance to literature. In this interdisciplinary study, Paisley Livingston promotes a dialogue between these different fields, arguing that recent theories of rationality can contribute directly to literary enquiry and that literary analysis can in turn enhance our understanding of human agency. The result is a work that helps bring literary studies into a more productive relationship to the human sciences.

Livingston provides a broad survey of the basic assumptions and questions associated with concepts of rationality in philosophical accounts of action, in decision theory, and in the theory of rational choice. He challenges prevalent irrationalist and mechanistic conceptions of human motivation and gives examples of the ways in which rationality is involved in the writing and reading of literary works, ranging from Icelandic sagas to Beckett, Dreiser, Kafka, Lem, Poe, and Zola. Livingston's critical analyses show how theoretically oriented readings of literature can contribute to the formation of hypotheses about the dynamics of human action and interaction.

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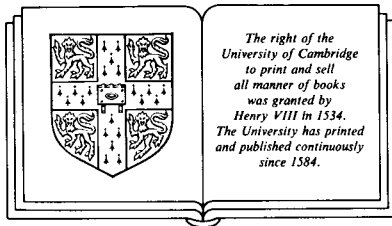
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# LITERATURE AND RATIONALITY

## Ideas of agency in theory and fiction

PAISLEY LIVINGSTON

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*to my parents*

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