

THE PERSISTENCE OF REALISM IN MODERNIST FICTION

Form vs. content, aesthetics vs. politics, modernism vs. realism: these entrenched binaries tend to structure work in early-20th century literary studies even among scholars who seek to undo them. *The Persistence of Realism* demonstrates how realism's defining concerns – sympathy, class, social determination – animate the work of Henry James, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett and Ralph Ellison. In contrast to the oft-told tale of an aesthetically rich modernism overthrowing realism's social commitments along with its formal structures, Stasi shows how these writers engaged with realism in concrete ways. The domestic novel, naturalist fiction, novels of sentiment and industrial tales are realist structures that modernist fiction simultaneously preserves and subverts. Putting modernist writers in conversation with the realism that preceded them, *The Persistence of Realism* demonstrates how modernism's social concerns are inseparable from its formal ones.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction: The Reminders of Realism	i
1 Fables of Autonomy in Late James	35
2 “She Will Drown Me with Her”: Sympathy and Autonomy in Joyce’s <i>Ulysses</i>	69
3 “Innumerable Slight Changes”: Historical Time and Social Reproduction in <i>The Years</i>	101
4 “I Was Always Sentimental”: Beckett’s Scenes of Sympathy	138
5 “He Forgot His History”: Ellison’s Naturalist Modernism	169
Conclusion: Form and Mediation, or the Desire to Explain Literary Objects	202
<i>References</i>	215
<i>Index</i>	231

Acknowledgments

This book began life in the Fall of 2014 as a graduate course playfully titled “Realism vs. Modernism.” What I then framed as rivalry, soon revealed itself to be a complicated intellectual inheritance, best understood through one of those great untranslatable German words: *Aufhebung*. Modernism, it now seems to me, preserves and transforms realism in equal measure. The same might be said of this book’s relation to that course, which, surprisingly enough, contained most of the key texts included in this study. I would like to begin, then, by thanking all of the students with whom I have tested these arguments, from that original seminar through multiple versions of my “Theory of the Novel” course.

Two distinct intellectual communities have been essential for this project. The first is the Marxist Literary Group, whose summer institutes have become a kind of second home over the last six or seven years. I thank all those comrades for their friendship and intellectual rigor, but especially Ericka Beckman, Beverley Best, Nicholas Brown, Kanishka Chowdhury, Barbara Foley, Peter Gardner, Neil Larsen, Courtney Maloney and the late, great Kevin Floyd. It is no exaggeration to say that our conversations have sustained me as we seemingly descend further and further into what Marx called the prehistory of humanity.

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Acknowledgments

vii

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