INTRODUCTION

Matter in Motion in the Modernist Novel

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Modernism and the Problem of the Real

In 1933, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary of her frustration with the novel. "The thing is to be venturous, bold, to take every possible fence. One might introduce plays, poems, letters, dialogues: must get the round, not only the flat. Not the theory only. And conversation; argument."[1] *A History of the Modernist Novel* attempts to fill in this tantalizing and elliptical description of the novel, made at a time when experimentalism in the form was at its height. It confirms in sometimes surprising ways that the modernist novel has always been "venturous and bold," from the era of the sensational aesthetic novel of Beauty to the late modernist tales of beautiful failures. It charts the myriad temporalities, lines of development, subgenres and styles that flourished in the modernist epoch (ca. 1880–1950).[2] A multivoiced approach to literary history suits well a genre characterized by pluralism and a degree of aesthetic experimentation that frequently entailed collaboration, interdisciplinary borrowings, and hybrid literary forms. Its generic richness – which includes naturalist, aesthetic, fantasy, adventure, Gothic, comic, impressionistic, didactic and parodic styles and modes – is the result of a singular openness to the reality it strives to include. M. M. Bakhtin recognized this in the 1930s, in his examination of the novel as a dynamic and dialogic form. The novel, he wrote, is "the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted," the sole genre to occupy a zone of "maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality in all its inconclusiveness."[3]

Literary history of the modernist epoch, as Chris Baldick points out, remains "strongly marked" by an emphasis on "radical breaks and unprecedented innovations."[4] Speaking of Woolf's and D. H. Lawrence's critical reflections on the novel, Baldick writes, that "[b]oth signal an important sceptical departure from habit and convention, a spasm of rebellion that is felt in the experimental construction not just of their own novels in the 1920s but of many other attempts to escape the imaginary tyrant of novelistic custom."[5] This "novelistic custom" relied on realism, particularly its tendency to confirm the middle-class, liberal-democratic ideology of the society it represented. Baldick shows that modernism produced a variety of realisms (environmental, psychological, socialist, provincial, artistic) and argues forcefully that "there are oversights and distortions involved in [a] partition of prose fiction into two distinct continents marked on our map as 'realism' and 'modernism.'"[6] However, contemporary reassessments of realism do not always escape the chronology that would place modernism *after* realism, which means that the classic "antinomy" remains at the center of the discussion.[7]

Many of the essays in this volume resist the dominant narratives in modernist studies, not the least those that modernists themselves constructed. Woolf's widely influential essays on fiction, particularly her critical assessment of Edwardian realists such as John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, and H. G. Wells, established a powerful story of how the modern novel transcended the empirical niceties of early twentieth-century realism by exploring the spiritual dimensions of the "dark places of psychology."[8] As David Bradshaw and Anne Fernihough show in this volume, Woolf not only misjudged these novelists but misrecognized the value of materialism and the narrative attention to everyday life – a value she saw quite differently, when she wondered, in 1933, if it was possible to "give ordinary waking Arnold Bennett life the form of art."[9] *A History of the Modernist Novel* returns to key debates like this to reassess the importance of everyday life and the technical means by which the novel tried to register and represent it.[10] It places canonical figures in new constellations, explores global connections and describes new hybrid forms, like the "modernist genre novel" and

experimental historical fiction. On the evidence it provides, we can say confidently that the modernist novel was *always in an experimental mode* and it was *always engaged with realism*, and in this double-barreled way it sought narrative access to the Real (i.e., to the irreducible materiality of lived experience) and to the temporal and geographic coordinates of our experience of it.[11]

The modernist frame of reference in this *History* includes language, narrative form, popular media networks, new and diverse audiences, transnational influences and pressures, the idea of cosmopolitanism as a *Weltanschauung*, and the materiality of everyday life. English-language traditions, together with some of the main lines of continental European development (Russian, German, French) are covered in some detail, as well as new modes of writing, publishing, distributing, and reading modernist fiction. While this *History* is concerned primarily with work in the period before the Second World War, Parts IV and V offer reflections on how modernism in the novel reorients itself in the 1940s and early 1950s. This raises the question of belatedness: is it possible that late modernists arrived after the feast of innovation? Is it because they come late that we find such a pervasive aura of failure in their work? Failure is a keynote throughout the modernist epoch, but the relation of failure (and *failing*) to innovation changes as modernist writers learn to rethink the underlying humanist values that shape their sense of success and failure in creative, ethical, and practical life. In late modernism, a trend that has coursed through the epoch comes into its own as a defining trait: the transvaluation of *failure* (defined as part of a rigid, technocratic binary with *success*) into *failing*, which Theodor Adorno associated with the most experimental of modernist works – works that "push contradiction to the extreme, and realize themselves in their resultant downfall."[12]

Coming late, therefore, does not reduce artistic expression to second-degree intensities or derivations, or to sterile, differential repetitions. Late modernism is conditioned by temporal openness and freedom, by geographical extension and cosmopolitan belonging, but also by the limits of locality and the failures of freedom and belonging. It throws open to the reader the spectacle of a world split

in two: radical solipsism of the sort we find in Samuel Beckett is matched with a vertiginous sense of time and space in which multiple voices create the din of a community – a confused sense of belonging ("a statement to be made, by them, by me, some slight obscurity here"[13]) that, for all its failings, constitutes a new narrative dynamic for character development and the consideration of human action.

One way to approach writing a history of such a complex genre – one with multiple temporalities and modalities of innovation, that resists totalization even as it experiments with unifying visions – is to formulate it as a *negative* dialectical art form that aspires to hold in creative tension two different worlds: the *expressed* world, the diegetic level of fiction that constitutes the "world" of the artwork, and the *represented* world, the non-diegetic level of lived experience that mimetic art seeks to imitate and emulate through faithful resemblance.[14] The represented world, which in fictional forms is manifested most effectively in realist styles, plays a decisive role in the development of the modernist novel, even though it is "inevitably and voluntarily mutilated" in the process,[15] for it is through this mutilation that the expressed world of the fiction emerges out of the world of objects and lived experience. If realist styles and techniques of notation are used, they serve primarily to augment an anti-mimetic world that does not strive to reflect or resemble the "given" state of things.[16] In its tactical, *notational* use of realism, the modernist novel augments an expressed world of anti-mimetic richness by providing narrative points of purchase for reflection and action: the objects that are so prominent in modernist anti-mimetic art.

Realism is at once an inheritance and an opportunity, a practice to be appropriated in the service of an aesthetic agenda that is inimical to its underlying mimetic impulse, which is to create resemblances to the observable world in art works. Appropriations of realism by modernist and avant-garde writers can thus have the effect of *derealizing* narrative, a tactic found in the sensational novels of Ouida, in Andrei Belyi's *Petersburg* (1913–14), and in Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890–91), in which the realism of the story is rendered *unreal*, *umheimlich*, by the introduction of sensational, Gothic, and melodramatic narrative styles; realist

notation, when it is used, jars with the aesthetic fantasy that contains it. Hybrid styles that feature realism tend to accomplish de-realization by virtue of rhetorical elaborations, descriptive exaggerations, or abstractions that serve both to undermine and reaffirm the realist "base" style. To de-realize realism is to make it *more real* as a style, an anti-mimetic style that resists vulgar and conventional "novelistic custom."

The highest virtue of the nineteenth-century realist novel, especially in France and England, was not its verisimilitude but its generative power, for it was able to create vast and detailed represented worlds, to which their narrators' ardent aspirations lent an affective dimension and human shape. The represented world in such fictions was as much a reflection of hope as it was of current social conditions.[17] This generative power is not easily refuted. There is a clear trajectory in the history of the modernist novel, a movement forward that entwines realist narration first with aestheticism, then the avant-garde realism of D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster, then the protean-styled or "Daedalean" experimentalism of the high modernists (Joyce, Woolf, Proust, Gertrude Stein, Belyi, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Flann O'Brien), the highly refined neo-realism of Ernest Hemingway, early William Faulkner, Elizabeth Bowen, and Kate O'Brien, and the ruthless subtractions from representation that we find in Beckett.

What sets the modernist apart from the nineteenth-century realist novelist, for whom the world of the novel maps nearly seamlessly with the world of representation, is that realism becomes a tactic or a technique, a style among others, rather than the literary index of a *Weltanschauung*, in which mimesis both mirrors a specific social order and legitimizes the ideology behind it. What most critics mean by "conventional" or Victorian realism is a form of narrative that assumes a stable and faithful representation of the lived experience of the world as it is *given to* representation. This is the mimetic trick of resemblance. Mimesis calls for a close resemblance to the given world of lived experience in representation (the givenness of reality is *presented again*). The realist novel, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sought to reconcile lived experience with

representation, the latter mobilized in such a way as to be the transparent medium of the life narrated.[18] In line with nineteenth-century psychology and social science, the realist novel developed styles of empirical description and dialogue that helped to create a normative discourse of everyday life. It served both an aesthetic function (by giving a "reality effect" to representation) and an ideological function (by redistributing social position and class, at the level of plot and incident, and by relying on omniscient third person and first person narrators).[19] If the nineteenth-century realists sought to reconcile language and the world in a style that veiled the struggle for reconciliation (in the sense of an achieved social totality), then modernists, by virtue of their tactical reuse of realist techniques and methods, aspired toward a reconciliation that was no less utopian but freed from the necessity to achieve a totality or to devalue the struggle that substitutes for that achievement. They put more creative and critical pressure on the negative, and struggled to resist dialectical closure.[20] If nineteenth-century realism dialectically integrates art and life, narrative and social experience, then modernist realism seeks to scuttle this integration through tactics of defamiliarization and misrecognition that accentuate the struggle against totality and open the novel to a more inclusive view of everyday life.

The discipline of resemblance that characterizes conventional realist fiction thrives in modernism precisely because resemblance itself can be mobilized in a hybrid or pastiche narrative as a style among other styles; for example, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, an "initial style" of stream of consciousness uses the mimetic principle of resemblance to show how language differs from the world. "Joyce had created a new realism," writes Arthur Powers, "in an atmosphere that was at the same time half-factual and half-dream."[21] Joyce's modernism requires the notational function of realism in order to stipulate the resemblance it then perpetually disavows. Novelists such as Woolf, Stein, and Beckett routinely use resemblance (echo, repetition, parallel) to dissemble reality; their language strives to resemble (or re-assemble) lived experience, its tempo and temporalities, and does so in part by estranging itself from the conventions of mimesis. Throughout the modernist epoch, the novel achieves one of the

classical goals of art, as articulated by Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote that "[Nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden."[22] The more radical the stylistic innovations are, the more tenuous the hold on a borrowed embodiment of narrative time and the more "golden" its aspect in the aesthetic autonomy it creates for itself. The modernist novel develops its own world; like all narrative art, it offers its own time to the reader even as it acknowledges conventional temporal markers such as chronology or sequence and the time of world history (as Woolf does in *Mrs. Dalloway* with periodic references to Big Ben). There are levels of "represented reality" in even the most resolutely anti-mimetic novel. "And to think I try my best not to talk about myself," notes the title character in Beckett's *Molloy*. "In a moment I shall talk about the cows, about the sky, if I can."[23] Experimental modernists, who explore the creative and critical potential of anti-mimetic literature, do not abandon realism so much as transform the field of what is representable in a realist style so that it draws attention to the objects (cows, sky) that are merely background in the realist novel and to the subject's inwardness, his reflections and affections ("If I can"), which are the stuff of the modernist novel. The point is not to achieve resemblance but rather to register in language and literary form the lived experience of the present in a flash of being that resembles nothing, save the flight-pattern of its own emergence.

On the Theory and History of the Novel

The theory of the novel emerged within modernism itself. The prefaces and essays written by the likes of Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf have had a profound impact on our conception of the modernist novel as an enterprise that registers the fine gradations of consciousness, that attends to the inner life and memories of one's protagonists, that creates from experience of the world a "magical suggestiveness" (in Conrad's vivid phrase) that grants to prose narrative some of the qualities of musical sound. For these modernists, the novel was a forum for expressing what could be known about the world, for offering intimations of the quicksilver

contact we make with objects, for conveying the "triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead" that overwhelms Mrs. Dalloway in "this moment of June."[24]

For all of the commentary these novelists made on the *form* of the novel, a strictly formalist theory of the novel did not emerge until much later.[25] Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1966) ushered in a brand of formal analysis that concentrated on point of view, narrative disposition (reliable and unreliable), and the question of narrative *voice*, though his rhetorical approach was eclipsed by the structural narratology of Gerard Genette and Roland Barthes. In the meantime, the dialectical materialism of Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1920) offered a critical perspective on modernist experimentalism. Ideally, "the novel establishes a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself."[26] From a dialectical perspective, realism both represents the "real world" (for analysis and reform) and constitutes what is real through representation. The nineteenth-century realist novel, for Lukács, was a great bourgeois invention, powered by "the old genuine dialectic" that, by the 1940s, had been "consigned to oblivion."[27] The greatness of this conventional form did not rest on its having *actually* achieved dialectical closure (seamless integration of narrative and experience), but on its ardent aspiration toward that achievement. The failures of the modernist novel were, for Lukács, the failures of a genre to grasp its historical moment and to express, through formal means, a remedy for it.

What Lukács inaugurated subsequent theorists developed further, from Bakhtin who had argued, beginning in the late 1920s, that the novel was dialogic, parodic, carnivalesque, and constantly changing,[28] to postwar touchstones such as Erich Auerbach, whose *Mimesis* (1946) remains an important account of how novelistic realism developed out of a long tradition of mimetic representation, and Ian Watt, whose *Rise of the Novel* (1957) inaugurated a mode of literary history that charts the English novel's emergence and rise as a function of political and cultural modernization. Something of this

approach is discerned in the historicist critics of the novel, such as Walter Benn Michaels, for whom the novel's legibility was tied strongly to our understanding of social conditions (e.g., the relationship between the "gold standard" and narrative technique).[29] These materialist approaches, and those driven by phenomenology to explore the horizon of the novel's fictive worlds,[30] have led novel theory toward what has remained its central questions: What is the relationship between form and reality? Can the novel do more than shape life into representations? Can it "express" the "qualia" of everyday life, the immediate experience of sensation?

In the last half century, there have been many attempts to retell the history of the novel in terms of its relation to the lived experience of everyday life, a relation that Raymond Williams has described in terms of "structures of feeling," "the culture of a period . . . the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization," which often "corresponds to the dominant social character."[31] Materialist and feminist revisionism has challenged orthodox attitudes toward everyday life, especially the structures of feeling governing domestic life and the life of women. Works such as Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), tell the story of women novelists in a way that reorients our understanding of the genre, preeminently by widening the scope of objects and events, characters and themes that were available for representation.[32] In the wake of Homi Bahbha's seminal work on "narrative and nation,"[33] many studies have considered the impact of empire and colonialism on the shape of the modernist novel. Some of these retain an interest in the nation and nationalism, as in John Kucich's study of British fiction and the fantasies of empire, while others consider alternatives to national identification and belonging, as in Jessica Berman's study of "cosmopolitan communities" in modernist fiction.[34] Some studies focus primarily on the modernist novel and its investments in the imperial project, though in others, such as Simon Gikandi's *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992), postcolonial literatures are pitted against canonical modernism. This viewpoint has been challenged in recent

years, most notably by Neil Lazarus, and we are now more inclined to see a modernist moment entwined with a postcolonial one.[35]

Michael Valdez Moses argues that the novel is fundamental to our understanding of global culture: "the very process of global modernization that has made a world literature possible has itself become a principle subject of that literature."[36] The upsurge of interest in globalization and cosmopolitanism, together with a resurgence of interest in Immanuel Wallerstein's "world-systems" theory, has created a new context for understanding the modernist novel as a development within a larger global network of literary production and circulation.[37] One of the most ambitious projects is Franco Moretti's five-volume *Collana Romanzo* (2001–03). The two-volume English-language edition (*The Novel*, 2006) is just shy of 2,000 pages and maps the complexity of the literary field with an analytical method that re-conceives *genre as a global system* in which analysis cuts across geopolitical boundaries. But it also shows the novel's continuing efforts to narrate the ambivalent space of the nation: at once a location and a *dis*location; an ancestral land, language and way of life, but also a global terrain in which national distinctions are configured in terms of a vast and expanding global network. In a quite different vein, Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* has been widely influential in reading global literature as an extension of national traditions and languages. Casanova is interested in systems mapping; but unlike Moretti, she calls a halt to the critical tendency to disavow or undervalue national literary traditions precisely by linking them to the global systems of which they are, at bottom, mirror images. Her approach hinges on the difference between *national* and *international* writers: "The internal configuration of each national space precisely mirrors the structure of the international literary world as a whole." She speaks of a "rivalry" between "'national' writers (who embody a national or popular definition of literature) and 'international' writers (who uphold an autonomous conception of literature)." The "world literary space" is created by "a composite of the various national literary spaces, which are themselves bipolar and differentially situated in the world structure" with respect to "national and international poles."[38] In Casanova's analysis of the