

Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013. ISBN-13: 978-1-78168-133-6. 326 pages

If the world of Marxist Literary Criticism constructed its own version of Mount Rushmore, I have little doubt that Fredric Jameson's mug would be amongst the first immortalized in stone. Perhaps what distinguishes Jameson from the majority of his contemporaries is the consistency of his corpus, as well as his commitment to dialectical thinking. I defy you find another cultural critic whose analysis of politics, history, and literature has been as consistently insightful, thought-provoking, and challenging as Jameson's. Such brilliance comes at a price, however: Suggesting that Jameson's line of thinking is sometimes difficult to follow would be an understatement. To fully appreciate the depth of knowledge that he has acquired over the years, one has to be "in the know" when it comes to his unique brand of marxist jargon and dialectical thinking. For this reason, newbies might want to familiarize themselves with Jameson's earlier works before opening the latest installment of his "poetics of social form", aptly titled *The Antinomies of Realism*.

In this study, Jameson takes what he started over twenty years ago in his seminal work, *The Political Unconscious*, and applies it convincingly to the 19th century realist novel. Without mentioning it by name, Jameson is appealing to his own notion of the *ideology of form*, described in *The Political Unconscious* as "the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production". Simply put, every genre and literary mode has a dialectical relationship with residual, dominant, and emerging social formations—the realist novel being no exception.

What we first see at work in the realist novel is a tension between *récit* and *roman*, i.e. the simple telling of past events vs. the showing of events as they unfold. According to Jameson, realism favors the latter, while never completely transcending the former (one of its many antinomies). *Récit* reflects the age-old tradition or "narrative impulse" captured in novellas, ballads, and folk tales, while *roman* disrupts the seamless continuity of *récit* by introducing a non-linear, heterogeneous present. With the development of the realism, new techniques such as *style indirect libre* begin to emerge, while *affect* starts taking precedence over *named emotion*. Rather than simply telling readers "Tess hated Charles", realist writers attempted to show individualized feelings that could not be reduced to a common array of reified emotional states such as love, hatred, fear, disgust, anger, pleasure, etc. Jameson hypothesizes that this shift from named emotion to affect can be traced to the emergence of what he calls the *bourgeois body*. Unfortunately for his readers, Jameson doesn't really elaborate further, but reading between the lines, we can induce that the bourgeois body is the metaphorical antithesis of what we see in Bakhtin: an appeal to the individual and high culture, rather than a celebration of the common,

naughty parts.

The dialectic outlined in *Antinomies* would have perhaps been easier to follow had Jameson decided to explore some of the idiosyncrasies of bourgeois body while explaining how they might be connected to the emergence of affect and roman. Nevertheless, Jameson does a convincing job demonstrating what he calls the “codification of affect” in classic realist novels, showing how they combined an attention to the body and its states of feeling while focusing on the quest for individual realization. It does not take a stretch of the imagination to see how such literary trends might be connected to the bourgeois culture’s obsession with individualism, but I cannot help but feel that such a vital element of Jameson’s dialectic should have been fleshed out more.

That one complaint aside, *Antinomies* offers a fascinating study of how these trends manifest themselves in the works of the era’s most notable writers. Jameson finds affect in the sensory onslaught of Zola’s Paris: The dead fish in the market, the ocean of clothes in the department store, the lights, the crowd, the array of cheeses, etc. Zola even goes so far as to describe 18 different varieties of cheese, then uses their rank smell as a backdrop for some gossiping women. Affect in Tolstoy manifests as a form of “distraction”, whereby seemingly fixed identities are constantly undermined by what Jameson calls “impersonal consciousness”. Identity in Tolstoy seems to serve as an objective social marker, however, his multitude of characters often escape fixed essences through a shifting range of moods, fantasies, disappointments, and impulses. In a sense, there is an aporia of character at work within his rich array of seemingly “stable” fictional identities. In Galdos, we witness the tension between plot and consciousness manifest itself in what Jameson describes as the “waning of protagonist”. Like the “distraction” of Tolstoy, Galdos sacrifices stability by inhibiting the minds of a vast array of characters, but what is unique to Galdos is how his major characters become minor ones: Heroes and heroines move to the background, while the foreground becomes increasingly populated by minor or secondary characters whose “stories might once have been digressions, but now colonize and appropriate the novel for themselves”(96). The final literary giant highlighted in this study is George Eliot, who Jameson credits for the breakdown of the simple distinction between good and evil. Since affect is an internal state, Jameson argues that Eliot’s characters allude external moral judgements through *mauvaise foi* or bad faith, a condition that makes the feeling of guilt virtually impossible.

Jameson never lets his readers forget that it is the antinomies—between affect and named emotion, linear story-time and impersonal presence, récit and roman, background and foreground—that are unique to realism. From Jameson’s perspective, it is the tensions between these residual, emerging, and dominant forms that will eventually give rise to the modernist experimentation of the twentieth

century. It is important to note that he does not see this as being part of simple cause and effect relationship, but rather the result of an ongoing dialectic accompanying the development of capitalism over two centuries. Unfortunately, this dialectic is implied rather than demonstrated in *Antinomies*, therefore is contingent upon the reader's familiarity with Jameson's corpus and its one underlying theme—Always historicize!

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