

Jarrad COGLE, *Jameson and Literature: The Novel, History, and Contemporary Reading Practices*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, ISBN 978-3-030-54823-0, 176 p.

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It would be difficult to separate the rehabilitation of Marxist theory in American academia from the influence that the work of Frederic Jameson has exerted on the field. Considered one of the most prominent leftist academic voices, Jameson's work in cultural and literary theory has become a staple reference for anyone interested in postmodernism, dialectical criticism, as well as a general understanding of the text as traversed by ideology. Although Jamesonian analysis has garnered a lot of popularity and has remained relevant throughout the decades, some underdeveloped strands of his theories have also come under fire from other academics (particularly exponents of feminist and postcolonial scholarship). In an attempt to estimate his place in the contemporary theoretical landscape, Cogle aims to trace the critical reception of Jameson's writing. Reconsidering the critique surrounding his body of work serves to highlight both deficient and fertile angles opened up by Jameson's generic and cultural investigations. The primary goal of Cogle's metacritical approach is to recontextualise Jamesonian theoretical frameworks by focusing on the theorist's reading practices. Therefore, by trying to locate aspects of his theory in his practice, Cogle re-evaluates the importance of Jameson's engagement with literature as it relates to the development of his ideas.

In his depiction of Jameson's literary investigations, Cogle considers a wide variety of the critic's volumes and essays, managing to construct a nuanced study of his career that does not limit itself to his most well-known works, *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Political Unconscious* (1981) and *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). The structuring criterion of Cogle's study is rooted in chronology, namely in the succession of the historical periods that Jameson takes an

interest in: the 19th century, modernism, and the post-war and postmodern periods. Each one of these areas of interest present in Jameson's *oeuvre* is allotted a different section, meaning that each of the five major chapters of the volume sheds light on a distinct aspect pertaining to the theorist's career: a general overview of his academic trajectory, his understanding of realism, his engagement with modernism, his work on postmodernism and genre fiction and conclusions concerning his reception. Cogle assesses different instances throughout the critic's body of work which he dedicates to the study of the novel, this being the literary genre privileged by Jameson. The research in this volume blends biographical and textual analysis as Cogle strives to identify different factors that might have had an impact on the evolution of Jameson's relationship with the novel, as well as to point out the strengths and weaknesses of some of his theoretical arguments. In considering both the strong points and the shortcomings of Jameson's work, the author of this book takes an array of circumstances into account, such as the theorist's educational background, his interaction with contemporary studies, the critical evaluation of his ideas, and seemingly problematic aspects of his writing.

The first chapter of the book takes a quick overview of Jameson's career as its starting point. It emphasises the features of his work that led to the intense circulation of his ideas, as well as certain paradoxes pertaining to the influence of his studies. Furthermore, this introductory section of the book also announces the overarching goal of Cogle's research, which is to underline "Jameson's idiosyncratic engagements with the literary canon—as well as his predilections and absences when discussing certain periods and forms" (3), which, according to Cogle, will prove useful in the re-examination of his theoretical projects. If the consensus is "to consider Jameson a cultural studies figure, rather than a literary one" (2), the author of this volume turns his attention to an aspect that has remained relatively marginal in discussions on Jamesonian theory – his treatment of the novel. What is important to note regarding Jameson's understanding of literature is that he believes in the primacy of literary analysis oriented towards the historical context in which certain novels operated, as that would allow for the identification of the *ideologeme* (10). Jameson's grasp of the novel is thus similar to Kristeva's, who also believed in the novel's ability to reveal or repress ideology. Concerning the theorist's approach to the elaboration of his ideas, Cogle makes

an interesting remark referring to his reticence in relation to interacting with academics contemporary to him. This is particularly telling in one of his most recognisable works, *The Political Unconscious*, which, while engaging with important poststructuralist voices (Deleuze, Foucault), has its theoretical roots in the ideas of Althusser, Levi-Strauss, Marx, Hegel, and Lukács (10-11). Such an approach causes Jameson's work to acquire a quasi-anachronistic feel, something that critics such as Terry Eagleton and Evan Watkins have also noted (11). This lack of engagement with contemporary thinkers will become characteristic of Jameson's work and will impact its reception in other fields. Even though the merits of his writing are recognised by many, Jameson exerts a paradoxically small influence on scholarship centred on feminist-, postcolonial critique, and affect theory, where the referencing of his work is often superficial (18). Thus, despite Jameson's academic position, which remains "somewhat obscure" (4) due to the development of his ideas in line with older generations of thinkers, the book will try to clarify Jameson's place within contemporary culture.

Building on Jameson's primary specialisation in French literature, the second chapter of the study examines his appreciation of the realist novel, as well as the extent to which he allots textual space to literature belonging to a non-French lineage. The terms in which he discusses realism are mainly related to the Marxist view of the 19th century as a time of important historical change concerning the expansion of capitalism. Examples of Jameson's works that this section makes use of are *The Prison-House of Language*, *The Political Unconscious*, and *Antinomies of Realism*. This is the longest chapter of Cogle's book and probably the most substantial in the sense that it already traces the lines of some of the most problematic aspects of Jameson's work, most of which will remain noticeable and will be further explored by Cogle in relation to other periods. Even though it is *The Political Unconscious* that "marks the culmination of Jameson's early interest in realism" (34), it will be his later book, *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013), that will solidify his commitment to the investigation of the realist novel. Moreover, it will be in the latter that Jameson will steer away from "the symptomatic or paranoid reading practices" (36) that he has been criticised for by other scholars. For him, Realism represents fertile ground for conducting a Marxist analysis of the novel as it implies understanding how history has generated ideological practices easily confused with what is considered to be the "objective" truth promoted by Realism.

His overarching argument in regards to the birth of high realism is based on a tension between the heritage of the 18th century (folk tales, myth, the novel) and the nascence of affect in narrative tradition, observable in elements of scene and description. This dialectical element makes it difficult to obtain a strict category of what Realism entails (35). Notwithstanding the fact that Jameson has broadened the view of the 19th century and the realist novel, Cogle also points out the drawbacks of some of his arguments, which have also attracted valid criticism from other important voices in academia. One of the most problematic aspects is in connection to the lack of transparency regarding his textual choices, something that Cogle will term as the theorist's "canonising gestures" (163). Leaving out the American novel, superficially discussing the English novelistic tradition and spending little energy on the analysis of Russian authors (such as Tolstoy), Jameson privileges the French realist novel as the peak literary production of the century. Even though Jameson has often spoken up against "ethical criticism" (40) and imparting value judgements upon literature, the fact that he not only reinforces the idea of a male canon by excluding important women writers from his analysis but also channels his interest disproportionately towards the French lineage of the realist novel (Balzac, Flaubert, Zola) is telling of an inability to separate personal preference from literary research. Terry Eagleton commented on how Jameson's writing does not free itself from "ideological or ethical imperative[s]" (53) simply by denying the use of "ethical or moral thought" (51) when the theorist does in fact often operate within the confines of a personal hierarchy. A further problem with Jameson's work on Realism lies in the fact that he investigates the English novel one-dimensionally, without considering the historical context of the works he analyses in their entirety, unlike his detailed interpretations of the French novel (43). Sometimes he leaves out the English tradition altogether, even if the context of his discussion demands an excursion into Anglophone novelistic practice, for example when he omits to turn to Jane Austen on the topic of *style indirect libre* (56). This exclusion of Austen appears, however, to be tied to a larger, systematic exclusion of women writers in general, which Cogle and feminist critics such as Showalter, Sedgwick, Ngai, and Martindale (55) have taken notice of. This further reflects on Jameson's undervaluing of the importance of the domestic topos for the nineteenth-century novel (55), choosing to focus on the public sphere instead of novels that privilege the private feminine space. Jameson's merit in

discussing the realist novel is largely based on his focus on the literary subject's experience of the 19th century, but could, otherwise, according to Cogle's investigation, also benefit from a more holistic view gained by shifting attention to women writers, other cultures and popular genres outside of "high realism".

The third chapter moves on to Jameson's inquiry into Modernism, aiming towards reconciling Jameson's seemingly "reductionist economism" with what scholars have identified as "a multitude of modernist practices and uneven development" (91) in correlation with the concept of alternative modernities. Modernism is the period most "obscured" in Jameson's writing as observed by critics such as Donougho (79) and occupies the most ambiguous place in his theorisation of the novel. Modernism is viewed as "incomplete" (80) throughout Jameson's work as he refuses the idea of the movement as a monolithic standard under which to group disparate manifestations simply because they belong to the same time frame. Similar to his engagement with the realist novel, what transpires from Jameson's writings on Modernism is that his canon is based on a view that reinforces a traditional perspective on the period, one that privileges Western male authors. Nonetheless, in considering the modernist movement he moves past Francophone literature (Camus, Proust, Céline) and also turns to Anglophone writers (Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Fitzgerald), engaging primarily with the exponents of high modernism. He continues to only briefly mention the contribution of women, such as Woolf (93) but tries to tackle the notion of alternate modernities and the uneven expansion and development of Modernism in his book *A Singular Modernity* (2002) (98). By breaking away from what Jameson considers to be overdone interpretations of novels such as *Ulysses* through the advancement of new methods of literary interpretation focused on the historical context (104), Cogle remarks that Jameson manages to maintain the sense of "heterogeneity" characteristic of high modernism by emphasising various underlying "narratives of industrialisation and imperialism" (100). Cogle also discusses one of the biggest controversies of Jameson's career, the accusations of cultural imperialism that he received after the publication of his 1986 essay *Third-World Literature in The Era of Multinational Capitalism*. Other than his use of the problematic, homogenising phrase "third world", which other thinkers such as Aijaz Ahmad have commented on (86-88), what has made scholars question his approach to "peripheral cultural material" is his very position as an

intellectual in a "neo-imperialist state" (88). Cogle himself acknowledges that Jameson's writings related to Modernism are "missing necessary nuances" (110), but that he nevertheless managed to broaden interpretative practices of certain modernist texts.

The last chapter dealing with Jameson's engagement with novelistic practices is directed towards his interest in postmodern and post-war literature. What this section of Cogle's study analyses are the ways in which Jameson has limited the interpretation of certain emblematic postmodern novels, as well as his interest in postmodern genre fiction as opposed to products of high postmodernism. Jameson criticises postmodern novelistic production because of its apparent apolitical nature, but often, as Cogle proves, performs a surface-level reading of these works. Taking Doctorow's *Ragtime* as a prime example, Cogle shows how Jameson not only fails to address the context in which the novel appeared but also limits his understanding of Doctorow's work to his concept of the "waning" of affect, thus disqualifying the sense of anxiety that permeates many texts on the postmodern subject (128). It is Jameson's stance regarding "inauthentic realism" (128) that makes him doubt the narrative possibilities of such a novel. Even though he has disagreed with scholars who try to invalidate postmodern artistic production based on its lack of aesthetic value, he approaches the novel of this period guided by his personal preferences (120-1). Important to note when it comes to Jameson's approach to postmodern literary production is that he has developed a more optimistic view in relation to genre fiction (particularly detective novels and science fiction) as opposed to the high postmodern novel. Concerning popular fiction, Cogle primarily focuses on Jameson's perception of science fiction. For him, science fiction can prove productive for a Marxist literary undertaking as it could potentially "express the historical situation of late capitalism" (135). The author of this book further remarks how Jameson tries to demarcate science fiction from the rest of the postmodern cultural material (137) by providing less restrictive interpretations of the genre. Consequently, his attempt to separate the two becomes a perfect example for Cogle's thesis – the examination of how Jameson's personal preferences in connection to cultural material impact his work as a theorist.

The last part of the book delineates Cogle's conclusions about how criticism has sometimes unfairly dismissed Jameson's work without taking a more nuanced approach to his writing. Providing a brief overview of how the theorist both fails and succeeds in

conducting a complex portrayal of the cultural material that he discusses, Cogle stresses the importance of not reducing Jameson to his major texts, as well as how certain concepts (such as the "collective"), which have yet to be fully explored by him, could open up his work to new directions.

To conclude, Cogle provides a complex depiction of Jameson's career in academia, taking a wide variety of his writings into account. Even if this is not the only study concerning Jameson's work that takes a critical stance towards it, Cogle manages to consolidate and prove the relevancy of his thesis – the need to de-isolate Jamesonian theoretical frameworks from the theorist's engagement with literature. Cogle's merits lie, furthermore, not only in cohesively presenting his arguments but also in avoiding a reductive perspective on Jameson's theoretical material.