

ENGL 300 Introduction to Theory of Literature
Professor Paul H. Fry

A Bit More Marx and Marxism

The Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.

--Marx, Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach (1845)

Let Scott, Balzac, and Dreiser serve as the non-chronological markers of the emergence of realism in its modern form; these first great realisms are characterized by a fundamental and exhilarating heterogeneity in their raw materials and by a corresponding versatility in their narrative apparatus. In such moments, a generic confinement to the existent has a paradoxically liberating effect on the registers of the text, and releases a set of heterogeneous historical perspectives—the past for Scott, the future for Balzac, the process of commodification for Dreiser—normally felt to be inconsistent with a focus on the historical present. Indeed, this multiple temporality tends to be sealed off and recontained again in “high” realism and naturalism, where a perfected narrative apparatus (in particular the threefold imperatives of authorial depersonalization, unity of point of view, and restriction to scenic representation) begin to confer on the “realistic” option the appearance of an asphyxiating, self-imposed penance. It is in the context of this gradual reification in late capitalism that the romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and freedom from the reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage.

--Jameson, “Magical Narratives” (*The Political Unconscious*)