

Postmodernism Marxist Critiques

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Federic Jameson

Courtesy: <http://wallpaper222.com/explore/fredric-jameson-quotes/>

Abstract

This article argues how postmodernism is covertly ideological. The article presents a critique. This work will attempt to examine Eagleton, Jameson and other Marxist theorists, their approaches to postmodernism. Sketch the ambiguities and contradictions in their claims and to outline the influence of postmodernism in their writings. The present study is analytical and qualitative in nature.

Key words: Eagleton, Jameson, Marxist theorists, Marxism, post Marxism and postmodernism.

Introduction: Postmodernism versus Modernism

Postmodernism marks the destruction of magnificent narratives that controlled the human life. Modernism had been nostalgic for the values of the past. Postmodern logic calls this

nostalgia as a miscalculated idealistic extravaganza. The aesthetic of postmodern is flat: it is a time not of nostalgic concern but of the joyous celebration of chaos. The old distinction between 'high and low', 'vice and virtue', 'nature and culture', are dissolved and boiled down to empty images aimlessly wandering in the newly made homogeneous solution. Postmodernism is confusing and baffling to define, there is at the heart of it what Ihab Hassan called 'to become intimate with chaos' or Francis Fukuyama's notorious proclamation of 'the end of history'.

Marxist Theory

On the contrary, Marxist theory believes that human experience is always temporal and that all types of human consciousness arise from the material conditions. It claims to be a scientific theory of changing the society of human beings. Marxist theory and Postmodernism are draggers drawn at each other. The Marxist theory rules out the Postmodernism claim to drain out history and its belief in the historical continuum. It is a perversion of what might be termed as historical naturalism, as per the Marxist theorists.

Focus of This Study

The study will examine how Jameson, Eagleton and other Marxist theorists appropriate the Continental tradition in philosophy to present a nuanced understanding of Marxism. The study aims at understanding the most perceptive Marxist response to postmodernism in the English-speaking world.

Postmodern Literary Theory and Its Relevance to the Present Political Reality

Many intellectuals, during the last few decades, have done a considerable amount of work on postmodern literary theory and its relevance to the present political reality. A buzz word Postmodernism has become.

In his *Postmodernism and Politics*, Jonathan Arac, encourages us to consider once again many privileged objects of human enquiry: the criticism discipline, the reader of a book /viewer of a film, the leading intellectual, the artist, and even itself the notion of experience. He speaks of the ways through which the late capitalist culture can be interpreted and how to transform it. The

leftist intellectuals should concern themselves with the ideological conditions of the critical discourse and its origin in the material conditions, he adds that too.

Andrew Ross also raises a crucial question. Culture in which we all live is a Postmodernist culture, it hardly matters how unevenly its effects are felt across the jagged spectrum of gender, class, color, region, and nationality. In his *Universal Abandon: The Politics Of Postmodernism*, Andrew Ross asks when postmodernism has abandoned the Universalist foundations of enlightenment thought, we must ask ourselves, whose interests are served by this universal abandon? Thus he also makes postmodern culture complicit with power structures.

Genealogy of Postmodernism

As we know, Postmodernism is dependent of time, but it is the sour fruit of time. Its genealogy is traced back to its roots in the late 18th century romantic tradition, in *Postmodern Literary Theory* of Niall Lucy. In that belief, the literary was conceived as inseparable from the literary theory. But, he says, for postmodernism what was once the romantic space of the literary becomes a general plane existence of humans. He uses the work of Johnson, Rousseau, Hobbes, Kant, Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger to historicize his analysis.

Similarly, in *The Origins of Postmodernity* Perry Anderson talks about the rise of ideas around postmodernism. Where does the postmodernism idea come from? Who first conceived and developed it? How have its meanings changed? These are the various questions posed and answered. He argues, besides, about the importance of explaining literary texts from a political perspective. The publication also makes no secret of Jameson's admiration.

Jameson's Ideas of Marxism and Their Application

Robert Adams examines the key ideas of Jameson in his *Frederic Jameson*. He examines, moreover, the sources and contexts of Jameson's writing. He deals, largely, with his Marxism and the critical analysis of postmodernism. Same work has been done in his masterpiece, *The Fiction of Postmodernism* by Stephen Baker. He talks, besides Frederic Jameson, about Lyotard, Adorno, and Baudrillard. He offers an explanation of postmodernism from both the perspective of post Marxism and from the Marxist critical tradition. In relation to works of contemporary

fiction, issues relating to the development of a postmodern politics and the postmodern representation of history are also addressed.

In their seminal work Douglas Kellner and Sean Homer, *Frederic Jameson; Critical Reader*, track Jameson's career from the "New left" and the rethinking of Marxism in the 1950s and 60s through the rise of postmodernism.

James Smith in his *Terry Eagleton: A Critical Introduction* gives a close look to Eagleton's works, sketching out their arguments and implications, traces the development of Eagleton's theoretical positions and an assessment of Eagleton's contribution to Marxist literary criticism and cultural theory.

Byron Clarke in his article, "Minimum wage is an objective truth: how Postmodernism hurts the working class" castigated Postmodernism. Clarke says that post-modernism masks itself in obscure and pretentious language. By this, he says, it keeps the general masses in oblivion while serving its own interests.

Gopal Balakrishnan in his article, "The Coming Contradiction", examines *Frederic Jameson's Valences of the Dialectics*. He says that in the postmodern atmosphere of ontological and epistemological uncertainty, Jameson is wonderful in establishing a Hegelian-Marxist grounding of postmodernism. He says, In an atmosphere of growing suspicion towards 'totalization', Jameson can be seen to have pulled off an improbable intellectual coup, establishing a broadly Hegelian-Marxist understanding of a widely, if in chaotically, experienced postmodernism, while conjoining this mutation in the superstructure to a new phase of capitalist expansion and intensification.

Christopher Norris in his review on Eagleton's *After Theory* says that the story Eagleton has to tell is one of successive accommodating moves between the literary-academic 'institution' and those critics, schools or ideas which begin by challenging its cultural hegemony, and end up by merely extending its powers.

The same book is reviewed by Albert Colon .He studies the development of Eagleton's thought and says that this book is not merely a disavowal of postmodernism. It exists as an example of the theory that Eagleton espouses throughout the book. It is a theory that allows for the reader and the practitioner to engage the fundamental questions that lie at the center of our existence.

Eminent Exponents



Terry Eagleton

Courtesy: <https://robertarood.wordpress.com/2013/08/10/nobody-would-have-an-orange-juice-with-oliver-twist-if-they-could-share-a-beer-with-fagin-how-to-read-literature-by-terry-eagleton/>

In the English speaking world most eminent exponents of Marxist theory are Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton. We observe them, every now and then, targeting postmodernism in its various forms. Frederic Jameson attacks the various anti-historical formalisms, for these abstract language and knowledge from the temporal change and distorts their relation to the lived experience. He makes available a framework for analyzing the connection between art and the historical circumstances of its meaning---in particular how cultural artifacts repress, distort, or transform their circumstances through the abstractions of aesthetic form. This analysis provides a stark alternative to empiricism and humanism. It would later provide a compelling alternative to

post-structuralism and deconstruction as they became dominant methodologies in aesthetic criticism. His groundbreaking work was to discover the historical roots of postmodernism itself. As he says, Postmodernism is not a timeless gesture but a logically historical derivation of late capitalism, just as modernism was the culture of monopoly capitalism. According to him it is safest to grasp the concept of postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place. He once described it as the specialization of culture under the pressure of organized capitalism.

Eagleton, too, castigates the non-Marxist theory by exposing its complicity with the power structures. According to him Non-Marxist theory is part of the ideological and political history of our epoch. Non-Marxist theory is less an object of intellectual enquiry in its own right than a particular perspective in which to view the history of our times.

Eagleton believes, pure literary theory is an academic myth. So it had better been abandoned in the interests of a practical, transformative involvement in cultural politics. Such a work is done by Marxist theory. It addresses the important issues that are shunned by the recent cultural theorists i.e. truth, objectivity, morality, revolution and fundamentalism. He believes the aesthetic philosophies of the early capitalistic period had been ideological and the contemporary theory is the latest phase of the history of this relationship between aesthetic and ideology.

Conclusion: Many intellectuals have done a considerable amount of work on postmodern literary theory and its relevance to the existing political reality, during the last few decades. Postmodernism and Marxism are draggers drawn at each other. The latter rules out the former's claim to drain history out and its belief in the historical continuum. It is, as per the Marxist theorists, a perversion of what might be termed as historical naturalism.

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