

## Victorian Research Seminar Week 2 Outline

Authors: Ana Curtis and Tristan Beiter

Date: 29 January 2018

---

### January 30: canonical realisms 1

some topics: realism overview; social networks; city and country; news and newspapers

- Anthony Trollope, *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*, continued
  - Georg Lukacs, “Narrate or Describe”
  - Ian Watt, from *The Rise of the Novel*
  - Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect”
  - Fredric Jameson, beginning of chapter 3 from *The Political Unconscious*
  - optional: Fredric Jameson, “The Realist Floor-plan”
  - Bruno Latour, “Circulating Reference”
  - complete before class: Dennis Tenen and Grant Wythoff’s plain-text authoring tutorial
  - create a Github account
  - in class workshop: close reading criticism
  - in class workshop: concepts of version control (git, Github) and Prose.io
  - discussion and outline: Tristan, Ana
  - close reading: Rebecca
  - criticism summary: Katie (Lukacs), Emma (Barthes), Ana (Jameson)
  - seminar paper: Leila
  - break: Emma
- 

## Outline Week 2

For reference, here is the 2016 seminar’s week 2 outline.

## Latour

### What's his argument?

(Our answer: in order to understand things, we abstract them and make them referential, but then that replaces things in our mind. Example of the pedocomparator)

### How is all of that working? What are the layers there?

### How should we be applying this to literature and the other theorists we read?

(Our answer: the realist novel is to life what the map is to the forest in Latour.)

### Do you wanna talk about the diagram?

Specifically the one on page 71? If so, what are people's thoughts?

*Latour Circulating Reference page 71 diagram*

## Watt

### formal realism

P. 32 "The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism" . . . "Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience" (32)

Do we accept this definition of formal realism? Is that what we think it's doing?

What's his whole thing with philosophical realism? Is anything gained by that?

Where do these definitions leave genre fiction, for example? Fanfiction? (who's to say that a novel-length work that follows novelistic plot structures isn't novelistic?)

**He's saying the novel is defined by realism and that Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding are separated by those before them by realism as well.**

Why does he bring all this up and then abandon it?

## **Barthes**

### **Emma's summary**

Emma, what do you most want us to take away from your summary?

Did everyone follow/agree with Emma's summary? Did anyone get something substantively different out of the reading (even if they don't dispute it)?

"The general structure of the narrative, at least as this has been analyzed at one time or another up to the present, appears essentially predictive ... description is quite different: it has no predictive aspect; it is 'analogical', its structure being purely additive" (12)

What do we think this means? Do we agree? Is this similar to Lukacs?

### **The semiotics**

Let's break this down a little bit with reference to the Saussure handout

What does it mean to have an empty sign?

### **Leila's paper**

(transition: this makes us think of Leila's paper because she emphasizes the potential failure of Trollope to empty signs and the idea of oversignification)

Leila, tell us what you want us to be getting out of this! What did people think of Leila's paper? What questions did people still have?

What's the difference between being "relatable," "relevant," and "realistic"? Some degree of reference and/or research is implicit in relevance and realism, so what's separating those?

**Use Barthes and Jameson from Emma's essay to transition to my essay on Jameson**

## **Jameson**

### **Ana's paper**

Ana can say a little bit about her paper (capitalist/objective stuff). Tristan got something very different (programming).

Who do people agree with? Do people have other views/opinions? What really stood out to people?

**Did people agree with Jameson?**

**Can we describe (or narrate!) the connection between Jameson and Barthes? What is the major difference? Can we do this via the barometer example.**

**Separate from Jameson's theory, how do we feel about his reading of Flaubert?**

What about the two alternate readings that he presents?

What theoretical point is he making by giving us these readings and saying they're not wrong, but they're incompatible with what I'm saying? Are they really on different levels because of the time they're reading it?

What's up with the thing about Pound?

**What do we gain from approaching Jameson's theory through the example? Does it help us? How so?**

**Capitalist connection between Jameson and Lukacs (transition to Lukacs)**

**Lukacs**

**Katie's paper: what should we take away?**

Do we agree? Disagree?

Practicing disillusionment—what does that mean?

**Do we agree or disagree with Lukacs?**

Specifically, his opinions about narration vs description and description as inherently capitalist (if anyone gets the capitalism thing, please explain it to us) (please)

**Was anyone else personally annoyed by him?**

How does personality and tone affect our understanding of the theory? It seems clear that he hates Nana and likes Anna Karenina – how is this changing how we think about this? Did anyone else feel like this was about writing instead of reading? (Ana felt like she was getting a creative writing lecture)

**Conflict between Lukacs' account of what realism does and is and Watt's (Lukacs as maybe similar to Jameson)?**

**Break!**

**Rebecca's close reading paper**

Passage:

And very becoming her dress was. It was white velvet, without any other garniture than rich white lace worked with pearls across her bosom, and the same round the armlets of her dress. Across her brow she wore a band of red velvet, on the centre of which shone a magnificent Cupid in mosaic, the tints of whose wings were of the most lovely azure, and the colour of his chubby cheeks the clearest pink. On the one arm which her position required her to expose she wore three magnificent bracelets, each of different stones. Beneath her on the sofa, and over the cushion and head of it, was spread a crimson silk mantle or shawl, which went under her whole body and concealed her feet. Dressed as she was and looking as she did, so beautiful and yet so motionless, with the pure brilliancy of her white dress brought out and strengthened by the colour beneath it, with that lovely head, and those large, bold, bright, staring eyes, it was impossible that either man or woman should do other than look at her.

Neither man nor woman for some minutes did do other.

→ applying “novelistic realism” to Trollope

What does Rebecca want us to get out of this paper?

Did people have other thoughts? What associations did this passage and this paper conjure for people?

Why this passage? What's interesting about it? How do we fit this passage into our understanding of the novel?(Symbolically, metonymically, narratively, characterization, etc.)

Does this reading of this passage fit in with Lukacs, especially as we get to the end of it? How do other theories fit into this reading of the passage?

**John Bold's death**

**We don't know how he dies.**

Should it not be noteworthy that a man as young and vigorous dies? Is this death a symptom of “reality” or is it meant to be noteworthy because it's serving

narrative?

If he died of illness, shouldn't there have been a joke about him being a doctor?  
And if he died of an accident, is that not worthy of note?

**We get the information early, but first it's just glossed over:**

"with his daughter Mrs Bold, now, alas, a widow" (p. 10) and then it's given a little bit more attention on p. 13. On page 13, the narrator says that "could [Eleanor] even have admitted that he had a fault, his early death would have blotted out the memory of it." So he's acknowledging that this is out of the ordinary but still doesn't tell us how he died.

Is this glossing over supposed to impart the reality of dying or to minimize the disruptive effect of a death that is necessary for narrative?

**What other elements in the novels did you find suspicious or to be pushing the bounds of realism?**

**It happens between books; is he even the same character when/after he dies? What is signified by him dying in that gap?**

**The intrusive narrator**

Is this "realistic"? Is that "narrative"? Is that something else entirely?

Barchester Towers p 12 "I never thought him worthy of the wife he had won."

The Warden p. 180 "Of all such reformers, Mr. Sentiment is the most powerful. It is incredible the number of evil practices he has put down. It is to be feared he will soon lack subjects . . ."

But let the gentle-hearted reader be under no apprehension whatsoever. It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr. Slope or Bertie Stanhope. And here, perhaps, it may be allowed . . . " (Barchester Towers 126-7)

Self-awareness of genre convention (both novels, but especially in Barchester Towers)?

"I think I once caught Sammy fibbing" (The Warden 110) Who is this person telling us this story?

Where else?

**Blanks and the reality effect?**

Lord —— and the town of ——.

Beginning of *The Warden*, Bishop Grantley's death, etc How does that help or hinder the construction of realism? What other effects might it have?

## Capitalism

### CoE

The question of appointments within the Church of England is the focus of both *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*. This is particularly interesting when we look at Jameson and Lukacs, who associate realism and description with capitalism, because of course appointments within the church are not based on the presumed equity of the capitalist market.

If this system is compared to the capitalist market, which one looks more equitable or merit-based? Do you think that readers are supposed to make that comparison or distinction?

How does this tie in to Leila's argument that Trollope's novels exist in "a roomy unreality"?

Has anyone noticed examples of this kind of thing in the text?

### Do any characters in *Barchester Towers* work within the market?

We see a lot of different ways in which Bertie, for example, tries to make money, but his best hope ends up being trying to marry Eleanor.

How does this reflect on the capitalist market/literary realism connection?

What about men who can work or are qualified to work, but don't have to? John Bold, for example. Or men who have a profession in the market but do something else, like Tom Towers.

How do they intersect with capitalism and class?

### What about servants?

## Class

The ha-ha at the Thornes'; physical space as a marker of class. Does that appear elsewhere in the novels?

The hospital and its inhabitants as a sort of classed body. Who gets to inhabit it? What are they thought to deserve as a function of their class history?

Mrs. Proudie fighting with Slope and Dr. Grantly describing him as from "the gutters of Marylebone" (*Barchester Towers* 45)

Plumstead Episcopi “the well furnished breakfast parlor” (108) “the apparent object had been to spend money without obtaining brilliancy or splendor” (109)

Other passages that make us aware of how class functions within either the novel or Barsetshire society?

## **Plain-text authoring**

How did the tutorial go?

Why are we doing this?

Walk through committing and pushing an outline.

**THE END**