

UNCOVERING HIDDEN SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSIONS IN 19TH-CENTURY REALISM THROUGH CONTEMPORARY QUEER-THEORY LENSES

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ABSTRACT

This review article examines the emerging field of queer-anarchist literary criticism, focusing on its application to canonical 19th-century realist fiction. Integrating queer theoretical concepts – such as heteronormativity critique, antisocial thesis, queer temporality, reparative reading, and failure as critique – with anarchist principles of anti-statism, horizontalism, and prefigurative politics, the article identifies the core methodologies of “queer-anarchist reading.” Through close analysis of works by Gustave Flaubert, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Brontë, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry James, it demonstrates how such readings uncover hidden socio-political dimensions concerning resistance to bourgeois domesticity, economic precarity, state censorship, and utopian desire. The article concludes by outlining future research directions, including digital humanities approaches and postcolonial extensions, and assesses the field’s growing recognition within Scopus and Web of Science indexed publications. Ultimately, queer-anarchist criticism is positioned not as a niche interpretive strategy but as a vital reorientation of 19th-century literary studies.

Keywords: queer theory, anarchism, 19th-century realism, canonical literature, heteronormativity, prefigurative politics, queer temporality, reparative reading

1. Introduction: The Queer-Anarchist Turn in Literary Studies

For much of the 20th century, 19th-century realist fiction was read as the literary embodiment of bourgeois liberalism: a mode of narrative that stabilised social hierarchies, normalised domesticity, and rehearsed the rise of the nuclear family as the inevitable outcome of human development. The canonical realist novel – from Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* to Eliot’s *Middlemarch* to Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* – has typically been understood as a vehicle for consolidating heteropatriarchal values under the guise of mimetic transparency.

In the last decade, however, a growing body of scholarship has begun to unsettle this consensus by reading the realist canon through the joint lenses of queer theory and anarchist political thought. This emerging field – which I term queer-anarchist literary criticism – proposes that 19th-century realist texts harbour subversive potentials that exceed both their authors’ stated intentions and the dominant interpretive traditions that have shaped their

reception. By bringing together queer theory's critique of normative sexuality and gender with anarchism's critique of state power, capitalism, and all forms of unjust hierarchy, this critical approach reveals hidden dimensions of resistance, failure, and utopian longing within the very texts that have long been held up as monuments to social order. This review article provides the first systematic survey of queer-anarchist readings of 19th-century realist literature. It has three primary objectives: (1) to trace the theoretical genealogy of the queer-anarchist approach, synthesising key concepts from queer theory and anarchist thought; (2) to identify and exemplify the central methodologies of queer-anarchist reading, including the critique of heteronormativity, queer temporality, reparative reading, and failure as critique; and (3) to demonstrate the yield of this approach through extended case studies drawn from the realist canon, showing how queer-anarchist lenses uncover hidden socio-political dimensions concerning resistance to bourgeois domesticity, economic precarity, state censorship, and utopian desire.

The review argues that queer-anarchist reading does not simply "add" queer or anarchist content to texts that otherwise lack it. Rather, it attends to the formal and structural ways in which realist fiction registers, manages, and sometimes inadvertently magnifies the contradictions of its own historical moment – contradictions that include the instability of gender and sexual norms, the violence of state and legal apparatuses, the coercive logics of capitalist accumulation, and the persistent lure of alternative forms of social organisation.

By situating the field within the broader landscape of contemporary literary studies, the article demonstrates that queer-anarchist criticism has gained increasing recognition in Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals, including *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, and *Victorian Studies*. Its emergence reflects a broader turn within the humanities toward politically engaged reading practices that refuse to separate aesthetic analysis from social critique.

2. Theoretical Foundations: Queer Theory Meets Anarchist Thought

2.1 Queer Theory: From Identity to Anti-Normativity

Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s as a radical departure from earlier lesbian and gay studies. As the editors of *Queering Anarchism* observe, "the invocation of queer politics intended to signal a refusal of the identity categories (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender) that had come to seem too stable, too complicit with the very structures of normativity that had marginalised non-normative sexualities in the first place". Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's foundational work on the epistemology of the closet, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Michel Foucault's history of sexuality together established a critical apparatus focused less on recovering hidden homosexual identities than on exposing the constructed, contingent, and oppressive nature of all sexual and gender norms.

Central to queer theory is the concept of heteronormativity – the institutional and discursive structures that naturalise heterosexuality as the default, normal, and morally privileged form of social and sexual organisation. Lee Edelman’s influential “antisocial thesis,” articulated in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), pushes queer theory toward a radical negativity, arguing that queerness is defined by its opposition to the reproductive futurism that organises normative social life. Edelman contends that the figure of the Child functions as the privileged emblem of political futurity, and that any politics that appeals to the future for the sake of the Child is inevitably a conservative politics. Queerness, for Edelman, resides in the embrace of negativity, the death drive, and the refusal of all political hope.

This antisocial stance has been contested by scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz, who advocates for a queer utopianism that looks backward to the past and forward to the future in search of moments of queer world-making. In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz argues that queerness is “not yet here” but is always on the horizon, discernible in moments of aesthetic and social excess that exceed the given. Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) offers another departure from Edelman’s negativity, proposing that failure, forgetting, and unbecoming can be revalued as “more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world”. Halberstam’s work has been particularly influential for literary critics because it provides a vocabulary for reading canonical texts against the grain – not as celebrations of success, but as records of failure that open up alternative possibilities for living and thinking.

2.2 Anarchist Thought: Anti-Statism, Horizontalism, Prefiguration

Anarchism, like queer theory, is a tradition defined by its opposition to hierarchy and its refusal of stable, fixed identities. As Liz Barr notes in her review of *Queering Anarchism*, both terms “are contested and slippery ... often maligned and misunderstood”. Rather than offering a single doctrine, anarchist thought encompasses a range of positions united by a fundamental critique of the state, capitalism, and all forms of unjustified authority. Key anarchist principles include anti-statism (the rejection of centralised, coercive government), horizontalism (the preference for decentralised, egalitarian, consensus-based decision-making), and prefiguration (the idea that the means of social transformation must embody the ends one seeks to achieve). Anarchist literary criticism has historically focused on the representation of revolutionary violence, state repression, and working-class struggle in 19th-century fiction. Deaglán Ó Donghaile’s *Blast and the Radical Politics of Vorticism*, for example, argues that Victorian popular fiction and modernism are linked by their treatment of “the explosive shocks of late 19th-century terrorism”. However, anarchist criticism has often been gender-blind and sexuality-blind, neglecting the ways in which

patriarchal and heteronormative hierarchies operate alongside – and intersect with – state and capitalist hierarchies.

2.3 The Queer-Anarchist Intersection: Shared Critiques, Divergent Traditions

The intersection of queer theory and anarchist thought has been most explicitly explored in the edited volume *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire* (2012). The collection brings together a diverse set of essays that explore how queer critique can enrich anarchist analysis and vice versa. The editors suggest that “queerness is more than a new gender norm – instead offering a new personal politics that refuses to acquiesce to the mainstream codification of LGBT identity”. This refusal of identity politics aligns closely with anarchism’s suspicion of all forms of fixed identity and representation.

Several key points of convergence between queer theory and anarchism have been identified in the literature. First, both traditions are fundamentally anti-normative: queer theory targets heteronormativity, while anarchism targets state and capitalist norms. Second, both are anti-identitarian: queer theory refuses the stability of sexual identity categories, while anarchism refuses the authority of representatives, leaders, and states. Third, both are prefigurative: queer theorists and anarchists alike argue that the practices of resistance must embody the world they seek to bring about. Fourth, both embrace negativity as a critical resource: queer theory’s antisocial thesis and anarchism’s anti-statism share a commitment to refusing the terms of the existing order.

However, the queer-anarchist intersection is not without tensions. As Jamie Heckert observes in his contribution to *Queering Anarchism*, “queering anarchism means complexifying it”. Some anarchists have been suspicious of queer theory’s perceived focus on culture and discourse over material economic struggle, while some queer theorists have been wary of anarchism’s historical association with masculinist violence. The challenge for queer-anarchist literary criticism is to hold these tensions productively, using them as a source of critical energy rather than a paralyzing impasse.

3. Methodological Toolkit: How to Read Queer-Anarchically

3.1 Reading for Heteronormativity and Its Discontents

The first methodological move of queer-anarchist reading is to identify the operations of heteronormativity within a text – not merely as a theme to be described, but as a structural logic that organises narrative, character, and plot. Heteronormativity in 19th-century realist fiction often manifests through the marriage plot, the domestic ideal, the naturalisation of reproductive futurity, and the pathologisation of non-normative desires and relationships.

Queer-anarchist reading does not stop at exposing heteronormativity; it also looks for discontents – moments of tension, contradiction, or excess where the heteronormative logic of the text falters or becomes visible as a constructed imposition rather than a natural fact. These discontents may appear in minor characters who deviate from the marriage plot (the bachelor, the spinster, the bohemian), in narrative asides that betray anxiety about the very norms the text seems to affirm, or in formal features such as irony, free indirect discourse, or unreliable narration that unsettle the reader's identification with the heterosexual couple.

3.2 Queer Temporality and the Critique of Reproductive Futurism

A second key methodology is the analysis of queer temporality. Elizabeth Freeman's *Beside You in Time* (2019) provides a powerful framework for understanding how 19th-century texts register alternative rhythms and durations that deviate from the linear, progressive time of bourgeois modernity. Freeman examines how "sense methods" – embodied, sensory experiences of time – can create "queer sociabilities" that resist the temporal discipline of industrial capitalism and the reproductive timeline of the nuclear family.

Reading for queer temporality in 19th-century realism involves attending to scenes of waiting, idleness, repetition, or arrested development that disrupt the forward momentum of the marriage plot. It also involves analysing how texts represent the relationship between past, present, and future – whether through nostalgia, prophecy, or the kind of "backward failing" that Halberstam associates with queer art.

3.3 Reparative Reading vs. Paranoid Reading

The distinction between paranoid and reparative reading, introduced by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and elaborated by subsequent queer critics, offers a third methodological resource for queer-anarchist criticism. Paranoid reading is defined by its suspicion, its exposure of hidden violence and oppression, and its tendency toward reductive explanation. Reparative reading, by contrast, seeks to "repair" damaged or overlooked aspects of a text, attending to moments of pleasure, creativity, and survival that exceed the logic of victimisation.

Queer-anarchist reading draws on both traditions. It is paranoid in its exposure of heteronormative and state violence; but it is also reparative in its willingness to find hope, utopian possibility, and alternative social arrangements within texts that have been dismissed as merely conservative. As one recent analysis puts it, reparative reading can provide "the foundation for a larger project of queer repair – a prefigurative politics of the imagination".

3.4 Failure and Critique: Halberstam's Queer Art of Failure

Judith (Jack) Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* has been particularly influential for queer-anarchist literary criticism. Halberstam argues that "under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world". This revaluation of failure provides a powerful tool for reading 19th-century realist fiction, in which characters who fail to achieve the goals of marriage, wealth, and social respectability are often dismissed as cautionary figures. A queer-anarchist reading might instead celebrate these failures as refusals of the bourgeois order – moments when characters choose not to play the game, or when the narrative inadvertently exposes the impossibility of the game itself.

4. Case Studies: Uncovering Hidden Socio-Political Dimensions in 19th-Century Realism

4.1 Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*: The Female Gaze and the Dissolution of Bourgeois Masculinity

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) has long been read as a cautionary tale about the dangers of romantic fantasy and female desire. Emma Bovary's pursuit of passionate love and luxury goods leads to her financial ruin and eventual suicide, providing a moral lesson for the aspiring bourgeois reader. However, a queer-anarchist reading uncovers a more subversive text.

As Jenn McCollum argues in her analysis of the novel's "queer gaze," Flaubert saves "his most intimate moments of narration for the male body," not for Emma's body. The narrator's "hungry gaze at the male body" undermines the heterosexual logic of the plot, suggesting that the real erotic energy of the text circulates among men rather than being directed toward Emma. McCollum concludes that "Flaubert places Emma at the centre of narrative, yet he does not desire to show her body – perhaps because it is uninteresting. His focus is fueled by the hyper-muscular male physique and invokes a world in which the female body is a stranger".

This queer reading of the male gaze has clear anarchist implications. By displacing Emma from the position of erotic object and instead privileging male-male looking, Flaubert destabilises the heterosexual logic that organises bourgeois domesticity. Charles Bovary's helplessness, Rodolphe's cynicism, and Léon's timidity are all revealed as symptoms of a masculinity in crisis – a crisis that the novel's legal prosecution only amplified. Marco Wan's study of the *Madame Bovary* obscenity trial argues that the novel was prosecuted because it presented "the androgyne" – a figure of sexual dissidence that "called into question an increasingly fragile normative, middle-class masculinity". The state's attempt to censor the novel inadvertently confirms its subversive potential: *Madame Bovary* is not a conservative cautionary tale but a text that exposes the fragility of the very norms it appears to affirm.

4.2 Emily Dickinson: Genre, Solitude, and the Refusal of the Marriage Plot

Emily Dickinson's poetry has traditionally been read as the work of a reclusive spinster, her unconventional syntax and punctuation interpreted as signs of psychological eccentricity rather than aesthetic and political intention. Queer readings of Dickinson have radically revised this picture. Nina Schifano's recent analysis undertakes "a queering of genre" that attends to how "gendered genre norms affected how Dickinson wrote, how her works were edited and published, and how people have since read her".

The queer-anarchist reading of Dickinson extends this analysis by situating her refusal of publication, her withdrawal from social life, and her rejection of the marriage plot as forms of political resistance rather than symptoms of personal failure. Halberstam's concept of failure as critique is directly applicable here: Dickinson's "failure" to publish, to marry, to participate in the public sphere can be revalued as a refusal of the compulsory social scripts of 19th-century American life. Her choice of solitude – a "failure" to be social in the terms required by heteronormative domesticity – becomes a queer-anarchist experiment in living otherwise.

The New Emily Dickinson Studies collection confirms that queer theory has become a central lens for contemporary Dickinson criticism. The volume includes essays that read Dickinson "through such new critical lenses as ... queer theory, race studies, and contemporary poetics". For queer-anarchist critics, Dickinson's poetry offers a rich archive of refusal: refusal of gender norms, refusal of heteronormative temporality, refusal of the demands of the literary marketplace. Her famous lines – "I'm Nobody! Who are you? / Are you – Nobody – Too?" – become an anarchist manifesto, celebrating the joy of non-identity and the solidarity of those who reject the recognition of the state, the market, and the normative social world.

4.3 Brontë's Jane Eyre: Queer Masculinity and the Gothic Undermining of Domesticity

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) is typically read as a feminist bildungsroman that charts its heroine's progress from oppressed orphan to independent woman to married domesticity. However, queer readings have complicated this narrative in productive ways.

One especially innovative approach reads Rochester's "coarseness" as a form of queer masculinity. As one analysis puts it, Rochester's behaviour is "representative of queer masculinity" that unsettles the ideal of the gentlemanly, emotionally contained bourgeois husband. His refusal to conform to standards of politeness, his openness about his sexual past, and his willingness to flout social convention all mark him as a figure who challenges, rather than confirms, Victorian norms of masculine propriety.

The figure of Bertha Mason – the “madwoman in the attic” – has also been read through a queer-anarchist lens. Bertha’s imprisonment in the attic, her wordless rebellion, and her final destruction of Thornfield Hall can be interpreted as a Gothic allegory of state violence against non-normative subjects. As one analysis notes, Jane’s relationship with Rochester “is constructed through Bertha’s dehumanisation” and the narrative’s project of reasserting the dominance of “the healthy Anglo-European family”. A queer-anarchist reading would attend to Bertha as a figure of the abject – the queered, racialised, feminised other who must be violently excluded for the domestic ideal to be maintained. Bertha’s rebellion – her burning of the house, her destruction of the patriarchal order – becomes a moment of anarchist violence that the narrative cannot fully contain.

4.4 Tolstoy: Anarchist Ethics and Queer Desire in the Russian Realist Tradition

Leo Tolstoy’s late-period works have long been recognised for their anarchist commitments: his rejection of state authority, his advocacy of non-resistance to evil, and his critique of private property all align with key anarchist principles. However, only recently have scholars begun to explore the queer dimensions of Tolstoy’s writing.

Javier Sethness Castro’s *Tolstoy’s Search for the Kingdom of God: Gender and Queer Anarchism* (2020) offers “queer-friendly readings” of *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, and other works. Sethness Castro draws on homoerotic passages in Tolstoy’s diaries to argue that the author’s anarchist politics were intimately connected to non-normative desires that could not be fully expressed in the terms available to him. The analysis suggests that Tolstoy’s late-period turn toward asceticism and spiritual simplicity – often read as a rejection of the sensual – might alternatively be understood as a queered reorganisation of desire away from the compulsory sexuality of the marriage plot.

Anna Karenina offers rich material for queer-anarchist reading. Anna’s affair with Vronsky, her rejection of her husband Karenin, and her eventual suicide have traditionally been read as a tragedy of female transgression. But a queer-anarchist reading might instead attend to the ways in which the novel registers the impossibility of alternative social arrangements within the constraints of imperial Russian society. Anna’s desire is not simply for Vronsky; it is for a form of life that does not exist within the available social scripts. Her “failure” to achieve this desire – her suicide – becomes, in Halberstam’s sense, a queer art of failure: a refusal to accept the terms of the life she is offered, even at the cost of life itself.

4.5 Henry James: Queer Realism and the Refusal of Marriage

Henry James has been a central figure in queer literary studies since Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's foundational readings in *Epistemology of the Closet*. James's late novels are remarkable for their depictions of intense same-sex attachments that are never named as such, for their suspicion of marriage as an institution, and for their complex narrative techniques that make meaning elusive and indeterminate.

Recent scholarship has explored James's relationship to realism as a mode that can itself be understood as "queer." As one analysis argues, James's "queer realism" emerges in the space where "realism's breakdown into naturalism and romance" opens possibilities for representing desire that exceed the limits of conventional mimesis. The figure of the bachelor – central to so many James novels – becomes an emblem of queer-anarchist refusal: the refusal to participate in the reproductive futurism of the marriage plot, the refusal to be captured by the state through the institution of marriage, and the refusal to align one's erotic life with the demands of property and inheritance.

James's interest in anarchism was not merely thematic. As scholars have noted, James's London years coincided with a period of intense anarchist activity, including the "dynamite novels" of the 1880s and 1890s that sensationalised anarchist violence. While James's own political commitments were far from anarchist, his fiction registers the anarchist challenge to state authority in subtle ways – through characters who refuse to be governed, through plots that resist closure, and through a narrative voice that withholds judgement in ways that unsettle the reader's moral certainties.

5. Discussion: Contributions, Limitations, and Future Directions

5.1 What Queer-Anarchist Reading Offers to Literary Studies

The queer-anarchist approach offers several distinct contributions to the study of 19th-century realist fiction.

First, it denaturalises the marriage plot by showing how the organisation of narrative around heterosexual coupling is a contingent, historically specific achievement rather than a transhistorical given. The marriage plot, far from being the natural telos of human development, is revealed as a social technology for managing property, reproducing labour, and stabilising gender hierarchies.

Second, it recovers minor figures and marginalised perspectives that have been overlooked by mainstream criticism. The spinster, the bachelor, the failed artist, the madwoman – figures who appear only as cautionary examples or as obstacles to the heroine's progress – become

central to a queer-anarchist reading, which sees in their failures and refusals the outlines of alternative ways of living.

Third, it bridges the gap between formalist and historicist criticism by attending to how literary form registers the contradictions of its historical moment. The unstable pronouns, disrupted syntax, and ambiguous tenses of a Dickinson poem; the free indirect discourse that slips between Emma Bovary's desires and the narrator's judgement; the elaborate sentence structures of a James novel that defer and delay resolution – these formal features are not merely aesthetic choices but political interventions, ways of refusing the clarity and closure that the state, the market, and heteronormativity demand.

Fourth, it provides a vocabulary for describing the politics of failure. For too long, literary criticism has been in thrall to success – the successful marriage plot, the successful bildungsroman, the successful career of the author. Queer-anarchist reading revalues failure as a political resource, showing how characters who fail to achieve the goals set for them by their social world may be engaged in a deeper refusal: the refusal to play a rigged game.

5.2 Limitations and Critiques

Despite its contributions, queer-anarchist literary criticism faces several limitations and critiques that must be acknowledged.

First, there is a risk of anachronism. Applying contemporary theoretical categories – queer, anarchist, heteronormativity – to 19th-century texts can impose frameworks that were not available to historical actors. While queer theory has developed sophisticated responses to this problem (through the concept of “queer readings” as distinct from “readings of queer people”), the risk remains. As Carla Freccero and Louise Fradenburg have argued, queer theory can productively “dislodge the ‘truth-effects’ of critical practices that privilege historical” accuracy, but this dislodging must be done with care and reflexivity.

Second, queer-anarchist reading may over-politicise texts that are, in their dominant register, conservative. It is possible to read Madame Bovary as a proto-feminist, queer-anarchist text; it is also possible to read it as a misogynist cautionary tale. The claim that a queer-anarchist reading uncovers “hidden” dimensions does not mean that those dimensions are the only dimensions, or that they were available to the author in the way the critic presents them.

Third, the field has been predominantly Euro-American in its focus. Most queer-anarchist readings of 19th-century realism have concentrated on French, English, and American authors. The applicability of the approach to non-Western realist traditions – Russian, Latin American, Japanese, African – remains underexplored. A truly global queer-anarchist

criticism would need to attend to the specific histories of colonialism, empire, and racialised capitalism that shape the realist tradition outside Europe.

Fourth, the political efficacy of queer-anarchist literary criticism is not self-evident. Does reading *Jane Eyre* queer-anarchically contribute to dismantling the prison industrial complex or redistributing wealth? The relationship between academic interpretation and political change is indirect at best. Critics who claim that their reading practices are “prefigurative” – that they embody the world they seek to create – need to be specific about the mechanisms by which this prefiguration operates.

5.3 Future Research Directions

Notwithstanding these limitations, queer-anarchist literary criticism is a vibrant and growing field. Several future research directions warrant attention.

Digital humanities approaches offer opportunities for large-scale analysis of the representation of non-normative desires and relationships across the 19th-century realist canon. Corpus linguistics, topic modelling, and network analysis could identify patterns of representation that are invisible to the close reading of individual texts. For example, one could analyse the frequency and distribution of terms associated with bachelorhood, spinsterhood, and celibacy across a large corpus of 19th-century novels, or map the social networks depicted in realist fiction to identify alternative forms of kinship that deviate from the nuclear family model.

Postcolonial and decolonial extensions are urgently needed. The 19th-century realist novel emerged in the context of European imperialism, and many canonical realist texts are deeply implicated in colonial violence. A queer-anarchist reading that attends to race and empire – that asks how heteronormativity and the marriage plot are entangled with colonial governance and racial hierarchy – would extend the approach in crucial ways. The work of scholars such as Joseph Lavery, who has analysed “The Mikado’s queer realism” and the legal management of Orientalist knowledge, offers a promising model for this extension.

Transnational and comparative approaches would enrich the field by bringing 19th-century realist traditions into dialogue with one another. How does the marriage plot operate in the Russian realist tradition, which has different religious and legal frameworks governing marriage and divorce? How does French naturalism’s emphasis on biological determinism intersect with heteronormativity differently from the social realism of George Eliot? Comparisons of this kind would reveal the specificities of heteronormativity as a social formation, showing that it is not monolithic but varies across national and cultural contexts.

Attentiveness to the history of sexuality remains essential. While queer-anarchist reading draws on Foucault's argument that homosexuality as an identity category emerged only in the late 19th century, it must also attend to the specific histories of sexual regulation in different national contexts. The criminalisation of sodomy, the legal management of obscenity, the medicalisation of perversion – these histories shape the realist canon in ways that a purely theoretical approach might miss.

6. Publishing Landscape: Queer-Anarchist Criticism in Scopus and Web of Science Journals

The queer-anarchist approach to 19th-century realism has gained increasing recognition in high-impact journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, published by Duke University Press, is a central venue for interdisciplinary queer scholarship, including literary criticism. The journal's scope includes "scholarship, criticism, and commentary in areas as diverse as law, science studies, religion, political science, and literary studies," and it is indexed in both Scopus and the Social Sciences Citation Index.

Novel: A Forum on Fiction, also published by Duke University Press, has published key contributions to queer realist criticism, including Joseph Lavery's analysis of "The Mikado's Queer Realism: Law, Genre, Knowledge". The journal's focus on narrative form and its engagement with political and legal contexts make it a natural home for queer-anarchist approaches.

Other relevant journals include the *Journal of Gender Studies* (Routledge, indexed in Scopus), which published Jenn McCollum's analysis of the queer gaze in *Madame Bovary*; *Victorian Studies* (Indiana University Press, indexed in the Arts & Humanities Citation Index), which has published work on queer temporality and Victorian fiction; and *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, which is "one of the leading journals in the transdisciplinary field of gender and sexuality studies" and is indexed in Scopus.

The presence of queer-anarchist literary criticism in these journals confirms that the approach is not a niche specialism but a recognised contribution to the broader field of literary and cultural studies. As queer theory continues to engage with political economy, state power, and social movements – and as anarchist thought increasingly informs critical theory across the humanities – the queer-anarchist approach is likely to become even more prominent in the coming years.

7. Conclusion: Toward a Queer-Anarchist Canon

This review article has argued that queer-anarchist reading offers a powerful and generative approach to 19th-century realist fiction. By bringing together queer theory's critique of heteronormativity with anarchism's critique of state and capitalist hierarchy, this approach uncovers hidden socio-political dimensions in canonical texts concerning resistance to bourgeois domesticity, economic precarity, state censorship, and utopian desire.

The case studies examined in this review – Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Dickinson's poetry, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Tolstoy's late works, and James's novels – demonstrate the yield of this approach across a range of national traditions and formal registers. In each case, a queer-anarchist reading reveals dimensions of the text that are invisible to more traditional critical frameworks: the queer male gaze that displaces the heterosexual couple; the refusal of publication and marriage as forms of political resistance; the Gothic undermining of domesticity through the figure of the madwoman; the anarchist ethics of non-resistance intertwined with queer desire; and the formal strategies of delay and indeterminacy that refuse the closure demanded by the marriage plot.

The review has also identified limitations and future directions for the field. The risks of anachronism, the danger of over-politicisation, the Euro-American focus of existing scholarship, and the uncertain political efficacy of academic interpretation all warrant critical reflection. However, these limitations do not diminish the value of the approach; rather, they invite further refinement and extension.

As the publishing landscape confirms, queer-anarchist literary criticism is not a passing trend but a durable contribution to the study of 19th-century literature. The approach has been embraced by leading journals in the field, and its influence is likely to grow as queer theory and anarchist thought continue to intersect and cross-pollinate.

Perhaps most importantly, queer-anarchist reading offers a reorientation of the 19th-century realist canon. For too long, this canon has been read as the literary expression of bourgeois liberalism: a conservative tradition that naturalised the nuclear family, the marriage plot, and the developmental temporality of capitalist modernity. A queer-anarchist reading shows that the canon is far more contradictory, far more unsettled, and far more politically ambiguous than this narrative suggests. The realist novel is not simply a vehicle for social control; it is also a site where the contradictions of bourgeois society become visible, where the pressures of heteronormativity produce moments of excess and failure, and where the desire for alternative ways of living finds expression, even if only in negative form.

To read the 19th-century realist canon queer-anarchically is to refuse the choice between celebration and condemnation. It is not to claim that these texts are progressive in any simple sense, nor is it to dismiss them as irredeemably conservative. Rather, it is to read them with

attention to their complexity, their ambivalence, and their capacity to register the limits and failures of the social order they so vividly depict. In doing so, queer-anarchist reading opens a space for imagining otherwise – a space that is, perhaps, the most important contribution literary criticism can make to the political struggles of our own time.

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