

MARXIST CRITICISM

Focus of Marxist Criticism

- ❖ Marxist criticism studies how **literature represents the existing social structure and social conflicts**.
- ❖ It treats every text as a product of a particular **economic system**, especially **capitalism**.
- ❖ It asks how a text shows **class divisions, exploitation, ideology, and power relations** between rich and poor.

Joint Founders of Marxism

- ❖ **Karl Marx (1818-1883)** was a German philosopher, economist, and revolutionary.
- ❖ **Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)** was a German philosopher and historian, and a close collaborator of Marx.
- ❖ Together, Marx and Engels laid the foundation for **Marxism**, which also became the basis for **socialist and communist** political movements.

The Communist Manifesto (1848)

- ❖ Marx and Engels describe history as a continuous **class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat**.
- ❖ The **bourgeoisie** are the owners of capital and the means of production.
- ❖ The **proletariat** are the industrial working class who sell their labour.
- ❖ Famous line: **"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."**
- ❖ They call for international solidarity of workers with the slogan: **"Workers of all lands unite."**

The German Ideology

- ❖ Marx and Engels explain that **the ruling class controls the ruling ideas of any age**.
- ❖ Famous claim: **"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."**
- ❖ This means that dominant beliefs, morals, and values usually serve the interests of those in power.

Theses on Feuerbach

- ❖ Marx criticises earlier philosophers for only interpreting the world instead of changing it.
- ❖ Famous statement: **"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."**
- ❖ This line shows that Marxist theory is **practical and revolutionary**, not purely academic.

A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

- ❖ Marx states that **people's social existence shapes their consciousness**, not the other way around.
- ❖ Famous sentence: **"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness."**
- ❖ This is the basis for **economic determinism** in Marxist theory.

Idealism vs. Materialism

Hegel's Idealism

- ❖ The German philosopher **G. W. F. Hegel** believed that reality is the expression of **"the Idea" or Spirit**.
- ❖ His famous statement is **"What is real is rational, and what is rational is real."**
- ❖ Hegel used the image of the **"owl of Minerva"** to say that philosophy understands reality only after events have already happened.

Marx's Materialism

- ❖ Marx rejects Hegel's idealism and proposes **historical materialism**.
- ❖ He claims that **human reality is essentially material**, meaning that economic and physical conditions are fundamental.
- ❖ For Marx, ideas are only **reflections of the material world** in the human mind.
- ❖ He states that **"the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into terms of thought."**

Economic Determinism: Base and Superstructure

The Economic Base

- ❖ The **base** is the **economic structure of society**.
- ❖ It includes the **means of production** such as land, factories, raw materials, and machines.
- ❖ It also includes the **relations of production**, meaning the relationship between those who **own** the means of production and those who **work** for them.

The Superstructure

- ❖ The **superstructure** is the world of **social, political, religious, legal, and cultural institutions**.
- ❖ It includes the **state, law, religion, philosophy, literature, art, education, and other cultural practices**.
- ❖ According to Marx, the superstructure **rises out of** and **reflects** the economic base, even though it may seem independent.

Formula

- ❖ In simple terms, **the economic base shapes the superstructure**, and the superstructure in turn **helps to preserve and justify** the base.
- ❖ This is why Marxist critics search texts for **hidden support or criticism of the existing economic system**.

Key Economic Terms Used in Marxist Theory

Means of Production

- ❖ The **means of production** are the **physical and material tools** used to create goods.
- ❖ These include factories, machines, land, and raw materials.

Relations of Production

- ❖ The **relations of production** describe the **relationship between the owners and the workers**.
- ❖ For example, in capitalism, the bourgeoisie employ the proletariat and pay them wages, while they take the profit.

Mode of Production

- ❖ The **mode of production** is the combination of **means of production** and **relations of production**.
- ❖ Examples of modes of production are **feudalism, capitalism, and socialism**.

Dialectical Movement

- ❖ Marx adapts Hegel's **dialectic** to material history.
- ❖ **Thesis:** a stage like **feudalism**.
- ❖ **Antithesis:** a conflicting stage like **capitalism**.
- ❖ **Synthesis:** a higher stage like **socialism**, which negates both but preserves important elements.
- ❖ This dialectical process explains **historical change** in societies.

Commodity, Value, and Surplus Value

Commodity

- ❖ A **commodity** is anything that can **satisfy a human need** and can be **exchanged** for something else.

Use-Value

- ❖ **Use-value** is the **practical utility** of a commodity.
- ❖ It is qualitative and depends on how the object satisfies a need.

Exchange-Value

- ❖ **Exchange-value** is the **quantitative worth** of a commodity when it is traded for another commodity or for money.
- ❖ It expresses how much one commodity is worth compared to another.

Surplus Value

- ❖ **Surplus value** is the part of the value of a product for which the worker is **not paid**.
- ❖ It is the **source of profit** for the capitalist.
- ❖ The worker produces more value during the working day than the wage he or she receives.

Commodity Fetishism

- ❖ In the discussion of "**The Fetishism of Commodities**," commodities appear as if they are **independent beings with life**.
- ❖ People forget the human labour behind them and treat them as magical objects.
- ❖ This **fetishism** hides the true social relationships of exploitation in the production process.

Alienation and Reification

Alienation

- ❖ Alienation takes place when workers become **indifferent to their own labour**.
- ❖ Work becomes **mechanical and fragmented**, so workers do not see the final product as theirs.
- ❖ They are "**de-skilled**" and lose any overall understanding of the production process.

Reification

- ❖ **Reification** is the process through which human beings are treated as **things**.
- ❖ In capitalism, workers lose their **human qualities** and become only instruments for producing profit.
- ❖ Capitalist goals are placed **above human needs**, so people themselves are reduced to commodities.

Example from Literature: Oliver Twist

- ❖ **Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist**
- ❖ It mentions the **Poor Law Act of 1834**, which officially claimed to support the "deserving" poor but in practice created **inhuman working conditions, miserable lodging, and poor rations**.
- ❖ The famous line "**Please, sir, I want some more.**" shows the hunger and oppression of the workhouse child.
- ❖ A Marxist reading treats the novel as a **critique of the harsh Victorian social and economic system**.

Two Streams of Marxist Literary Criticism

Engelsian Marxism

- ❖ **Friedrich Engels** argues that genuine art should not be **direct propaganda**.
- ❖ In a letter to **Margaret Harkness**, he says that **the more the author's opinions remain hidden, the better the work of art**.
- ❖ This view allows **relative freedom and autonomy** for literature.

Leninist Marxism

- ❖ **Vladimir Lenin** believes that literature should openly serve the interests of the **socialist party**.
- ❖ He claims that **literature must become Party literature**.
- ❖ After the revolution, the Soviet state in the 1930s condemned experimental modernist authors like **Proust and Joyce** as **"bourgeois decadence."**
- ❖ This form of Marxist criticism expects art to be **clearly committed to the political cause of the Left**.

Russian Formalism and Its Place in Marxist History

- ❖ In the **1920s**, before being suppressed, **Russian Formalism** flourished in the Soviet Union.
- ❖ **Viktor Shklovsky** developed the concept of **defamiliarization**, which means making familiar things seem strange so that readers pay new attention to them.
- ❖ **Boris Tomashevsky** distinguished between **fabula** (raw story material) and **sjuzhet** (the way the story is organized and presented).
- ❖ Later, formalist ideas influenced **Structuralism** in the 1950s and 1960s.

Antonio Gramsci: Hegemony and Subaltern

- ❖ **Antonio Gramsci** was an Italian Marxist politician and sociologist.
- ❖ He introduced the term **"subaltern"** to describe **working-class and oppressed groups** who lack access to hegemonic power.
- ❖ He developed the concept of **hegemony**, which is **the domination of one group over another with a degree of consent from the governed**.
- ❖ According to him, ruling classes maintain control not only through force but also by **winning consent through cultural and ideological means**.

Louis Althusser: Ideology and State Apparatuses

Ideology as Interpellation

- ❖ **Louis Althusser** is a French Marxist philosopher.
- ❖ Traditional Marxism sometimes defined ideology as **"false consciousness,"** but Althusser gives a more complex view.
- ❖ He says **ideology "interpellates" individuals as subjects**, which means it **"hails" people and makes them feel as if they are freely choosing their roles**.

- ❖ Ideology is **material**, because it exists in practices, rituals, and institutions, not just in abstract ideas.

ISA and RSA

- ❖ **Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA)** work mainly in the **private sphere** through **ideas and beliefs**.
- ❖ Examples are **religion, education, the family, and cultural institutions**.
- ❖ **Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA)** work mainly in the **public sphere** through **direct force**.
- ❖ Examples are the **police, army, and prisons**.
- ❖ Both ISA and RSA help **reproduce the existing relations of production** and maintain the power of the ruling class.

Relative Autonomy and Overdetermination

- ❖ For Althusser, art has **relative autonomy**, which means it is not simply a reflection of the economic base.
- ❖ He uses the term "**overdetermination**" to show that events and texts are shaped by **many causes at once**, not by a single economic cause.

Western Marxist Critics and Major Contributions

Georg Lukács

- ❖ **Georg Lukács** was a Hungarian Marxist critic and philosopher.
- ❖ He defends **realism** as the best literary mode for revealing social totality.
- ❖ He praises writers like **Sir Walter Scott** and views the historical novel as a continuation of the **great realistic social novel**.

Pierre Macherey

- ❖ **Pierre Macherey** is a French Marxist critic.
- ❖ He is interested in what a literary text **does not say**, focusing on **gaps, silences, and contradictions** as signs of ideology.

Lucien Goldmann

- ❖ **Lucien Goldmann** was a Romanian-French philosopher.
- ❖ He developed **genetic structuralism**, which links a **text's structure** to the "**world-vision**" of a social group.

Terry Eagleton

- ❖ **Terry Eagleton** is an English literary critic and one of the leading Marxist theorists of our time.
- ❖ He wrote many important books, including "**After Theory**", which discusses the limits and future of literary theory.

- ❖ Eagleton argues that Marxist criticism can explain **the social origins and functions of literature**.

Fredric Jameson

- ❖ **Fredric Jameson** is an American Marxist literary and cultural theorist.
- ❖ He writes on **postmodernism, consumer society, and late capitalism**.
- ❖ In his essay "**Postmodernism and Consumer Society**", he defines:
 - **Pastiche** as a **blank parody** without satire or humour.
 - **Schizophrenia** as a condition that leads to a **loss of historical sense**.
- ❖ He famously claims that **all third-world texts are to be read as national allegories**, linking individual stories to national struggles.

Aijaz Ahmad

- ❖ **Aijaz Ahmad** is an Indian Marxist philosopher and theorist.
- ❖ In "**Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'**", he **criticises Jameson** for overgeneralizing third-world literature.
- ❖ He discusses the **Three-Worlds Theory**, which divides the world into:
 - The capitalist **First World**,
 - The socialist **Second World**,
 - The formerly colonised **Third World**.

Slavoj Žižek

- ❖ **Slavoj Žižek** is a Slovenian philosopher who combines **Marxism with Lacanian psychoanalysis**.
- ❖ He points out a **similarity between Marx's analysis of commodity and Freud's analysis of dreams**, seeing both as revealing hidden meanings beneath surface appearances.

Edmund Wilson

- ❖ **Edmund Wilson** was an American critic who used Marxist ideas in cultural criticism.
- ❖ He states that Marxism can **throw great light on the origins and social significance of works of art**, even if it does not explain everything.

Frankfurt School and Critical Theory

Important Thinkers

- ❖ The **Frankfurt School** is associated with several German thinkers, including:
 - **Max Horkheimer**
 - **Theodor Adorno**
 - **Walter Benjamin**
 - **Herbert Marcuse**
 - **Jürgen Habermas**

Culture Industry

- ❖ In their essay "**The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,**" Horkheimer and Adorno describe modern mass culture.
- ❖ They argue that under late capitalism, **entertainment becomes the continuation of work**, because people watch or listen only to relax enough to return to their jobs.
- ❖ Mass culture promotes **conformism**, not genuine freedom.

Walter Benjamin

- ❖ In "**The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,**" Benjamin says that mechanical reproduction destroys the **aura** or uniqueness of the artwork.
- ❖ In "**Theses on the Philosophy of History,**" he warns that every cultural document is also a **document of barbarism**, because culture is built on exploitation and suffering.

Jürgen Habermas

- ❖ **Habermas** criticises postmodernism and defends the values of **modernity**.
- ❖ In his lecture "**Modernity: An Incomplete Project,**" he argues that **reason, science, and progress** are still important for **human freedom and social justice**.

Relationship between Marxism, Psychoanalysis, and Literature

- ❖ Marxist critics argue that **psychoanalysis isolates individuals** and ignores the **social and economic structures** around them.
- ❖ Literature often tries to **repress historical truth** and hide class conflicts.
- ❖ Marxist analysis attempts to **reveal the underlying ideology** within literary texts and expose how they support or question the existing system.