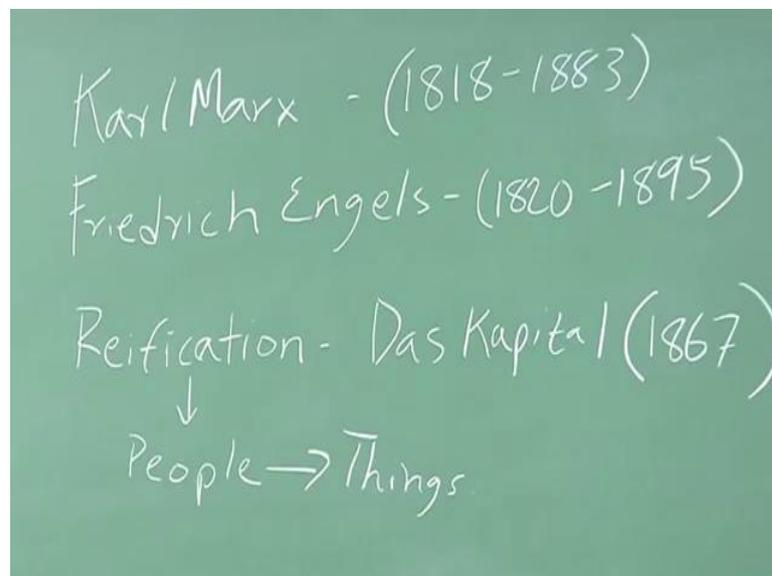


Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 10 A
Marxism and Marxist Literary Criticism

Hello and welcome to today's module on Literary Theory and Literary Criticism. In today's class in the two modules that will be doing today, will be looking at Marxism and Marxist Literary Criticism.

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Now, Marxism is basically a school of thought that was founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who were both Germans and they were contemporaries as well as you can see from their respective timelines. Marx lived between 1818 and 1883, while Engels lived in 1820, I mean lived between 1820 and 1895. Though we might understand Marx to be as such a philosopher, today Engels would perhaps be more or the lines of what do you would call sociologist, what would you understand a contemporary sociologist to be.

Now, even though they are both German, much of their workings and much of their collaborated writings happens not when they were in Germany, but when they were both exile from Germany and living in England. Now, Marx was born as the son of a lawyer and like I just mentioned, he lived, spend much of his life in Britain and much poverty

and he exile from Germany. This was following that 1848 year of revolution, likewise Engels left Germany in 1842 as well where he worked in his father's textile, textile from which was located in Manchester.

Now, Marx and Engels met each other after reading much of, what they had been writing, much of their writings that were contributing as articles in various journals. They came together and developed their theories which they together called communism rather than Marxism as it is known today. Now, communism or Marxism as they understood it, had a firm belief in the state, establish a firm belief in the state ownership of industry, transport etcetera.

This is just to be understood that something that is, that lives in a position to a private ownership and control and together Marx and Engels jointly wrote their seminal text, the communist manifesto which is published in 1848. Now, as a political philosophy Marxism ends to establish a classless society and a society that is based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

You will, many of you probably know that Marxism, it is understood today as a materialistic philosophy. It is a materialistic philosophy, in that it seeks to explain phenomena, natural phenomena and social phenomena without really bothering to assume an existence of another world, which is separate from the natural world that surrounds us and access outside around us. Therefore, it looks for concrete and scientific and logic explanation for the events that are happening within the world.

Now, as a school this philosophy, philosophy of materialism are opposed to what we are understand as idealism, which is basically a reliance on the existence of a spiritual world that is located elsewhere and would offer for instance, you know offer to, offer explanations about what is to do in life and it is conduct in spiritual terms. And at this point, I would like to remind you about the famous Marxian dictum that religion is the optimum of the people.

With this strongly hints at the materialist bases of their philosophy, while other philosophies basically tried to understand the world. It was Marx, who famously proclaimed or originally that his intention was not to understand, but rather than to change it. Thus Marxism views a progress as something that comes out through they struggle for power between various social classes.

History itself is thus seen as a product of class struggle and something that is driven by the competition among various social classes for economic social and political advantage and dominion. Therefore, an exploitation of one class by another is another strong concern of Marxism and Marxism sees this kind of an exploitation happening in as following the modern industrial revolution, industrial capitalism itself, especially in its 19th century form.

In this context, I would like to draw your attention to what we understand today as a process, the phenomenon of workers' alienation. Workers' alienation is seen by Marxists as a product of this very, as a result of this very exploitation of social classes. Now, what is alienation mean? Alienation simply means that the workers perhaps in an industrial setting or in a factory, experience what is our work, go through what is largely a deskilled state.

In this state, they largely perform fragmented and repetitive tasks, whose purpose the worker himself would not really fully comprehend. Now, this is closely associated with the idea of the conveyor belt mechanism that was introduced by in infant's factories during the industrial revolution. And what happened here is that the worker becomes just nearly becomes another cog, who has to keep on repeating some kind of meaningless task, which does not in his understanding contribute to the emergence of a finished product.

Now, this needs to be contrasted with the pre industrial system of manufacture, where in a worker or someone who completed a finished product and who are also perhaps in direct contact with his customers through the sale of this finished product. Now, this is something that has also been parodied in the famous Charlie Chaplin film Modern Times. If you have seen the film, if you are aware of film you will recall how the character played by Charlie Chaplin is.

You know engaged as a worker in a factory and throughout his shift, he has to keep on repeating a particular kind of a physical chore and he so attuned to this, he is so...this process is so ritualized that even men on his break, he is unable to prevent his body from teaching to the moments that he is so used to. Now, another term that is given to us by the Marxists is something called reification.

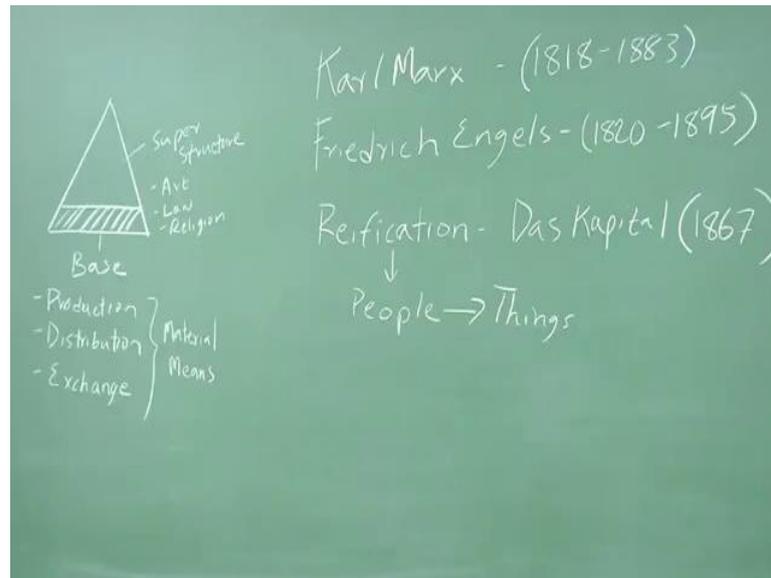
Reification comes to us from Das capital which was published in 1867 and in a simple nutshell, it basically it concerns the process by which people are basically simply turned into thing. We understand that according to the Marxist model, in capitalism goals or issues of profit and loss become paramount and thus in such a system, workers are nearly reduced to just a labor force as another unit in the capitalist machinery.

Thus, in put simply in a nut shell in a word, people just become things and this is what the term reification implies. Now, some of the early influences on Marxism is perhaps the most important influences is perhaps that of Hegel. Hegel was in 18th century German philosopher, whose massive contributions major contribution to Marxism is in the word dialectics that Marx's borrowed, Marxism borrows from Hegel.

Now, dialectics is basically something that implies that opposing ideas and forces can bring about a person and conflict ideas and forces can bring about new situations and new ideas. Marxism is also inspired by the French socialist ideas from the times of the French revolution itself. If you call the French revolution, you will remember that some of the key ideas associated with the French revolution is ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity.

Marxism also represents in invention of classic and early economics theory. This theory maintenance that the perceived of individual economics self interest would itself bring about economic and social benefits to the entire society. Now, this you will very easily understand that this is basically the underlying rational for the existence of capitalism itself and this is something that Marxism seeks to inverse. Now, the simplest Marxian model for the society is basically the base super structure model, which can be conceptualized though a pyramid.

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If we think of the base super structure model, you can think of it as a pyramid that is structure. This pyramid has an economic base which is basically governed by the material means of production, distribution, exchange etcetera and it is on this base, that the society super structure relies on. The super structure is something that is seen as something that is determined by the economic base and is represented by areas such as art and culture, law, religion etcetera.

Now, classic Marxian theory tells us that the superstructure that is a shape or determined by the nature of the base itself. Now, this is what we understand as the principle of economic determinism and this pyramid principal of economic determination is a central idea of traditional Marxian thought. Now, with that we will now try to attempt to arrive at a discussion of how Marxist literary criticism might operate.

It needs to be understood that Marx and Engels themselves never really put forward a comprehensive theory of literature or the purpose of literature or how it must function. In this, their views were largely relaxed and perhaps not very dogmatic. They always allowed that good art always had a degree of freedom from prevailing economic circumstances and you can immediately see, how this might go against the idea of economic determinism that we looked at just now.

For example, Engels in a letter through someone known as Margaret Harkness that was that he wrote in the month of April in 1888 had this to say. Quote, far from finding fault

with you for not having written a point blank socialist novel, the more the opinions of the order remain hidden, the better the work of art becomes a court. Now, this is a direct quote from Engels himself from where we can easily understand what his rational, what is opinion on art and literature was.

However, Marxist literary criticism would also maintain that a writer's social class and ideology which is to put very simply his factor of his outlook and his values, have a major bearing on what is written by that member of that class, which is to say in other words that Marxist critics does not see authors or poets as somebody who is an inspired, an autonomous creative genius who produces original and timeless works of art.

Now, this is something that you are recall, this is more or less the picture of an artist that we get from the critics of the romantic times. Marxist theories would argue that artist are formed, they are webbed and molded by their social context, even if they are not aware of it or even if they are reluctant to admit it. And this reflex not only in the content of their works, their ideology and their molded that their social class finds expression not only in the content of their works, which is to say the story and the plot and how the device is functional, but interesting even in the form that their works take up.

Now, we use the term from here to include all the conventional features of a work of art. For example, in the realistic novel the form would include perhaps the chronological time schemes, the formal beginnings and the ending, the in depth psychological characterization, the plotting, etcetera. For example, something that can be easily be seen in the works of someone like, say Thomas hardy or Emile Zola.

Thus going by this logic, the fragmented or the absurd is forms of drama and fiction that were used by the 20th century writers like Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka are seen as a responds to the contradictions and demission that are inherent in the late capitalist society itself by Marxian critics. To give you an example, Catherine Belsey who is a British leftist critics, argues that the very form that the realist novel takes up is becomes validation of the existing social structure, that is prevalent for that society at that particular time.

And she argues that this is so because, realism lives the conventional ways of looking at things intact and it actually discourages a critical scrutiny of reality. We shall now go on to examine what has be, what we understood today, what we have understand today as

the Leninist model of Marxist criticism. Now, the Leninist model of Marxist criticism represents a much rather structural approach to art, then what was original advocated by Marx and Engels.

And this is seen as something that was adopted and implemented from about the 1930's onwards, which is to say since the revolution took place. So, this is roughly seen as a mode of criticism that was in circulation and prevalence and currency from about 1930 till about 1960 or so. Now, the official, so we added to a literature dictated that, dictate a lot of control over literature and arts in the USSR, vendors to Soviet Union Russia.

Now, this can be very easily seen in the humorous example of brilliant film maker known as Sergei Eisenstein. Now, since this model of, this approach advocated that you know, literature art should be controlled and should be you know should be an instrument that promotes the revolution that supports the revolution. All art and all forms of art and media were widely mediated and you know strictly regulated.

This became a especially a problem for the Russian film makers who enjoyed a bit of freedom before it came up and who are largely instrumental and producing some of the best and innovative and experimental works that have defined modern cinema. So, what happened in Soviet Russia was that, if you are trying to make a film, you could only make a film that the state would approve and that would innovatively be a film that talks about the, you know glorifying the revolution.

So, Sergei Eisenstein who was a brilliant film maker, he commission, he approach Lenin to be granted funding and he proposed a film known as Ivan the Terrible which was basically about the despotic role of a mindless tyrant, his script was approved, the film was made and released and it was widely you know it was very well received. The film was such a great hit that Lenin actually commissioned, you know part for a sequel and thus Ivan the terrible part two was made.

And this went on and talks where in the pipeline for making a third part of Ivan the terrible, when he suddenly realized that Ivan himself might be the cruel despot that is presented in Ivan the terrible might actually be very thinly wield representation of Lenin himself. And it is to say this made him pretty angry, but before he could retaliate Sergei Eisenstein had already left Russia and this is a funny anecdote that we remember.

Thus as early as the first Soviet writers congress and came about at 1934, liberal views were completely out of the window and a new orthodoxy was imposed, which is basically based on the writings of Lenin himself. Lenin had argued as early as 1905 that literature must become an instrument of the party itself, literature he said in his own words must become party literature.

Thus experimentation in art and literature was officially banned, officially and effectively banned and writers like James Joyce and Marcel Proust, were stigmatized as exemplars of, what they understood to be the decadence of the western world and a strict form of socialist realism was imposed all over Soviet Russia. Now, the theorist George Steiner identifies for us two major streams of Marxist criticism.

He identifies for us the Engels kind, which stresses the necessary freedom of art from direct political determination and he also identifies for us, the Leninists model which insists on the need for art to be explicitly committed to the political cause of the left. Thus in what came to be known as the Walter Dillmann Marxism of the 1930's, a direct cause and effect relationship between art, literature and economics was assumed and all writers were seen as someone who are inevitably trapped within the intellectual limits of their own social class position.

As an example, as testimonies to this, we have Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* which was published in 1930 and 1946, where he maintains that every facet of a writer is linked to some aspect of his or her social status. This means; this obviously means that all poets have their own forms of escape from modern reality, he was critical of poetry in general. For example, in Tennyson he identified the citation world of romance, Ian Brownie he identifies the Italian romance of spring time, etcetera.

All of which, he immediately dismissed as escape poetry, that ignored everyday social and class related realities. Now, according to Stravinsky on commentary and account, the Engels and Marx's form of criticism which was a more liberal of the two, also flourished in the 1930's. However, it was almost in exile or in an every surprise or underground form. The group that effectively practice this is something that we know today as the Russian formalist.

The Russian formalist were a group of writers and critics and thinkers, who flourished in the 1920's until, they were officially disbanded by the party itself. The most prominent

members of the group where theories, like Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Thomashefsky and Boris Eichenbaum. Sklovsky is an idea of decentralization or the act of making strange, which was originally expanded and given to us in his essay artist technique.

Planes that one of the chief effects of literary language, is that of making the familiar world seem new to us and this is to encourage our critical understanding of it. Because, he would be seeing it as is where the first time and thus, it is laid open and bear to us for our reappraisal. Another key Formalist idea that is borrowed from Thomashefsky's distinction is his identification is, distinction between the story and the plot.

He called the story Fabula in Russian and the plot itself was called Suje in Russian. And later on, in the early 1950's and the 1960's, this formalist ideas where of great interest to the early structuralists, particular this is particularly so, because of their emphasis on the distinction between the language, the two aspects of language and reality and on literature itself as a set of systematic procedures and in acted structures.

Now, the group the suppress group known as Russian formalism also had a massive influence in Germany, leading to the establishment of what we understand today at the Frankfurt school of Marxist aesthetic, which was founded in 1923. Now, the Frankfurt school of Marxist criticism also practiced the form of criticism which tried to combine Freud and Marx's as well as taking in and exploring some of the aspects of our formalism.

The prominent member of the Frankfurt school includes theory such as Walter Benjamin and Thorold Adorno. Just like some of the people that they mentioned, the playwright Brecht also fled in Germany in an attempt to free the technical imposition of social realism on his work and art. And it is from Brecht, from Bertolt Brecht that we get that idea of the notion of alienation effect in drama, which is basically the implementation of device that is intended to draw the attention of the audience to the fact that, what they see has been answered on the stage is basically a very artificial and constructed literary image and something that is not a natural reality at all.

As an example to this, we have the best role play Galileo, where one of the tropes in the play involves the director itself sitting on this stage with his script in hand. Now, as you can understand, these basically foreground the idea of defamiliarization that we just talked about. Since, again it also emphasizes this shift between literature and life and

with that we will conclude our discussion on Marxist literary theory and criticism today.
We will pick this up later on in the next module.

Thank you.