

Marxism literary and the new criticism theory



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Marxism literary theory and the new criticism theory are among many wide schools of theory with historical importance. These theories differ in their methods and conclusions as well as their text. Different theories complement and supplement each other in their goals, methods, conclusions and text. The present day literary theory dates back in the 1960s. Literary theory was at its highest peak in popularity in some of the leading universities in America such as John Hopkins and Yale. It is from these universities that the influence of literary theory started spreading and by 1980s it was being taught almost everywhere. During this time, literary theory was supposed to be an academically cutting-edge, and as a result the majority of university literature departments wanted to teach and learn theory and integrate it into their curricula.

The goal of Marxist literary theories is to represent class conflict as well as to reinforce class distinctions through literature. Marxist theorists frequently champion writers who are sympathetic to the working classes and those whose works challenge the economic equalities in capitalist societies. In maintaining the spirit of Marxism, literary theories developing from the Marxist paradigm have sought Modern ways of understanding the relationship between literature and economic production as well as cultural production. Literary theory has drawn a lot of influence from the Marxism analyzes society.

New Critics in their works usually include inherent moral dimension, and occasionally a religious dimension. For instance, New Critic may read a poem by Thomas Eliot for its level of honesty in expression of torment and contradiction of a serious exploration of belief in the present world. On the

other hand Marxist critic might see New critics' point of view as ideological instead of critical. They would argue that critical distance should be kept from the poet's religious standpoint for the poem to be understood. New criticism theories look at literary works in the view of what is written and not upon the authors' goals or biographical issues. In contrast, the Marxists emphasize themes of class conflict.

Marxist literary criticism

Marxist literary criticism is used to describe literary criticism influenced by the philosophy of Marxism. Twentieth century leading proponents of Marxist theory are also literary critics. They include, George Lukács, Terry Eagleton, and Raymond Williams. Marxist theory has different goals. One of its simplest goals is literary assessment of the political "inclination" of a literary work, hence determining whether its literary form is progressive.

According to Marxists legal systems, religious beliefs, and cultural frameworks are determined by social and economic conditions. Therefore Art should represent these conditions truthfully and also seek to better them. The popularity of Marxist aesthetics has reduced in nowadays consumerist society; however it continues to pose responsible questions.

Marxist basis of evaluation is hard to establish although it is one of the vigorous and varied 20th century school of aesthetics. Marxist theory has not been able to explain how the political, artistic, and legal superstructure of a nation reflects in its economic constitution. Assumptions from its generalizations have been stunningly inaccurate. For instance the hypotheses with which Marxism explained the rise in living standards of

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capitalist working class; the Russian-Chinese conflict revolution in Russia; and the uprisings in Berlin. The fact that Marxism fails intellectually is a prove that it has weaknesses in literary criticism.

Despite Marxist criticism theories having weaknesses it is a good thing that it allows intellectual freedom. Sometimes the authors writing may have been influenced in some way by the state. For instance, the communist world was totally different from what writers were allowed to show. This means that the literary work of time could not be analyzed by simply looking at the author's goal as it is proposed by new criticism. Reading the literary work very closely and particularly the language used by the author would help to analyze the work more critically. In this case Marxism is very crucial because what people read that is what they practice.

Some contemporary Marxists such Terry Eagleton have tried to rehabilitate or revise marx. She recognizes the fact that literary work like that of Shakespeare create value because by reading them we are made to think and get something out of them thus getting some values from them. This supplements new criticism theory that looks at the moral and sometimes the religious dimensions such as honesty.

Georg Lukacs contribution

In his contribution towards Marxism and literature, Georg Lukacs, maintained that the text contained in classic realist writings in describing events of ordinary occurrence and social conditions give a vivid picture of the entirety of a society and its evolution. He argues that the literature of naturalism shows the contradictions that exist in societies and within the

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individual in the context of a dialectical unit. He acknowledged the fact that realist novels present a partial image of a society. However, he also supported the idea that the value of a novel lies in its description of the nature of a society in a historic period. He also argued that any literary work does not reflect individual phenomena in isolation as modernist text depicts, but should be the whole process of life found in realism. However, Lukas was opposed by Bertolt Brecht, who argued that society is dynamic and hence reality also changes. This is why Bertolt maintained that modes of representation should change accordingly. The methods and goals of representation are always changing in the quest to describe present-day realities.

Raymond Williams contribution

According to Williams, any literature portraying an ever changing culture has the counter-hegemonic and dominant ideology. Therefore Marxist criticism leaning towards William's theories considers literature as an important vehicle for ideology.

Williams' believed that where there was no common culture, a cultural and literary tradition is founded on selections made in the present and shaped by value decisions and power interests. This way he deconstructed the idea that truth is integral in a literary tradition. This contribution complements the new criticism theory that seeks to understand moral dimension of every literary text.

He also suggested the term " structure of feeling" for analysis of literature.

Even though she acknowledges that the term cannot be equated to an

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ideology since it lacks specificity of class and it is not universal; the term gives the dimension of experience more emphasis. Structure of feeling supplements new criticism theory since it emphasizes the experience dimension. This means that the text is not subjected to critical interpretations but instead the primacy of the text is upheld.

New criticism

New Criticism as a school of thought of literary interpretation stresses the significance of studying texts as comprehensive works of art in themselves. They argued for upholding primacy of text other than analysis based on context. According to proponents of this theory literary texts are usually comprehensive in and of themselves. They elevate the purpose of criticism in academics such as in the maintenance of language and poetry at the same time helping their development. Criticism is very important as it forms an inherent part of social development. Majority of new criticism studies see the theory as one that focuses on close reading of structure, theme, technicalities and the message contained in the literary works.

New criticism supplements the Marxism criticism theory in its objective. Marxism theory interprets every literary work on the basis of how it responds to social inequalities. Social development is therefore an inherent part of the Marxism theory. New criticism also gives some focus to social development though indirectly. New criticism theory expects that by focussing on criticism at the academic level, the same will trickle down to the society at large and hence leading to social development.

Unreasonable assumptions of Marxism and new criticism

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One of the assumptions of the New Critics is that biographical and historical information is not important in the study of a literary text. This assumption restricts the reader so much and is often seen as excessively authoritarian. Historical and biographical information is necessary as it can create an experience dimension that can pass some values to the reader. In so doing social development occurs. Marxism emphasizes the use of historical and biographical information in analyzing literary works. Marxism assumes that a literary work is a reflection of the society that produces it. This assumption is not always true. Some literary works may have had some external influences thus depicting a society in a way that people want to see it and thus may not be a true reflection of the society. Since new criticism does not emphasize the historical and biographical information of text, but instead on close reading of structure, theme, technicalities and the message contained in the literary works, it complements the Marxism assumption. Therefore the blend of both Marxism and new criticism can complement each other as mentioned above.

Humanism

Marxism does not put emphasis on the use of Marx ideology of class conflict for academics but instead for social development. Therefore proponents of Marxism criticism theory believe it is most useful in the humanist world outside the academy. As discussed earlier, the new criticism is so much focussed on academics and not the society. It is so restrictive to the reader and does not use biographical and historical information in analysis of a literary work. On the other hand, Marxism can be referred as being humanistic. It is humanistic because it empathizes with the victims of social

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inequalities. Marxism therefore seeks to analyse literary works using the Marx ideology of class conflict. The Marxists hope that by analyzing literary works using class conflict ideology, the reader will be able to recognize the inequalities existing in the society and thus can find ways of overcoming them and bring about an equal society.

According to Patricia Waugh humanism is not only found in Marxism but rather in all theories. She sees theories as a means by which one can exercise crucial capacities of being human. One can reflect or be rational about life through a theory and in the process one can stand back to make second order judgements about the world and our behaviour in it.

In conclusion, Marxism criticism theory and New Criticism are different in many ways. These differences are what complements and supplements each other. For instance, since New Criticism does not emphasize on the use of historical and biographical information in analyzing literary works, Marxism complements it. On the other hand, New Criticism supplements Marxism's structure of feeling by emphasizing moral dimension in the analysis of literary works. Raymond Williams a proponent of Marxism acknowledge values such as truth as integral to the literary tradition.