

## Historical Materialist Approach to Literature and Art<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article explores the basic features of the historical materialist approach to literature and art. It aims to highlight the core of this approach to literature and art and make a contrast to other approaches. The article addresses the research problems concerning the view of the historical materialist approach to the primacy of being or consciousness, the relationship of literature and art with the objective world, the free or class partisan literature and art, and the role of literature and art in changing the existing society. The research methodology adopted for this study is the review-based analysis of some of the major critiques of the historical materialist approach to literature and art. The researcher has included the critiques of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, V.I. Lenin, and Mao Tsetung as they represent the founding figures of the approach and widely named this approach the Marxist approach too. The article reveals that the historical materialist approach views being as primary over consciousness, observes the literature and art as the reflection of the objective world, believes in the class partisan literature and art in a class-based society, and sees the prime utility of literature and art in bringing a radical change in society. The historical materialist approach favors the revolutionary literature and art that takes sides with the majority of working-class people, the revolutionary force of the future capable of establishing the scientific communist society.

**Keywords:** Base, class partisan, class struggle, revolutionary, superstructure

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## **Introduction**

The article highlights the fundamentals of the historical materialist approach to literature and art. Literature and art are viewed fundamentally by two different approaches. The literary approaches that examine any literature and art are formed and take sides with the two antagonistic philosophical views and approaches that observe and analyze the laws that govern the whole universe. There are two world-outlook; materialism and idealism in which materialism views matter as primary while idealism believes consciousness as the originator of the matter itself. The phenomena of the matter are apprehended by two different approaches; dialectical and metaphysical. Dialectics believes in the motion of matter, while metaphysics interprets matter as being an immutable and static entity. Literature and art, like in the realm of philosophy, are observed and interpreted either through the lens of metaphysical idealism or through dialectical materialism. These two approaches, metaphysical idealism, and dialectical materialism, view literature and art differently, and they regard, idealize, and recommend two different types of literature and art. The term "historical materialism" is used to refer to dialectical materialism when it is used to examine human civilization. The historical materialist approach, therefore, encompasses the core ideas of dialectical materialism about literature and art. Marx and Engels systematized the philosophic worldview and approach of dialectical and historical materialism and developed the historical materialist approach to literature and art. This leads us to name this approach the Marxist approach to literature and art or the Marxist literary theory as well. The article discusses historical materialist analysis of the overall concepts of literature and art and the utility of different types of literature and art for the different classes in a class-based society.

The article adopts the qualitative approach with exploratory and analytical methods. This is done by analyzing and interpreting the core concept of historical materialism and applying it to the analysis of literature and art. The germs of historical materialism are not extracted and applied them truly to the analysis of literature and art by the previous literature and this creates the research gap for my present study. This article closes this research gap and will be a valuable resource for researchers in the future who want to try their hand at historical materialist interpretation of literature and art.

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## Result and Discussion

The historical materialist approach to literature and art examines and interprets any literature and art by using the principles of dialectical and historical materialism. Marx and Engels developed and systematized the core concept of dialectical and historical materialism and applied its concept while examining and interpreting literature and art. Marx and Engels are better recognized for their political and economic writings than their literary works (Eagleton, 2002, Marx, Engels, and criticism, p. 1), but whatever they wrote about literature and art is adequate to communicate their dialectical and historical approach to literature and art. In his famous quote from Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1984) describes his view of literature and art: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (p. 137). The social consciousness, or the social, political, and intellectual life process that also involves the creation of literature and art, is determined by the social being, or the mode of production of material life. This is known as the materialist interpretation of history, which contrasts with the idealist approach that places social consciousness before social being. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1983) go further to provide a clearer explanation of the idea:

Conceiving, thinking, and the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. (p. 25)

All mental creations, including politics, legislation, morality, religion, literature, and art, are the outcomes of human beings' material behaviors, just as the mental processes of human beings like conception and thought are products of action in the material world. Marx and Engel's emphasis on "real, active men" implies that active human beings are the creators of the specific concepts and ideas of a given epoch according to a definite development of their productive forces.

The specific development of productive forces provides the specific forms of materials for the literary production of a given age. Greek mythology serves as a material foundation for the creation of Greek art during the early stages of the development of productive forces. In his well-known work *Grundrisse*, Marx (1996) states:

We know that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art but also its basis. Is the conception of nature and social relations which underlies Greek imagination and therefore Greek [art] possible when there are self-acting mules, railways, locomotives and electric telegraphs? . . . Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, in other word that natural and social phenomena are already assimilated in an unintentionally artistic manner by the imagination of the people. . . . Egyptian mythology could never become the basis of or give rise to Greek art. (pp. 34-5)

Greek mythology, which served as the foundation for Greek art, was created using the time's concepts of nature and social interactions rather than the modern concepts of railroads, locomotives, and electric telegraphs. Greek art would represent Egyptian mythology if literature and art was not a product of the time's material circumstances. Unintentionally and subconsciously, the material condition of the moment leaves an impression on artists' minds, which is mirrored in literature and art.

Marx has little trouble understanding Greek art as a result of the material circumstances of the time, but he finds it challenging to explain why Greek art is so popular even today. T. Eagleton (2002) responds as follows: "The Greeks, Marx is arguing, were able to produce major art not *in spite of* but *because of* the undeveloped state of their society" (Literature and superstructure, p.11). Only the innocence of early humanity, when there was not such a 'division of labor' as there is in capitalism, was capable of giving rise to the high arts. Marx (1996) attests to it:

The charm their art has for us does not conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary, its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur. (p. 35)

Marx viewed the Greek eras as representing the infancy of humanity. Childhood is a time of innocence during which immorality and cruelty have no place. Marx views the Greek era as having no classes, much like a society based on a primitive communal basis, and

he sees a mirror of this society in Greek art. Marx (1996) contends: "An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does the naïveté of the child not give him pleasure, and does not he endeavor to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level?" (p. 35). Greek art thrills us because it captures the innocence of young humanity. As Marx refers to "endeavoring to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level," he is unmistakably referring to the communist society of the future when boundless resources will be available to an infinitely developing man (as cited in Eagleton, 2002, Literature and superstructure, p.12). Marx's view of Greek art illustrates the dependency of literature and art, or the superstructure on the economic base, and this also explains the causes of Greek art's brilliance, which continue to have an impact on people's minds even today.

Human beings are the creators of literature and art, and literature and art question and affect human thought. Literature and art reflect society's economic base and contribute to bringing change to the economic base too. In other words, there is a dialectical connection between literature and art and the economic base. In a letter he wrote to Joseph Bloch in 1890, Engels (1982) makes the following point explicit:

The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and its results, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas – also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. (p. 682)

The relationship between the economic base and literature and art is not mechanical and one-to-one; rather, the superstructure's various aspects, including literature and art, are continually influencing and reacting to the base. Eagleton (2002) maintains: "The materialist theory of history denies that art can in *itself* change the course of history; but it insists that art can be an active element in such change" (Literature and Superstructure, p. 9). The economic base is the key element in the conflict between it and the superstructure. The economic base often plays the primary and deciding function, but under some circumstances, the superstructure takes over and becomes the primary and deciding one (Tsetung, 2006, p. 116). This demonstrates the vital part that literature and art play in bringing about societal transformation.

In an April 1888 letter to novelist Margaret Harkness, Engels (1973) makes clear his views on literature and art. In the letter, he criticizes Harkness for giving working-class people in her story *A City Girl* an inaccurate image. The story lacks "the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances" (Engels, 1973, p. 114). Engels (1973) further emphasizes:

Now your characters are typical enough, as far as they go; but the circumstances which surround them and make them act, are not perhaps equally so. In the '*City Girl*' the working class figures as a passive mass, unable to help itself and not even making any attempt at striving to help itself. (p. 114)

The working class folks in Harkness' story are characterized as "a passive mass" that are powerless to alter the wretched fate that has befallen them. In her story, she had to depict "the militant proletariat" (Engels, 1973, p. 115) of 1887, the year when she set her story. Engels (1973) believes that Harkness has violated the concept of realism since she depicts "the passive side of working class life" at a period when the working class has already established the strength to overturn the power structures, especially "in the civilized world" (p. 116), the setting of her story.

A piece of literature or art that merely portrays members of the working-class cannot be considered proletarian literature or art unless it also captures the revolutionary hope of this class. Engels (1973) attacked *A City Girl* because it depicts working-class characters that are pessimistic about their future. Similarly, no one can claim to be a proletarian writer or artist if their works do not accurately depict the genuine class struggle in the current society, in which the new emerging class would be shown as the victor. Engels (1973) believed that the product of any literary or artistic work—the message it conveys to the new revolutionary class to engage in the class struggle—was what mattered, not the intentions or ideas of the author or artist. Engels (1973) argues: "The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to, may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions" (p. 115). The message of the literary and artistic works is what the readers are interested in, not the writers' opinions. Literature is a form of artistic writing, not plain writing. To convey objective truth through literature, Engels advises concealing the author's personal opinions. Opinions of the author cannot prevent the creation of literature if they are accurate in portraying reality.

Engels (1973) cited Balzac as an example, who, despite having a love for feudalism, faithfully captured the class conflict of his era in his writings and showed the bourgeoisie class to be the victor. Although "Balzac sympathizes most deeply – the nobles", his novels have depicted "the progressive inroads of the rising bourgeoisie upon the society of nobles" (Engels, 1973, p. 115). Throughout his works, Balzac always expresses unabashed respect for his fiercest political rivals, the republican heroes, who during that era (1830–1836) truly embodied the voices of the common people. Engels (1973) asserts:

Balzac thus was compelled to go against his own class sympathies and political prejudices, that he *saw* the necessity of the downfall of his favorite nobles, and described them as people deserving no better fate; and that he *saw* the real men of the future where, for the time being, they alone were to be found. . . (p. 116)

The material condition of the time forced Balzac to go against his own class preferences to accurately portray the genuine class struggle of his period in his novels; he acknowledged the demise of his favored nobility and recognized the bourgeoisie class as the true victorious class of the future. This stance taken by Engels in his literary criticism has been understood by certain critics as either "the necessary freedoms of art from direct political determinism" (Barry, 2011, p. 154) or "overt political commitment in fiction is unnecessary" (Eagleton, 2002, Marx, Engels and commitment, p. 44). In contrast to the opinions of these critics, Engels wants a strict political commitment from writers for them to produce accurate literature and art for the new winning class at every level of human growth to bring about social transformation. Engels advocates for the progressive literature and art that will illuminate the course of upcoming revolutions.

V. I. Lenin's writings on literature and art have advanced and extended Marxist literary theory. In his article "Party Organization and Party Literature," Lenin detailed his opinions on literature. Lenin's article extends Engels' ideas about political commitment for the newly emerging classes in literature and art to the idea of class-partisan literature for the proletariat at a time when the proletariat was engaged in a bitter class struggle against the capitalist class to establish socialism in Russia. Lenin (1975) claims:

Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become *part* of the common cause of the proletariat, "a cog and a screw" of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become a

component of organized, planned and integrated Social-Democratic Party work.  
(p. 149)

Lenin opines that literature is like "a cog and a screw" in a "great Social-Democratic mechanism," suggesting that it should be an integral part of the proletarian revolution. If literary texts contain progressive messages that aid in informing and motivating the working class people to participate in the proletarian revolution, it suggests literature has a significant impact on bringing about social change. Numerous literary works support the ruling class by implying that their dominance is unconquerable and unchangeable, thereby discouraging the emerging classes. Lenin (1975) criticizes writers who portray themselves as non-partisan and literary supermen, claiming that in reality, no writers are literary supermen who stand above classes and no writers are non-partisan who do not support any classes. Every writer, whether consciously or unconsciously, belongs to a particular class, and during the writing process, they are loyal to their preferred class.

The issue of writers' freedom is connected to the issue of writers' class partisanship. Class partisanship prevents writers from writing freely since they are required to express the ideology of one or another class in a society that is class-based. Lenin (1975) adds the following:

We must say to you bourgeois individualists that your talk about absolute freedom is sheer hypocrisy. There can be no real and effective "freedom" in a society based on the power of money, in a society in which the masses of working people live in poverty and the handful of rich live like parasites. . . . The freedom of the bourgeois writer, artist or actress is simply masked (or hypocritically masked) dependence on the money-bag, on corruption, on prostitution. (p. 151)

Lenin claims that writers who support the bourgeoisie class write for the interests of the bourgeoisie and their writings in no way represent those of the masses who belong to the working class. Hence, ". . . absolute freedom of the artist is an illusory freedom. Artistic work is inevitably entangled in the ideological battle" (Morawski, 1965, p. 15). In a society where there is widespread class exploitation, every writer is unavoidably intertwined with the interests of the exploiting or exploited classes. Lenin (1975) asserts that literature will be free if it is written for the working class to achieve socialism and is free from avarice and careerism. He argues:

It will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its



ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve, not some satiated heroine, not the bored "upper ten thousand" suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people – the flower of the country, its strength and its future. (pp. 151-52)

Lenin claims that there is no free literature and art in class based society. He argues that it would be considered free literature and art if it is written for the majority of working class people. Lenin, therefore, advocates for that literature and art, which are written not for the minority of the ruling class, but are created for the majority of the working class, which is the new emerging class capable of building socialism and communism.

Lenin (1996), while speaking up for the proletarian literature and art, opposes the feudal or bourgeois literature and art, which propagate the feudal or bourgeois ideology. Lenin (1996), however, places a high value on old literature that accurately narrates the class struggle at all phases of human history. Lenin (1996) respects Leo Tolstoy for writing novels that, despite Tolstoy's sympathies for feudalism, accurately depict the end of feudalism in Russia. Tolstoy acknowledges in his novel *Anna Karenina* that ". . . in Russia everything has now been turned upside down" despite his belief that "the ideological reflection of the old order, the feudal order," represents "the 'eternal' principles of morality, the eternal truths of religion" (Lenin, 1996, p. 43). Lenin (1996) recognizes Tolstoy's accurate portrayal of the breakdown of feudalism, but this does not imply that he endorses the beliefs Tolstoy expresses in his works. Lenin (1996) warns us that it would be detrimental to adopt Tolstoy's philosophy as it appears in his writings:

In our days, the most direct and most profound harm is caused by every attempt to idealize Tolstoy's doctrine, to justify or to mitigate his 'non-resistance', his appeals to the 'spirit', his exhortations for 'moral self-perfection', his doctrine of 'conscience' and universal 'love', his preaching of asceticism and quietism, and so forth. (p. 45)

The fundamental principles of Tolstoy's theory, which are the ideologies of feudalism, include pessimism, non-resistance, appeals to the "spirit," concept of everlasting truths, morality, universal "love," asceticism, and quietism. Lenin (1996) suggests us not follow Tolstoy's doctrines though he appreciates Tolstoy's novels for their true portrayal of the class struggle of his time.

Lenin speaks out against all types of outdated conceptions that serve to mislead the newly rising classes in the class struggle. Lenin, on the other hand, thinks that every

work of literature and art has some information that would be beneficial to the advanced classes at every stage of human progress. Lenin (1996) draws the following conclusion about Tolstoy's writing:

Tolstoy's doctrine is certainly utopian and in content is reactionary in the most precise and most profound sense of the word. But that certainly does not mean that the doctrine was not socialistic or that it did not contain critical elements capable of providing valuable material for the enlightenment of the advanced classes. (p. 45)

Lenin favors proletarian literature, but he also advises us to adopt some beneficial resources from feudal, bourgeois, and other types of literature for the benefit of working-class people in the class struggle.

Mao Tsetung's renowned work "Talks at the Yen-an forum on art and literature" systematizes Marxist literary theory in greater detail. Lenin's concept of class-partisan literature and art has been expanded in the article more confidently and clearly because Mao (1960) contends that there is nothing that transcends classes in the current class-based society:

In the world today all culture, art and literature belong to definite classes and follow definite political lines. There is no such thing as art for art's sake, art which stands above classes or art which runs parallel to or remains independent of politics. (p. 30)

Marxist literary theory rejects the bourgeois notion of art for art's sake and of literature and art that are unaffected by class politics. Mao (1960) believes that literature and art are inextricably linked to class politics: "Art and literature are subordinate to politics, but in turn exert a great influence on politics" (p. 31). This view is similar to Lenin's idea of literature and art as "cogs and screws" in the entire Social-Democratic machine. Literature and art are produced based on class politics, and they subsequently serve the politics of a particular class. There is a dialectical relationship between literature, art and politics.

Different forms of politics inspire various forms of literature and art. The Marxist literary theory examines all literature and art by classifying them, in contrast to the bourgeoisie literary theory. It is necessary to provide them with various labels for the literature and art that are created for the benefit of a particular class. Mao (1960) names some of them: "The art and literature for the landlord class are feudal art and literature. . .

. The art and literature for the bourgeoisie are bourgeois art and literature. . . . The art and literature intended for the imperialists . . . are collaborationist art and literature" (P. 13). All of these various kinds of literature and art are the ideological expressions of the various classes and serve the interests of their respective classes.

Marxist literary theory supports revolutionary literature and art among the different kinds of literature and art. The literature and art that are considered to be revolutionary are those that are written about the new revolutionary class or the working-class to serve them. Mao (1960) adds: "Revolutionary art and literature are the products of the brains of revolutionary artists and writers reflecting the life of the people" (p. 21). Revolutionary literature and art portray the ideology of the new, emerging revolutionary class, i.e., working-class people. Revolutionary literature and art, in the era of capitalism and imperialism, are the ideological expressions of the proletarian class. Therefore, they are also called proletarian literature and art.

Mao (1960) discusses the four fundamental issues that must be resolved for there to be truly revolutionary literature and art. These are the standpoint, the attitude, the audience for writers and artists, and the study (p. 2). The standpoint varies according to different kinds of literature and art and the revolutionary literature and art ". . . take the standpoint of the proletariat and the mass of the people" (Tsetung, 1960, p. 2). The standpoint outlines particular attitudes toward particular things. The attitude includes the central dilemma in all literature and art, which is whether to exalt or denounce a subject. Mao (1960) expounds:

Only truly revolutionary artists and writers can correctly solve the problem whether to extol or to expose. The fundamental task of all revolutionary artists and writers is to expose all dark forces that endanger the people and to extol all the revolutionary struggles of the people. (pp. 38-9)

True revolutionary literature and art always criticize the dark and conservative forces while praising the bright and progressive ones. It is the chief task of any literature and art to expose and extol the specific forces by their specific standpoint.

The audience of the authors and artists is the third issue Mao (1960) lists for revolutionary literature and art. The creation of revolutionary literature and art is aimed at the working class. Mao (1960) agrees with Lenin: "As far back as 1905, Lenin emphatically pointed out that our art and literature should 'serve the millions upon millions of working people'" (p. 11). Lenin and Mao believed that the main purpose of

any genuine revolutionary literature and art is to benefit the majority of the working class people. The authors and artists of the revolutionary movement should place equal emphasis on "elevation" and "popularization" to serve the interests of the working class through literature and art. Elevation refers to "the raising of their artistic and literary standards", and popularization is related to the "diffusion of art and literature among people" (Tsetung, 1960, p. 20). In other words, popularization is tied to the "content" while elevation is related to the "form" of literature and art. The literature and art produced by the exploiting classes may have "some artistic merit" notwithstanding its retrograde political nature. Yet, if they do not have artistic merit, works of art—no matter how politically progressive—are ineffective (Tsetung, 1960, p. 36). The integration of form and content is a key challenge for all revolutionary literature and art, as Mao (1960) notes: "The problem now is how to integrate 'The Spring Snow' with the 'Song of the Rustics', to integrate elevation with popularization" (p. 29). Mao (1960) places equal attention on the artistic quality and the revolutionary political content when creating effective revolutionary literature and art.

The study is the final issue Mao (1960) mentions with revolutionary literature and art. To create revolutionary literature and art, writers and artists must have a proper comprehension "of Marxism-Leninism and of society". Mao (1960) claimed that people without a core Marxist worldview, which holds that ". . . existence determines consciousness, that is, the objective reality of class struggle and national struggle determines our thoughts and feelings" (p. 8), were unable to create revolutionary literature and art. Revolutionary authors and artists should study Marxism to apply the dialectical and historical materialistic viewpoint while approaching literature and art, rather than write about philosophy in literature and art. Mao (1960) clarifies:

We study Marxism to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our approach to the world, to society and to art and literature, but not in order to turn our works of art and literature into philosophical discourses. (p. 43)

The study of Marxism enriches revolutionary literature and art by avoiding feudal, bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois ideology, liberalism, individualism, nihilism, art for art's sake, and an aristocratic, decadent, pessimistic viewpoint (Tsetung, 1960, p. 43). Mao (1990) counsels revolutionary authors and artists to study living Marxism, the Marxism

that has a living relationship with social activity, as opposed to studying orthodox Marxism:

Many who have read Marxist books have become renegades from the revolution, whereas illiterate workers often grasp Marxism very well. Of course we should study Marxist books, but this study must be integrated with our country's actual conditions. We need books, but we must overcome book worship, which is divorced from the actual situation. (Oppose book worship, p. 27)

Marxism is a practical philosophical system. It develops via practice and endures through practice. Mao (1990) advocates applying Marxism to society to transform it rather than just studying it in books. To create revolutionary literature and art, revolutionary authors and artists should adhere to this concept while studying Marxism.

The creation of outstanding works of revolutionary literature and art does not require one to be a member of the communist party. Although he is not a member of the Communist Party, Lu Hsun is recognized as the most important revolutionary literary personality in the People's Republic of China. In his remarks at the gathering honoring the first anniversary of Lu Hsun's passing, Mao (1990) acknowledges:

Although he did not belong to the communist party organization, his thinking, actions, and writing were all Marxianized. He showed more and more youthful energy as his life drew to its end. He fought consistently and incessantly against feudal forces and imperialism. (On Lu Hsun, p. 88)

Although not being a member of the Chinese Communist Party, Lu Hsun's literary works are revolutionary and firmly rooted in the Marxist school of thought. His writings, which paved the way for the Chinese revolution, clearly reflect his accurate "political vision," "militancy," and "fearlessness" (Tsetung, 1990, On Lu Hsun, pp. 88-9). This exemplifies the true nature of revolutionary literature and art, the ideological weapon of the working class people in the class struggle.

Mao does not reject the legacy of the literature and art that belonged to the ancients and foreigners while arguing for revolutionary literature and art. Revolutionary literature and art can copy and incorporate "all the fine artistic and literary legacy" (Tsetung, 1960, p. 21) from the ancient and foreign literature and art, though they fall into the feudal or bourgeois category. Mao (1960) advises: "We must not reject the legacy of the ancients and the foreigners, even though it is feudal or bourgeois, or refuse to learn from them" (p. 22). Instead of letting them take the place of our creativity and

revolutionary substance, we should only use them to improve our revolutionary literature and art. Mao (1960) cautions: "The most sterile and harmful doctrinarism in art and literature consists in uncritically borrowing and copying from our predecessors and foreigners" (p. 22). Uncritical imitation and copying of the old and foreign feudal or bourgeois literature and art would be detrimental and destructive for any revolutionary literature and art. Revolutionary literature and art should be able to distinguish the wheat from the chaff while borrowing from both ancient and foreign literature and art.

### **Conclusions**

The historical materialist approach to literature and art is founded on the core concept of dialectical and historical materialism. The approach, also known as the Marxist approach to literature and art or the Marxist literary theory, is predicated on the central tenet of Marxism, namely that social existence dictates social consciousness. The economic base of every phase of human history serves as the foundation for the superstructure of each phase, which also includes literature and art. But, literature and art, the superstructure, also have an impact on the economic foundation, and, under some circumstances, they play a key and crucial role in bringing about social transformation. The Marxist literary theory observes the utility of any literature and art on the truthful reproduction of reality. The primary purpose of literature and art, according to the theory, should be to aid in bringing about social change, rather than just reflecting social reality. The Marxist literary theory believes in class-partisan literature and art and classifies them according to their affiliation with the ideologies of their respective classes. Though it favors revolutionary literature and art, it suggests borrowing some useful elements from other different types of literature and art. The theory defines revolutionary literature and art, which arouses revolutionary optimism in the readers and aids the working class people in the class struggle. The revolutionary literature and art are oriented toward the majority of working-class people in which all the dark forces that harm people are exposed and the revolutionary struggles of the people are extolled. The theory suggests revolutionary writers and artists are equipped with the knowledge of living Marxism and produce an effective piece of literature and art giving equal emphasis to its form and content. The article focuses on the historical materialist approach to overall literature, art and the general features of the revolutionary literature and art that the approach favors.

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