



UNDERSTANDING MARXISM AS A CRITICAL STUDY AND RESEARCH PARADIGM: A FRAMEWORK FOR A CRITIC IN LITERARY ANALYSIS

Robert M. Kashindiⁱ

Assistant Lecturer,
Université Catholique de Bukavu (UCB),
UNI-50 /Lwiro, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Abstract:

Marxism in Literary or Art in our 21st centuries is built around a debate of methodology and application when a critic is requested to evaluate a literary text or genre. Though disparities of thoughts in the point of views of some scholars such as: Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser etc. have been involved in scientific debates whether Marxism as a sociological approach finds a better reliable application in literature. Marxism as a political ideology of Karl Marx was not designed for literary study, literature in terms of form, politics, ideology, and consciousness, numbers of research skills are required for a critic in almost literary components. While the question of methodology and application in literary analysis is still unsettled in the areas of literary studies so, it appears very difficult and ambiguous to some literary students and English teachers in our local universities in Bukavu (DRC) when prior involving in literary evaluation. Furthermore, sometimes students get involved into confusion mixing theories of new literary criticism or traditional literary criticism for Marxist literary interpretation. The work has enriched the debate by suggesting a critic engaging into the Marxism analysis to base his interpretation framing linguistic features as observable phenomena in literature or art in all its form affecting characters' life flashing back to Karl Marx ideology of class struggle to avoid him draining into confusion of interweaving his analysis with either traditional or new literary school criticism. Determining the focus of literary theory according to the text and genre, classical categorization distinguishes between genres and their own sub-genres: poetry, plays, (drama), novels and short stories (fiction). Research must be focused with regards to the area of application of research paradigms. The common topics dealt with under the traditional literary criticism have been: Plot, Setting, and Narration, Point of View, Characterization, Symbol, Metaphor, Genre, Irony/Ambiguity. Such literary analyses have been useful for the discussion of the following issues: How the various components of an individual work relate to each other. The tradition has ignored to deal with a question *"how concepts and forms in literary works relate to larger political, social,*

ⁱ Correspondence: email robertmaendeleo@gmail.com

economic or religious context?" Stern (1983:472) assumes that the dissatisfactions and failures of literary teachers and students with a single method or lack of method in the interpretation of literary work have contributed to the constant critique of methods and the demand for new reform and emphasis. The paper raises a question, how should a critic evaluate a literary genre based on Marxist approach? Assessing this issue requires examining Marxism from ideology to theory and then to literary criticism to help a critic evaluate successfully the literary genre. The paper has applied literary criticism as a basically qualitative research involved in the analysis and argumentation of the present data. The finding reveals that, Marxism is not only an ideology, but also a postulate for a literary framework, so a critic to handle his analysis requires a mastery of deep understanding features or paradigms characterizing Marxist theory such as: socio-economic conflict, modes and means production, class struggle, oppression (oppressor/oppressed). The bourgeois/proletariat, domination (dominant/dominated), economic base/superstructure, materialism, capital and labor force, and how characters actions determine class struggle for societal progress. Marxism as theory flashes back to Karl Marx ideology of class struggle and how this affect characters in a literary genre as an insight for a critic to counter his /her textual framework analysis.

Keywords: Marxism, critic, literature, research, paradigm, framework

1. Introduction

Marxism is a method of socioeconomic political analysis that frames [capitalism](#) through a paradigm of exploitation, analyzes [class](#) relations and [social conflict](#) using a [materialist interpretation of historical development](#) and takes a [dialectical](#) view of social transformation. It originates from the works of 19th century German philosophers [Karl Marx](#) and [Friedrich Engels](#). Marxism uses a methodology known as [historical materialism](#) to analyze and critique the development of [capitalism](#) and the role of [class struggles](#) in systemic economic change. According to Marxian theory, class conflict arises in [capitalist societies](#) due to contradictions between the material interests of the oppressed [proletariat](#). Marxism as a literary research involves an analysis (analytical move of linguistic features).It is a part of an argument which involves the use of all kinds of data both primary (the text) and secondary as sources of evidence about the questions or hypotheses about features so as to support the statements in the argumentation. Marxism is a sociological approach to literature that viewed works of literature or art as the products of historical forces that can be analyzed by looking at the material conditions in which they were formed. In Marxist ideology, we often classify a world view as actually the articulations of the dominant class. Marxism generally focuses on the clash between the dominant and repressed classes in any given age and also may encourage art to imitate what is often termed an "objective" reality. Contemporary Marxism is much broader in its focus, and views art as reflective age in which it was produced as stated in (Abraham, p.178, Childers and Hentzi, pp.175-179), Karl Marx, Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams. While literary approaches are also

called critical approaches or theoretical approaches including historical, sociological, psychological, post-analytical, New Criticism, formalism, and structuralism, feminism, deconstruction, reader-response criticism and discourse approaches to texts, Marxist postulate appears to be far different from them. The present paper frames how Marxism serves as critical study for literary interpretation and how a critic should handle his analysis. There are attitudes that scholars who come in contact with literary production can have: either they read for entertainment or they read for understanding or comprehension. This attitude is borne by the sense known as common reader of literature who is far different from a critic. A critic, however, is a person known as a critical reader researcher whose attitude is the conception of the researcher methodology when it comes to literature. Dixon and Bartolussi (2011, 59) and Gottschalk (2008) assumed that literary studies are ailing and the remedy for this ailment is the application of scientific approach to them. Thus, the Marxist critic is expected to frame his analysis based on Marxist approach looking into a work of art as a product of a society in which it was borne and how class struggle conflict affect characters. Thus, the critic emphasis in the evaluation of the work of art is based on features characterizing Marxist theory such as: themes of socio-economic class conflict, labor force, oppression, domination, corruption. The Marxist critic views works of literature, as well as those works' forms and meanings, as products of particular social institutions that reflect a particular ideology of feudalism to capitalism modal of production.

2. Discussion

Following the investigation along with any of the above axes in Figure 1 and Figure 2 lead the literary scholar, or a critic to involve questions and issues:

- How does Marxism vector connect with literature?
- What is the relationship between literature and ideology?
- What the relationship between 'base', superstructure and literature?

The literary critic may encounter dilemma when it is to deal with a text embodying economic, political, issues and the relationship existing between forces characterizing them. Now there a Marxist critic has to confront these issues with a ground understanding of the context in which the art has been produced. Such contexts may include: domination, value, the economic base, superstructure, oppression as determinants of cultural and socio-economic political mode of production and interaction between class struggle forces as a reflection of the society the art presents.

First, Marxist ideology of "Class struggle" is a subject of analysis for [sociologists](#), [political scientists](#), [anthropologists](#) and [social historians](#). However, there is not a consensus on a definition of "class" and the term has a wide range of sometimes conflicting meanings. In common parlance, the term "social class" is usually synonymous with "[socio-economic](#) class", defined as "people having the same social,

economic, cultural, political or educational status", e.g., "the [working class](#)"; an emerging professional class.

Figure 1: Vectors in Marxist ideology as the reflection of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in Art or Literature

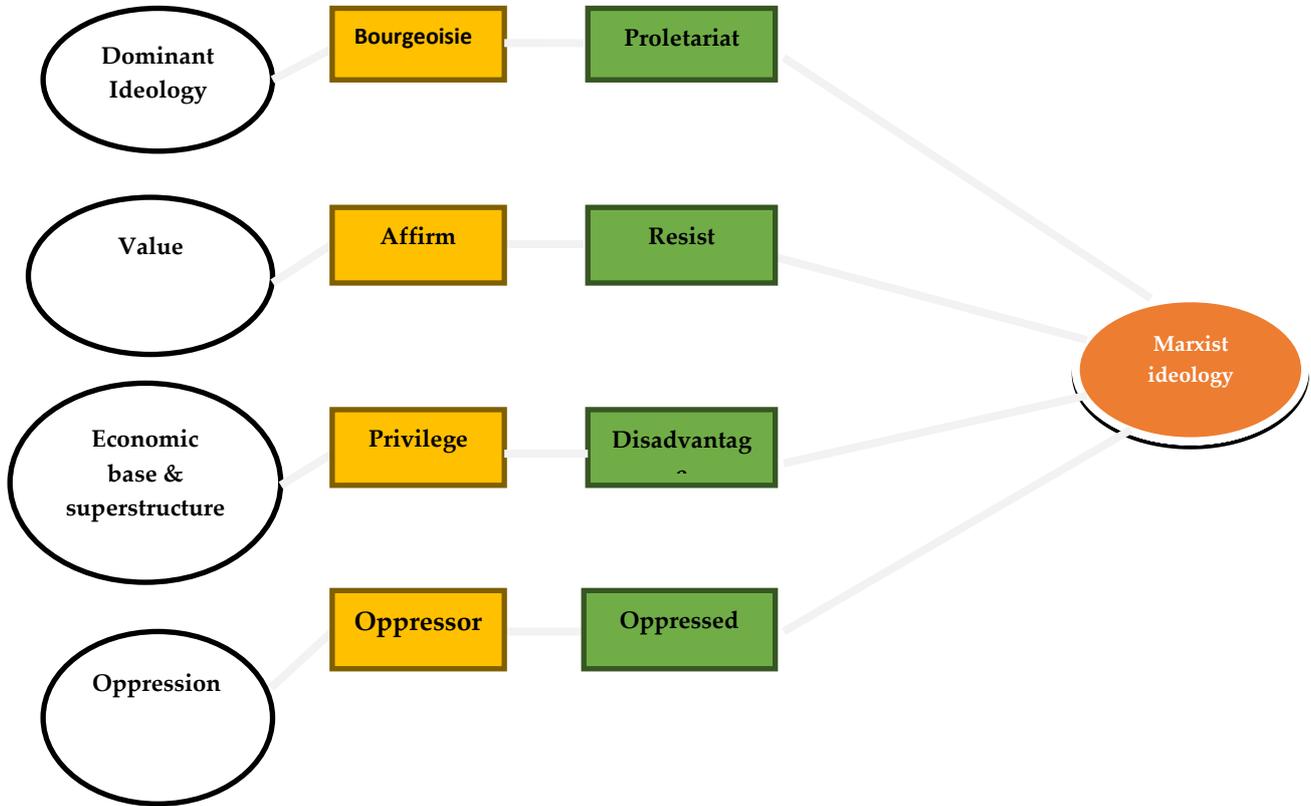


Figure 2: Marxism and literature



[Karl Marx](#) thought "class struggle" as the reflection of art is defined by one's relationship to the [means of production](#) (their [relations of production](#)). His simple understanding of classes in modern [capitalist society](#) are the [proletariat](#), those who work but do not own the means of production; and the [bourgeoisie](#), those who invest and live off of the surplus generated by the proletariat's operation of the [means of production](#). This contrasts with the view of the sociologist [Max Weber](#), who argued "class" is determined by economic position, in contrast to "[social status](#)". However a literary critic should understand that Marxism is not merely a 'sociology of literature' which concerns with how novels are published and whether they mention the working class. His aim is to explain the literary work more fully; this means a sensitive attention

to its forms, styles and meanings. But considering those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history in which characters in the art are determined by the production forces of ideas, concepts and consciousness engaging them into class conflict struggle that is directly interwoven with the material intercourse as language of real life. In the social production of their life, characters enter into definite stage of development of their will, relations of production forces which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces in which productive forces lie upon "exploiter and exploited". The sum total of vectors of Marxism constitutes the economic structure of the society and class struggle productive forces, as the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. Certain productive forces imply the organization of labor in the middle ages which involves the relation of villain to lord as known «feudalism". Now the production of new mode is based on a changed set of social relations between the capitalist class who owns those means of production, and the proletarian class whose labor –power the capitalist buys for profit. Taken together these "forces" and "relations" of production form what Marx calls the 'the economic structure of society '. From this economic base in every period, emerges a 'superstructure which a certain form of law and politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of social class which owns the means of economic production. However superstructure involves more than these: it also consists of definite forms of social consciousness (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on), which is what Marxism means as ideology. The function of ideology, also, is to legitimate the power of the ruling class in the society.

Second, to understand literature born from Marxist perspective, a critic should understand the total social process of which it is part. George Plekhanov states: The social mentality of an age is conditioned by the age's social relations. This is evident in the history of art and literature. Literature works are not mysteriously inspired in terms of their authors' psychology. Instead, they are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world as a social mentality and ideology. Ideology, in turn, is a product of the concrete social relations into which characters are not free to choose their social relations; they are forced into them by material necessity or by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production.

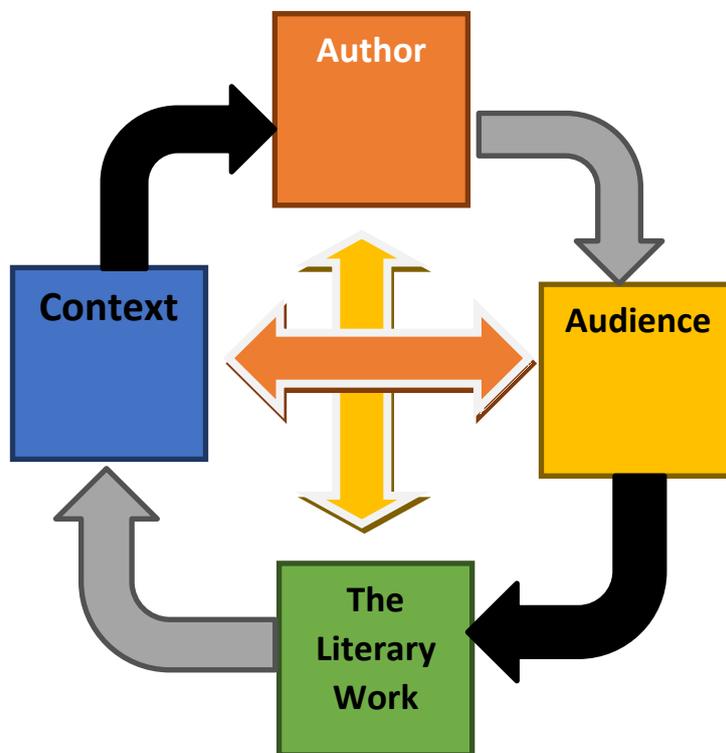
Third, it would be a mistake for a literary scholar to imply that Marxism criticism shifts mechanically from 'text' to ideology, to social relations, or to productive forces .It is concerned with the unity of these levels of society. Marx states that the economic situation is the basis, but various elements of superstructure including: political forms of class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by class after a successful battle, forms of laws and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of characters: political, legal, and philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma also exercise their influence upon the course of historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form.

Understanding the relationship existing between Marxist ideology and literature sounds relevant to discuss, then evaluating a literary work without knowing or understanding how do ideology and literature connect leads to a false interpretation, Friedrich Engels states that it is important here to grasp the precise meaning for Marxism of ideology. Ideology is not in the first place a set doctrines, it signifies the way men live out their roles in class–society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and to prevent them from a true knowledge of society. Marxism is ideological, while literature as an art springs from an ideological conception of the world. Engels’ remark suggests that art has more complex relationship to ideology than law and political theory, which more transparently embody the interest of a ruling class. The question, then, is what relationship art has to ideology.

This is not a simple question to answer, two possible arguments here are: One is that literature is nothing but ideology in certain artistic form that works of literature are just expressions of their time. Louis Althusser argues that art cannot be reduced to ideology: it has, rather, a particular relationship to it. Ideology signifies the imaginary ways in which is, of course, the kind of experience literature gives us too is what it feels like to live in particular conditions, rather than a conceptual analysis of those conditions. However, art does more than passively reflect that experience. It gives us the experience of the situation, which is equivalent to ideology and thus begins to move us towards that full understanding of ideology which is scientific knowledge. How literature can do with this is more fully developed by Pierre Macherey in his *Pour une théorie de la Production Littéraire* (1966) Macherey distinguishes between what he terms ‘illusion’ (meaning essentially, ideology), and fiction’ illusion –the ordinary ideological experience of men –is the material on which the writer goes to work; but in working on it he transforms it into something different, lends it a shape and structure. Ideology for a critic, is more than an amorphous body of free-floating images and ideas; in any society it has a certain structural coherence. Because it has such relative coherence, it can be the object of the scientific analysis; and since literary text belong to ideology, they too can be the object of such scientific analysis. A scientific criticism would seek to explain the literary work in terms of the ideological structure of which it is part, yet which it transforms in its art; it would search out the principle which both ties the work to ideology. Marx adopts that forms are historically determined by the kind of ‘content’ they have to embody; they are changed, transformed, broken down and revolutionized as that content its self-changes .Content is in this sense prior to ‘form’ just as for Marxism it is changes in society’s material ‘content’, its mode of production, which determine the ‘forms’ of its superstructure. Given such a distinctive relationship, **Marxist critic would consider the literary works from their ideological content and relating this directly to the class struggle or the economic basis.** What does it imply to say that literary form is ideological? Leon Trotsky maintains in *Literature and Revolution*, the relationship between form and content is determined by the fact that new form is resulted from its social roots. This is not an easy task since an ideology is never a simple reflection of a ruling class’s ideas it is always as a complex

phenomenon, which may incorporate conflicting, even contradictory, views of the world. To understand an ideology in art, we must analyze the précised relations between different classes struggle in the art and to do that means grasping the unit **features** of Marxism where those **classes in struggle stand in relation to the mode of production**. All these may seem a challenging task for a literary scholar who thinks that he was merely required to discuss plot and setting, metaphor etc; this may appear as confusion of literary criticism with disciplines like political class struggle and economic base and superstructure on which a literary critic should handle his research analysis by approaching a literary work either qualitatively or quantitatively based on linguistic features as observable phenomena affecting characters' life in art.

Figure 2: Marxist literary research questioning, analyzing, and hypothesizing



Considering investigation along any one of the above axes leads the literary critic to involve in questions and issues about clusters; author, context, literary work and audience in categories of Marxist theory: the formal features of literature on which the investigation is to be carried are based on the interactions between any two or more of the four clusters. The above clusters in the field of literary research require a paradigm shift to empirical investigation. This also implies the use of a method for the study of literary phenomena. In addition to that, literary criticism when conducted by informed reader is scientific when its development follows the scientific method. Thus, Marxist literary critical texts exhibit **some specific features** that distinguish them from other texts of the mega genre and that distinguish the sub-genre within a genre and applicable theories such as: Archetypal, Feminist, Reader-Response, post-structuralism ect. To highlight this, one should refer to the analysis of a topic by fostering on **aspects**

of literary criticism as paradigms the literary work has developed. Besides, Marxist literary aspects choice focus, Hashim suggests three types of research designs: qualitative, quantitative and mixed design, each one having the possibility of presenting variations research data findings. **Qualitative** consists of library research and textual analysis based on selected theory or framework, while, **Quantitative** research consists of using statistical data gathered from texts or respondents and Mix method consists of both qualitative and quantitative in the analysis of literary work.

Steps for analytical process for Marxist features or aspects as observable linguistic phenomena in literature or any form of Art for both qualitative and quantitative data research paradigms (Powell-Taylor & Temple and Renner, 2003)

Figure 3: Analysis Process

Steps	Activities
Get to know your data	Examine
Focusing the analysis	
Categorize the information	Identify themes and patterns (features)
Identify patterns and connections between categories	Descriptions within categories from smaller : Set relative importance of categories ;Identify relationships between categories
Interpretation	List the key findings; outline the key findings ,use displays to represent your findings

Marxist critical study paradigm is not merely a literary theory, but can be extended to literature for analysis of a literary text based on certain criteria. The main features under critical study include see proposed fig below:

Figure 4: Features (Patterns) of Marxist research on linguistic paradigms

Main Features of Marxist Literary theory

Oppression	Class distinction	Socialism
Bourgeoisie	Class conflict	Fascism
Proletariat	Gender	Political Structure
Class Struggle	Exploitation	Social Structure
Ruling Class	Racism	Power
Working Class	Poverty	Domination
Inequalities	Dictatorship	Revolution
		injustice
		Justice
		Fairness
Culture	Democracy	Liberalization
		Slavery
Economic power	Communism	Freedom
Societal power	Capitalism	

Following an investigation on Marxist criticism applicable method is required to literary texts to understand phenomena based on selected features in the work of art. Criticism may be applied by a critic either being qualitative or quantitative. The use of

Qualitative and Quantitative paradigm to analyzing features or linguistics aspects or phenomena in a text are surely applicable. (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980, 1999)

Marxist critics:

- Make a division between the “Overt”(manifest or surface) and “covert” (latent or hidden)content of a literary work;
- Relate the content of a work to social-class status of the author;
- Explain the nature of a whole literary genre in terms of the social period which has produced it;
- Relate a literary work to social assumptions of the time in which it is consumed or read;
- Look for symbols that create or reveal an individual versus exploited system; oppressive culture “theme”, individual as dehumanized, mechanized, robotized, zombieified only serving.

To guide his analysis, Marxist critic from different critical trends such as Moralism, Formalism, Feminism, Psychoanalytic criticism, Cultural Criticism, Structural Criticism, Post-structuralism, Archetypal Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Sociological Criticism, Author Intention, Biological criticism, Socio-political Criticism, generally works in areas covered by the following typical questions:

- Whom does it benefit if the work or effort is accepted, successful, believed etc.?
- What is the social class of the author?
- Which class does the work claim to represent?
- What values does it reinforce?
- What values does it subvert?
- What conflict can be seen between the values the work champions and those it portrays?
- What social classes do the characters represent?
- How do characters from different classes interact or conflict?
- Does the Story address societal issues?
- What does the work say about economic or social power? Who has it and who doesn't? Any Marxist learning evident?
- Does the story address issues of economic exploitation? What role does material play?
- How economic conditions determine the direction of characters' lives?
- Can the protagonist's struggle be seen as symbolic of a larger class struggle?
- How does the microcosm (small world) story reflect the macrocosm (large world) of the society in which it was born?
- Do any of the characters correspond to types of society, government such as a dictatorship, democracy, communism, socialism, fascism, etc? What attitudes toward these political structures, systems are expressed in the work? Does the text reflect a dominant class? Does the main character in the narrative reflect bourgeoisie value? Whose class gets told in the story? Are lower economic groups ignored or devalued?

- What does the setting tell the critic about the distribution of power and wealth?
- Does the society that is depicted value things for their usefulness.
- Does this text make the critic aware of his own acceptance of any social, economic or political practices that involve control or oppression?
- Illustrative descriptive example: Whom does it benefit?

Based on theory of Karl Marx (and so influenced by philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel), the analysis is based on class differences, economic and otherwise, as well as the implications and complications of the capitalist system: *"Marxism attempts to reveal the ways in which our socioeconomic system is the ultimate source of our experience."* (Tyson, 277) Theorists working in the Marxist tradition, therefore, are interested in answering the overarching question, whom does it benefit (power, oppression, inequalities, exploitation, conflict, policy, etc). The elite, Middle Class, Working class? Marxist critics or Literary Scholars are interested also in finding response on how the lower or working classes are oppressed in literature or art. Marx asserts that *"...stable societies develop sites of resistance: contradictions built into social system that ultimately leads to social revolution. This cycle of contradiction, tension, and revolution are based on conflict between the upper, middle and lower (working) classes as a reflection of society in literature and other forms of expression-art, music, movies, etc."*

The study of features, aspects or linguistic phenomena in literature such as; conflict classes will lead to an insight upheaval search of source to revolution, oppressed characters and form the ground work or frame the analysis based on new order of society and economic base.

To understand the nature of the society in literature requires for a Marxist critic to understand the economic base reflecting its characters. However, Marxist literary criticism cannot be handled far from or out of Marx ideology. Marx and Angles state that *"...class struggle is an ongoing historical reality"*. Main features include the idea that ruling classes keep power through ideology. Marxist literary analysis aims to uncover the illustrations or mystifications that the ruling class uses to maintain its control.

The Illustrative example of Marxist criticism may be studied on Animal Farm of George Orwell in which the ruling class representing power is a subject to exploitation, corruption, manipulation, domination over working animals involving them into hard work, misery and depriving them from food and wage, while the ruling class is more concerned with luxuries as a result to dreadful conflict and animal revolution. On another hand, the working class is a subject to hardship, misery, poverty, etc. The Upper class profits from labor force getting richer while the exploited ones draining in miserably extreme poverty. This evidence in George Orwell literature portrays different classes with economic base conflict.

Before discussing the features of Marxist theory of literature, it is important for the critic to get a brief back ground of beliefs that shape these features. Marxist criticism is based on the assumptions that consciousness (language, politics, economy etc) follow existence basically this means that we are born first and then we develop knowledge and awareness about ourselves. Our consciousness is developed based on type of

environment that we exist in. Then if the consciousness is superior then, the consciousness developed will be superior and vice versa.

Marxist Critics should believe that at birth people are equal but are distorted by their environments (political, social, or cultural system). Then Literature at this level is a mirror which reflects social realities to communicate the status of the Oppressors' "Reactionary narrative" or challenge the status of oppressed "Progressive narrative". To this end, the features that Marxist theory of literature would attempt to critically analyze and grasp are:

- Classes as exhibited by the literary work;
- Literary form whether reactionary or progressive;
- Political views guiding literature.

Marxist theory of literature, or literary concepts and assumptions arising from Marxist paradigm, is a social theory in the form of discourse based on the studies of German Philosopher and theorist Karl Heinrich Marx. However, **aesthetic and artistic** elements are less important. The historical social and political meaning of characters events are considered more important. The author's social class, his social conditions, and his ideology and interpretation of the social and historical background of his time are also significant for the study.

Marxist critic mainly focuses his analysis on attitude towards class struggle, class distinction and class conflict, obvious or hidden, represented in the literary text as viewed in (Raymond Williams, Marxist Critic, 547). On question, how research is conducted in literature framing Marxist postulate?

The answer to this question is simple to critic. First, the critic should investigate on whether literature reveals Marxist features above such as oppressive and inequalities, and how critical reading of the novel or any form of art reflect socioeconomic class based conflict. In the study, the critic collects his material through a coding scheme based on Marxist reading features .The features are discussed and analyzed from the novel regarding inequality power relationship, class struggle, socio-economic base conflict etc to understand the relationship existing between characters in literature or art. In relation to the literary analysis, practical implications and possibilities are discussed and considered. Thus, a number of conclusions are drawn from the analysis in the study.

As Terry Eagleton states: Marxism is not just an alternative technique for interpreting literature for the purpose of aesthetic judgment. It analysis literature instead in terms of conditions which produce it, and its needs. This means that Marxist critic is expected in literature to analyze, interpret and judge the work of art framing features developed in the art. The writer translates social fact into a reality. But this reality is not the special existence of an individual but the social background of which he is a product.

One of the basic assumptions of Marxism for critical study is that "force of production", among classes in art, the way goods and services are produced in capitalist society, will inevitably generate conflict which is conditioned by labor force

and unequal distribution of economic resources among classes and who profit from them or does not. More specifically, the struggle will take place between the bourgeoisie classes, who control the means of production by owning the natural and human resources and the proletariat class supplies the labor that allows the owners to make profit. The dominant class, using its power to make the pre-veiling system seems to be logical, natural and catches the proletariat into holding the sense of identity and worth that the bourgeoisie wants them to hold, one that allow the power in control. Marx refers class conflict as a product of struggle between opposites generated by contradictions inherent all events, ideas, actions, of the characters. A critic in this view should depict aspects of socio-economic base class conflict, unjust system, to realize how the working class is controlled by the oppressive bourgeoisie, self-appointed elite and how the attitude of the working class is developed to overturn the superstructure.

As Marxist literature reflects class struggle, Marxist critic thinks how often the quest for **wealth or poverty** traditionally defines characters. So, Marxist critic will view literature not as a work created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products of the economic class base conflict and specific Marxist ideological determinant features to that era in art (Abram 149). Doing so, the critic in his framework will reflect Marxism not only as an ideology, but also a postulate essential and research paradigm in literary criticism and analysis.

3. Conclusion

The present paper has examined Marxism from sociopolitical ideological view point of Karl Marx to literary framework analysis and how the ideology should reflect literary research paradigm. For literary critic the question of methodology in literary criticism and analysis has always been a dilemma when it requires shifting from traditional form of literary analysis such as: Plot, Characterization, setting or other new literary school criticism such as :Moralism, Formalism, Feminism, Psychoanalytic criticism, Cultural Criticism, Structural Criticism, Post-structuralism, Archetypal Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Sociological Criticism, Author Intention, Biological criticism, Socio-political Criticism to literature addressing socio-economic base, political, class struggle or materialism, conflict etc. in Art by literary students or teachers in our local institutions of higher education in Bukavu. Then Marxist literary critic should not base his analysis on aesthetic judgment, like **The Honeymoon**. Instead, the work has suggested to a critic to focus on Marxist linguistic features as research paradigm phenomena on which a critic may ground his analysis from historical conditions the art was born.

The present study has used qualitative research to ground this analysis .Though Marxism was not designed for the interpretation of literature, but as a socio-political approach. The finding reveals that literature is an expression and reflection of a society, then a better place for Marxism application is in literature. Thus, Marxist literary critic to guide his research requires a ground understanding of Marxist features or linguistic

aspects observable phenomena in art from Marx ideology to frame his analysis. So, there is enough thorough investigation of the issue that indicates the usefulness and validity of its method and application in literature either **qualitatively or quantitatively** as literary research paradigms in ELT.

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