the water or ship that takes Ulysses away when he speaks of death; therefore, water
is his eternal fate. In the beginning of the poem, he speaks of being an idle king
among these barren crags,” suggesting that his life now is without water, dying, desolate,
desert. Without water he cannot live, just as without duty and adventure he refuses to
out it is the water that continually sails him off to death. The duty, or the water of his
the very thing that gives him life.
Ulysses also makes many references to the elements of the sky. He mentions rain, sun,
moon, and sunsets, all of which are in reference to light in some kind of darkness. First,
so, “and vile it were / For some three suns to store and hoard myself, / And this gray
drowning in desire / To follow knowledge like a sinking star.” Hiding behind the sun
or following his dreams and pursuing further knowledge are repugnant to him. Just as
fall, his knowledge will also fall from his memory. He also uses the image “The long
mes; the slow moon climbs” to indicate the approach of death. Each of the refer-
to elements of the sky is a description of Ulysses’ inevitable end, his final adventure.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson used many elements in his approach to the topic of death in his
“Ulysses.” Not only does the voice of Ulysses echo the three parts of the Jungian
soul, anima, and persona, but it also uses references to death as water and sky to speak
with. Ulysses argues with himself that despite age and fate, the truly heroic spirit never
is through these universal symbols that Tennyson is able to completely capture the
soul of a dying hero. The memory of him will always be present, just like the water,
moon, and stars.

The Marxist analysis has got nothing to do with what hap­
pened in Stalin’s Russia: it’s like blaming Jesus Christ for the
Inquisition in Spain.

Tony Benn, British Labor politician

A comment that has made the rounds of many English departments over the past few
years is that since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent opening of Russia to
the West, Marxism has died a quiet death—except in English departments, where it
is still alive and well. Even if it weren’t for China and some other places in the world
where Marxist theory is securely in place, the remark would be inaccurate, but it does
point to the lasting viability of Marxist literary criticism, which continues to appeal
to many readers and critics. It is interesting to note, however, that the principles of
Marxism were not designed to serve as a theory about how to interpret texts. Instead,
they were meant to be a set of social, economic, and political ideas that would, accord­
ing to their followers, change the world. They are the basis of a system of thought that
sees inequitable economic relationships as the source of class conflict. That conflict
is the mechanism by which Western society developed from feudalism to capitalism,
which, according to Marxism, will eventually give way to socialism, the system that
will characterize world economic relationships. Since its inception, Marxist theory
has provided a revolutionary way of understanding history.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Marxism has a long and complicated history. Although it is often thought of as a
twentieth-century phenomenon, partly because it was the basis of the social-
governmental system of the Soviet Union, it actually reaches back to the thinking
of Karl Heinrich Marx, a nineteenth-century (1818–1883) German philosopher and
economist. The first announcement of his nontraditional way of seeing things ap­
peared in The German Ideology in 1845. In it he introduced the concept of dialectical
materialism, argued that the means of production controls a society’s institutions and beliefs, and contended that history is progressing toward the eventual triumph of communism. When Marx met the political economist Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) in Paris in 1844, and they discovered that they had arrived at similar views independent of each other, they decided to collaborate to explain the principles of communism (later called Marxism) and to organize an international movement. These ideas were expounded in the Communist Manifesto (1848), in which they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history and anticipated that it would lead to a revolution in which the workers would overthrow the capitalists, take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government to distribute fairly. With these events, class distinctions would disappear. In the three-volume work Das Kapital (1867), Marx argued that history is determined by economic conditions and urged an end to private ownership of public utilities, transportation, and the means of production. Despite the variations and additions that have occurred in the century that followed, on the whole, Marx’s writings still provide the theory of economics, sociology, history, politics, and religious belief called Marxism.

Although Marxism was not designed as a method of literary analysis, its principles were applied to literature early on. Even in Russia, where literature was sometimes accepted as a means of productive critical dialogue and at other times viewed as a threat if it did not promote party ideology, literature was linked to the philosophical principles set down by Marx and Engels. Although its place was uncertain and shifting—culminating finally in the Soviet Writer’s Union, founded (and headed) by Joseph Stalin to make certain that literature promoted socialism, Soviet actions, and its heroes—it was apparent that Marxism provided a new way of reading and understanding literature.

The first major Marxist critic, however, appeared outside of Russia. He was Georg Lukács (1885–1971), a Hungarian critic who was responsible for what has become known as reflectionism. Named for the assumption that a text will reflect the society that has produced it, the theory is based on the kind of close reading advocated by formalists but now practiced for the purpose of discovering how characters and their relationships typify and reveal class conflict, the socioeconomic system, or the politics of the time and place. Such examination, goes the assumption, will in the end lead to an understanding of that system and the worldview, the weltanschauung, of the author. Also known as vulgar Marxism, reflection theory should not be equated with the traditional historical approach to literary analysis, for the former seeks not just to find surface appearances provided by factual details but to determine the nature of a given society, to find “a truer, more concrete insight into reality” and look for “the full process of life.” In the end, the reflectionists attribute the fragmentation and alienation that they discover to the ills of capitalism.

Another important figure in the evolution of Marxism is the Algerian-born French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918–1990), whose views were not entirely consonant with those of Lukács. Whereas Lukács saw literature as a reflection of a society’s consciousness, Althusser asserted that the process can go in the other way. In short, literature and art can affect society, even lead it to revolution. Building on Antonio Gramsci’s idea that the dominant class controls the views of the people by many means, one of which is the arts, Althusser agreed that the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant one, a process he called interpellation. One way that capitalism maintains its control over the working classes is by reinforcing its ideology through its arts. Althusser went on to point out, however, that the arts of the privileged are not all the arts that exist. There remains the possibility that the working class will develop its own culture, which can lead to revolution and the establishment of a new hegemony, or power base. Althusser’s ideas are referred to as production theory.

Marxism established itself as part of the American literary scene with the economic depression of the 1930s. Writers and critics alike began to use Marxist interpretations and evaluations of society in their work. As new journals dedicated to pursuing this new kind of social and literary analysis sprang up, it became increasingly important to ask how a given text contributed to the solution of social problems based on Marxist principles. Eventually the movement grew strong enough to bring pressures to bear on writers to conform to the vision, resulting in a backlash of objection to such absolutism from such critics as Edmund Wilson in “Marxism and Literature” in 1938.

Currently two of the best-known Marxist critics are Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton. Jameson is known for the use of Freudian ideas in his practice of Marxist criticism. Whereas Freud discussed the notion of the repressed unconscious of the individual, Jameson talks about the political unconscious, the exploitation and oppression buried in a work. The critic, according to Jameson, seeks to uncover those buried forces and bring them to light. Eagleton, a British critic, is difficult to pin down, as he continues to develop his thinking. Of special interest to critics is his examination of the interrelations between ideology and literary form. The constant in his criticism is that he sets himself against the dominance of the privileged class. Both Jameson and Eagleton have responded to the influence of poststructuralism, and in the case of the latter, it resulted in a radical shift of direction in the late 1970s. (For definitions and a discussion of poststructuralism, see chapter 8.)

In some ways Jameson and Eagleton are typical of the mixture of schools in literary criticism today. For instance, it is not uncommon to find psychoanalytic ideas in the writing of a feminist critic, or postcolonial (see chapter 10) notions influencing a Marxist. As groups that share an active concern for finding new ways of understanding what we read and the lives we live, their interaction is not surprising. The borrowing back and forth may make it difficult to define discrete schools of literary analysis, but in practice it makes the possibilities for literary analysis all the richer.

READING FROM A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

To understand the discussion that follows, you will need to read the short story "The Diamond Necklace," by Guy de Maupassant, which begins on page 243.

Many of the principles of Marxism and the approach to literary criticism that it spawned have already been mentioned in the brief historical survey you just read.
Now it will be helpful to examine them in more detail and to see how they can be applied to literary texts.

ECONOMIC POWER

According to Marx, the moving force behind human history is its economic systems, for people’s lives are determined by their economic circumstances. A society, he says, is shaped by its “forces of production,” the methods it uses to produce the material elements of life. The economic conditions underlying the society are called material circumstances, and the ideological atmosphere they generate is known as the historical situation. This means that to explain any social or political context, any event or product, it is first necessary to understand the material and historical circumstances in which they occur.

In Guy de Maupassant’s short story “The Diamond Necklace,” we are given a clear picture of a society that has unequally distributed its goods or even the means to achieve them. Madame Loisel has no commodity or skills to sell, only her youth and beauty to be used to attract a husband. Without access to those circles where she can find a man with wealth and charm, she is doomed to stay in a powerless situation with no way to approach the elegant lifestyle that she desires. The material circumstances of her society have relegated her to a dreary existence from which she can find no exit. Her husband is so conditioned to accept the situation that he does not understand her hunger to be a part of a more glamorous and elegant world. He is content with potpie for his supper because he has been socially constructed to want nothing else.

The way in which society provides food, clothing, shelter, and other such necessities creates among groups of social relations that become the foundation of the culture. In other words, the means of production structures the society. Capitalism, for example, divides people into those who own property and thereby control the means of production, the bourgeoisie, and those who are controlled by them, the proletariat, the workers whose labor produces their wealth. (Although in American society today we have come to use the term bourgeoisie to mean “middle class,” it originally designated the owners and the self-employed as opposed to wage earners.) Because those who control production have a power base, they have many ways to ensure that they will maintain their position. They can manipulate politics, government, education, the arts and entertainment, news media—all aspects of the culture—to that end.

The division of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the society depicted in “The Diamond Necklace” is firmly established and maintained. Mme. Loisel’s husband is a “lowly clerk,” and although she has a wealthy friend from her convent days, she has none of the attentions of her husband-clerk, and her friend’s interest in the necklace apparently extends no further than the fact that it is impressive evidence of her wealth, for she substitutes glass for the real thing. When the acquisition of things that possess sign value and/or exchange value becomes extreme, an individual can be said to practicing conspicuous consumption.

Because the economic system shapes the society, the methods of production are known as the base. The social, political, and ideological systems and institutions it acquire the money to pay off their loans. Because of the debts owed to the bourgeoisie, incurred because of the loss of the necklace owned by Mme. Loisel’s well-to-do friend, they sink lower and lower in the social scale, losing what little hold they once had on social position or physical comfort. In the end, Mme. Loisel has become old and unkempt, unrecognizable to her friend. And in the most unjust irony of all, she learns after ten years that her efforts have been in vain. The bourgeoisie has tricked her once again by lending her a necklace not of diamonds but of cut glass.

Marx saw history as progressive and inevitable. Private ownership, he said, began with slavery, then evolved into feudalism, which was largely replaced by capitalism by the late eighteenth century. Evident in small ways as early as the sixteenth century, capitalism became a fully developed system with the growing power of the bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century. At every stage it had negative consequences because it was a flawed system that involved maintaining the power of a few by the repression of many. The result was ongoing class struggle, such as the one depicted the “The Diamond Necklace” between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The Marxist, then, works to reveal the internal contradictions of capitalism so that the proletariat will recognize their subjugation and rise up to seize what is rightfully theirs. As he states in a famous passage from The Communist Manifesto, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!” Although Mme. Loisel makes no move to create a revolution, she is keenly aware of the source of her sufferings. As she tells her affluent friend, who is “astonished to be so familiarly addressed by this common personage,” “I have had some hard days since I saw you; and some miserable ones—and all because of you—”. The fall of the bourgeoisie and the victory of the proletariat Marx deemed to be “equally inevitable,” and the new system born of such a revolution would be a classless society in which everyone would have equal access to its goods and services, such as food, education, and medical care.

Some of the damage caused by the economics of capitalism, according to Marxists, is psychological. In its need to sell more goods, capitalism preys on the insecurities of consumers, who are urged to compete with others in the number and quality of their possessions: a newer car, a bigger diamond engagement ring, a second house. The result is commodification, an attitude of valuing things not for their utility (use value) but for their power to impress others (sign value) or for their resale possibilities (exchange value). Each Mine. Loisel and her wealthy friend are victims of their society’s emphasis on sign value. The former is so dazzled by the glitter of jewels and gowns and fashionable people that she can find little happiness in the humble attentions of her husband-clerk, and her friend’s interest in the necklace apparently extends no further than the fact that it is impressive evidence of her wealth, for she substitutes glass for the real thing. When the acquisition of things that possess sign value and/or exchange value becomes extreme, an individual can be said to practicing conspicuous consumption.

Because the economic system shapes the society, the methods of production are known as the base. The social, political, and ideological systems and institutions it
generates—the values, art, legal processes—are known as the superstructure. Because the dominant class controls the superstructure, they are by extension able to control the members of the working classes. There is not complete agreement among Marxists as to whether the superstructure simply reflects the base or whether it can also affect the base. The group known as reflectionists, who subscribe to what is called vulgar Marxism, see the superstructure as formed by the base, making literature (and other such products) a mirror of the society’s consciousness. In a capitalist society it would exhibit the alienation and fragmentation that, according to the Marxists, the economic system produces. Controlled by the bourgeoisie, texts may, at least superficially, glamorize the status quo in order to maintain a stable division of power and means. Readers may not be aware of manipulation, especially when it appears in the form of entertainment, but it is no less effective for its subtle presentation.

Other Marxists, who assume that the superstructure is capable of shaping the base, recognize that literature (and art, entertainment, and such) can be a means for the working class to change the system. By promoting their own culture, they can create a new superstructure and eventually a different base. Even Marx and Engels admitted that some aspects of the superstructure, such as philosophy and art, are “relatively autonomous,” making it possible to use them to alter ideologies.

The economic base in “The Diamond Necklace” is significant to all that is depicted in the story. Mme. Loisel’s husband is a clerk whose employers have power over his professional life and their social relationships with him also reflect that power. They lead very different kinds of lives. The bourgeoisie give elegant parties while the clerk and his wife eat potpie. He is not expected to fraternize with his betters except by the rare invitation (so eagerly sought after by him) that comes his way. And on such occasions it is with difficulty that Mme. Loisel can achieve the appropriate appearance—dress, jewels, wrap. As they take on less attractive jobs to pay back what is owed, they are even less acceptable in the corridors of wealth and power. In the end, Mme. Loisel’s friend does not even recognize her.

**Class Conflict**

One of the basic assumptions of Marxism is that the “forces of production,” the way goods and services are produced, will, in a capitalist society, inevitably generate conflict between social classes, which are created by the way economic resources are used and who profits from them. More specifically, the struggle will take place between the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production by owning the natural and human resources, and the proletariat, who supply the labor that allows the owners to make a profit. The conflict is sometimes realized as a clash of management and labor, sometimes simply as friction between socioeconomic classes. They are two parts of a whole that struggle against each other, not just physically but also ideologically. Marx referred to this confrontation as dialectical materialism. Actually the term includes more than class conflict, for it refers to the view that all change is the product of the struggle between opposites generated by contradictions inherent in all events, ideas, and movements. A thesis collides with its antithesis, finally reaching synthesis, which generates its own antithesis, and so on, thereby producing change.

The Marxist is aware that the working class does not always recognize the system in which it has been caught. The dominant class, using its power to make the prevailing system seem to be the logical, natural one, entraps the proletariat into holding the sense of identity and worth that the bourgeoisie wants them to hold, one that will allow the powerful to remain in control. Monsieur Loisel, for instance, is content with his lot. He aspires to no more than he has and has difficulty understanding his wife’s dreams. As for Mme. Loisel, she longs for things that “most other women in her situation would not have noticed.” She believes herself born for luxuries—that is, a misplaced member of the middle class. They both experience the consequent debilitation and alienation described by Marx. Before the loss of the necklace, M. Loisel is given little credit for what he does. As a “minor clerk” he has little personal connection to
his labor and is given no credit for what he produces. After the loss, the situation is intensified, for the couple are finally shut out of all social contact with bourgeois society. In the end Mme. Loisel moves to carry out what Marx calls upon the proletariat to do. She realizes that her life has been controlled by others. Freed of the debt she has owed her wealthy friend, she determines to free herself of the social enslavement to her by speaking openly and honestly at last. In doing so, she becomes painfully aware of the unsuspected depth of the control the latter has had over her. The necklace is false. She has been stripped of her dreams and forced to suffer for nothing. Finally, by speaking clearly she engages in revolution by refusing to want any longer what the bourgeoisie values.

ART, LITERATURE, AND IDEOLOGIES

Ideology is a term that turns up frequently in Marxist discussions. It refers to a belief system produced, according to Marxists, by the relations between the different classes in a society, classes that have come about because of the modes of production in the society. An ideology can be positive, leading to a better world for the people, or it can be negative, serving the interests of a repressive system. The latter rarely presents itself as an ideology, however. Instead, it appears to be a reasonable, natural worldview, because it is in the self-interest of those in power to convince people that it is so. Even a flawed system must appear to be a success. An ideology, dictated by the dominant class, functions to secure its power. When such cultural conditioning leads people to accept a system that is unfavorable for them without protest or questioning, that is, to accept it as the logical way for things to be, they have developed a false consciousness. Marxism works to rid society of such deceptions by exposing the ideological failings that have been concealed. It takes responsibility for making people aware of how they have unconsciously accepted the subservient, powerless roles in their society that have been prescribed for them by others.

Marx himself was a well-educated, widely read German intellectual who could discourse on the poetry, fiction, and drama of more than a single culture. He enjoyed the theater and frequently made references to literature of all kinds. He was aware, however, that art and literature are an attractive and effective means of convincing the proletariat that their oppression is just and right. Literature is a particularly powerful tool for maintaining the social status quo because it operates under the guise of being entertainment, making it possible to influence an audience even when its members are unaware of being swayed. Because it does not seem to be didactic, it can lead people to accept an unfavorable socioeconomic system and to affirm their place in it as the proper one. By doing so, it serves the economic interests of those who are in power. Marx points out that controlling what is produced is not difficult, because those who create art must flatter (or not offend) their clients who pay for it—the bourgeoisie.

Although Marxist views about literature coexist comfortably with the principles of some other schools of criticism, they stand in direct opposition to the concerns of the Formalists, for Marxist critics see a literary work not as an aesthetic object to be experienced for its own intrinsic worth but as a product of the socioeconomic aspects of a particular culture. Marxists generally accept, then, that critics must do more than explain how a work conforms to certain literary conventions or examine its aesthetic qualities. Marxist critics must be concerned with identifying the ideology of a work and pointing out its worth or its deficiencies. The good Marxist critic is careful to avoid the kind of approach that concerns itself with form and craft at the expense of examining social realities.

Instead, she will search out the depiction of inequities in social classes, an imbalance of goods and power among people, or manipulation of the worker by the bourgeoisie, and she will point out the injustice of that society. If a text presents a society in which class conflict has been resolved, all people share equally in power and wealth, and the proletariat has risen to its rightful place, then the critic can point to a text in which social justice has taken place, citing it as a model of social action. In the former instance, the Marxist critic operates a warning system that alerts readers to social wrongs; in the latter, he is a mentor to the proletariat, pointing out how they can free themselves from the powerlessness in position in which they have been placed. The intent of both approaches is highly political, aimed as they are at replacing existing systems with socialist ones. The function of literature is to make the populace aware of social ills and sympathetic to action that will wipe those ills away.

The ideology that a text inevitably carries can be found in either its content or its form. That is, a text has both subject matter and a manner of presentation that can either promote or criticize the historical circumstance in which it is set. To many Marxists, it is content that is the more significant of the two. The “what” is more revealing than the “how.”

The “what” is important because it overtly expresses an ideology, a particular view of the social relations of its time and place. It may support the prevailing ideology of the culture, or it can actively seek to show the ideologies' shortcomings and failings. It can strengthen a reader's values or reveal their flaws through characters and events and editorial comment.

If the subject matter is presented sympathetically, it depicts the social relationships—laws, customs, and values—that are approved by that society, in a way that legitimizes them and, by extension, the underlying economic system that has produced them. On the other hand, it criticizes the prevailing ideology, it can be equally powerful and persuasive. By depicting the negative aspects of a socioeconomic system—injustice, oppression, and alienation—literature can awaken those who are unfavorably treated by it. It can make them aware that they are not free, that they (the working class) are controlled by the oppressive bourgeoisie, a self-appointed elite. It can be a means of changing the superstructure and the base because it can arouse people to resist their treatment and overthrow unfair systems. At the very least, it can make social inequities and imbalances of power public knowledge.

What is the ideology expressed by the content of "The Diamond Necklace"? It is doubtful that de Maupassant wrote the story to foment revolution among his countrymen, but in it the destructive power of the cool lack of concern of the bourgeoisie for the proletariat is unmistakably depicted. The minor clerk and his wife are almost
beneath notice to those who employ them, and the lower the couple falls in their ability to live well, or comfortably, or to survive at all, the less visible or recognizable they become. The denial of beautiful clothes and jewels to Mme. Loisel (while they are available to others no more deserving than she), and the suffering that such inequities cause her, carry with them a clear social commentary. Such a society is uncaring and unjust. It exists on assumptions that allow the powerful to keep their comfortable positions only if the powerless remain oppressed and convinced that it is right that they are oppressed.

The manner of presentation (the "how") can also be instrumental in revealing the ideology of a text, especially when it brings the reader close to the people and events being depicted. For that reason, realistic presentations that clearly depict the time and place in which they are set are preferable to many Marxist readers because they make it easier to identify with an ideology or to object to it. However, others find in modern and postmodern forms evidence of the fragmentation of contemporary society and the alienation of the individual in it. The narrative that is presented in an unrealistic manner—that is, through stream of consciousness or surrealism, may make a less overt identification with the socioeconomic ills of capitalism or with socialist principles, but it can nevertheless criticize contradictions and inequities found in the world that capitalism has created. The effect of forms on the development of social commentary in a text can be understood by imagining how "The Diamond Necklace" would be changed if instead of being a realistic depiction given by an omniscient narrator, the story were presented as an internal monologue taking place in the mind of Mme. Loisel or that of her husband or even that of her convent friend. In the latter form, the ideology would shift with each one's perception of what the social system is and should be, as well as what each has to lose or gain by changing it.

Believing that all products of a culture, including literature, are the results of socioeconomic and ideological conditions, the Marxist critic must have not only an understanding of the subject matter and the form of a work but also some grasp of the historical context in which it was written. He must also be aware of the worldview of its author, who wrote not as an individual but as one who reflects the views of a group of people. Such grounding helps the reader identify the ideology that inevitably exists in a text, so that she can then analyze how that ideology supports or subverts the power structure it addresses.

To make a Marxist analysis, then, you can begin by asking questions such as the following:

- What does the setting tell you about the distribution of power and wealth?
- Is there evidence of conspicuous consumption?
- Does the society that is depicted value things for their usefulness, for their potential for resale or trade, or for their power to convey social status?
- Do you find in the text itself evidence that it is a product of the culture in which it originated?
- What ideology is revealed by the answers to the preceding questions? Does it support the values of capitalism or any other "ism" that institutionalizes the domination of one group of people over another—for example, racism, sexism, or imperialism? Or does it condemn such systems?
- Is the work consistent in its ideology? Or does it have inner conflicts?
- Do you find concepts from other schools of literary criticism—for example, cultural studies, feminism, postmodernism—overlapping with this one?
- Does this text make you aware of your own acceptance of any social, economic, or political practices that involve control or oppression of others?

Your answers should lead you to an understanding of the ideology expressed in the text and perhaps to insight into your own. Does the work accept socialism as historically inevitable as well as desirable? Does it criticize the repressive systems? Or does it reject socialism and approve of another system that exists by promoting one group of people at the expense of another—e.g., a particular ethnic or minority group. Where do you see similar situations in your own world? How that ideology is expressed through the form of the work, the characters, the setting, imagery, and all of its other literary elements is the content of the analysis.

**WRITING A MARXIST ANALYSIS**

There is no prescribed form for writing a Marxist analysis. Doing so is simply a matter of applying Marxist principles in a clearly ordered manner. As a result, one such written critique may look quite different from another but be equally Marxist in its content.

**Prewriting**

If you have thoughtfully answered the questions listed above, you will have material to begin your prewriting. If you take those items that yielded the most information or generated your strongest opinions and use them as the basis of a freewrite, your thinking will begin to develop along some identifiable lines. It may be that you need only see where the responses you made to some of the questions are evident in the text. Those passages should provide you with examples of your generalizations.

Some questions that will require you to go outside the text for answers, but that can be rewarding to pursue, are those that deal with the historical circumstances of the writer and his text. You may want to take the time to do some library work to examine the following topics:
What are the values of the author's time and place? Where are they reflected in the text?

What biographical elements of the author's life account for his ideology? For example, to what social class did he and his family belong? Where is that evident in the text?

What are the socioeconomic conditions of the writer's culture? Where are they reflected in the text?

Who read the work when it was first published? How was it initially received? Was it widely read? Banned? Favorably or unfavorably reviewed?

What were the circumstances of its publication? Was it quickly accepted, widely distributed, highly promoted? Or was it difficult to find a publisher? Was it given limited distribution?

Regardless of which topics you ultimately decide to develop, the four most important goals of your prewriting are (1) to clarify your understanding of the ideology of work; (2) to identify the elements of the text that present the ideology; (3) to determine how they promote it—that is, convince the reader to accept it; and (4) to assess how sympathetic or opposed it is to Marxist principles. It is important to remember that a text does not have to be Marxist in its orientation to yield itself to an interesting reading from this perspective. Even one that is capitalist or sexist in its outlook can be fruitfully examined to determine how it attracts the reader into accepting its ideology.

It is also reassuring to recognize that Marxist critics do not always agree with each other's reading of a given text. If your interpretation differs from others, it is not necessarily wrong, because no single Marxist reading of a work results even when the same principles are applied. In the same manner, Marxism lends itself to combination with other schools of criticism, giving it even more possibilities for variation.

**DRAFTING AND REVISION**

**The Introduction**

In a Marxist analysis it can be effective to announce the ideology of the text and its relationship to Marxist views at the outset. Because the rest of your essay will be concerned with where and how the ideology is worked out, it is important that your reader share your understanding of the stance taken by the text. If you find this approach to be too dry, boring, and didactic, you might begin with a summary of an incident in the work that illustrates the social relationships of the characters or some other socioeconomic aspect of the society as preparation for your statement of its overall worldview.

**The Body**

The central part of your essay will demonstrate the presence or rejection of Marxist principles in the text you are analyzing. It is in this part that the organizational principles will be of your own design. That is, you may choose to discuss each of the major characters, assess the nature of the social institutions depicted, or point out the struggles between groups of people. The approach you take will in large part be dictated by the work itself. For example, an analysis of "The Diamond Necklace" could be built around the decline of the power and place of M. and Mme. Loisel as they are forced to repay the cost of the necklace, could illustrate the unjust treatment they receive from those in the powerful, controlling classes of society, or could compare and contrast the differences between their lives and those of the rich and powerful. Of course, these are overlapping issues, and it is difficult to focus on one without the other. Once you have addressed such a topic, you will quickly find yourself with comments to make about others that are related to it.

Because there is not a particular form to follow in writing a Marxist analysis, you may fall back on some of the techniques discussed in chapter 2 (Familiar Approaches). It might be helpful to think about the usefulness of explication, comparison and contrast, and analysis. In any case, during revision you will want to be sure that each of your points is equally developed and that all are linked together in a logical sequence. Making an outline (after drafting) to check on whether you have managed to provide adequate coverage and coherence is helpful because it can give you an overview of what you have done. If the parts are not balanced in length, depth, or content, you will need to make adjustments.

**The Conclusion**

The conclusion of a Marxist analysis often takes the form of an endorsement of classless societies in which everyone has equal access to power and goods or criticism of repressive societies in which that is not the case. It may once again make a case for social reform, pointing out where the literary work under consideration has either supported or rejected social change. In either case, to write the conclusion you will need to consider how the ideology in the text affirms or conflicts with your own ideology. Perhaps your analysis has made you aware that principles that you took as "given" or "natural" or "just the way things are" are actually socially constructed and can be changed in ways that make society more just and balanced. If so, explaining your realization can provide a powerful ending to your analysis.

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS USEFUL IN MARXIST CRITICISM**

**Base** The methods of production in a given society.

**Bourgeoisie** The name given by Marx to the owners of the means of production in a society.
Commodification The attitude of valuing things not for their utility but for their power to impress others or for their resale possibilities.

Conspicuous consumption The obvious acquisition of things only for their sign value and/or exchange value.

Dialectical materialism The theory that history develops neither in a random fashion nor in a linear one but instead as struggle between contradictions that ultimately find resolution in a synthesis of the two sides. For example, class conflicts lead to new social systems.

Exchange value An assessment of the worth of something based on what it can be traded or sold for.

False consciousness People’s acceptance of an unfavorable social system without protest or questioning, that is, as the logical way for things to be.

Historical situation The ideological atmosphere generated by material circumstances. To understand social events, one must have a grasp of the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur.

Ideology A belief system.

Interpellation A term used by Louis Althusser to refer to the process by which the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant one.

Material circumstances The economic conditions underlying the society. To understand social events, one must have a grasp of the material circumstances and the historical situation in which they occur.

Production theory The name given to Louis Althusser’s ideas about the ability of literature and art to change the base of a society. By creating and celebrating its own cultural artifacts, the proletariat can produce a revolution that replaces the hegemony of the dominant class with its own.

Proletariat The name given by Marx to the workers in a society.

Reflectionism A theory that the superstructure of a society mirrors its economic base and, by extension, that a text reflects the society that produced it.

Sign value An assessment of something based on how impressive it makes a person look.

Superstructure The social, political, and ideological systems and institutions—for example, the values, art, and legal processes of a society—that are generated by the base. Some disagreement exists among Marxists about the manner and degree of influence the base and superstructure have on each other.

Use value An appraisal of something based on what it can do.

Vulgar Marxism Another name for reflectionism. Those who practice it try to determine the true and complete nature of a given society.

Weltanschauung The worldview of the author.

**Recommended Web Sites**

http://home.mira.net/~deller/melt/
A site for primary works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, with information on Hegel, Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky, and Engels and the philosophies of each.

http://csf.colorado.edu/psn/marx/
Marxists Internet Archive is an extensive database of Marxism.

http://www.trincoill.edu/depts/phil/philos/marx.html
Provides links to other Marxist sites.

A list of nineteen email discussion lists dedicated to Marxism.

http://vos.ucsb.edu/shuttle/cultural.html#marxism
A clearinghouse site with links to several Marxist theory, ideology, and criticism sites. It also includes listings for journals devoted to Marxism.

**Suggested Reading**


**Model Student Analysis**

**Marxist Criticism of Frank Norris's "A Deal in Wheat"**

Vickie Lloyd

Frank Norris's short story "A Deal in Wheat" presents the reader with a circularity that shows the intimate economic relationship between the base (a capitalist economic system) and the superstructure (represented by a commodity trading system that favors greedy market speculators over producers). This story comprises a plain lesson to us of the impact on our lives of the lack of morality and common decency of the affluent classes who are allowed to run our economic system. Norris also exposes the false consciousness of the proletarian who are subjugated by this ruthless system.

The story begins with Lewiston, a man on the verge of losing the family farm because a wealthy speculator has driven the price of wheat down so low that he cannot break even.
avaricious machinations are nothing more than sport. Although the two have managed to
Hornung discovers the scam, he laughs it off, thus revealing that to both these men, their
selfish destructiveness of ruthless and powerful men affects all levels of a society.

This desire, Norris plainly shows us one of the more immoral facets of capitalism, that of
high that Truslow is forced into bankruptcy. He longs to destroy his great enemy, and in
order to drive up the price. He sells a load of wheat to Truslow but has second thoughts:
many damage to one another as possible, and in their war of greed, the worker is ruthlessly
answerable to the working class.

Lewiston forfeits his farm to creditors, and while his wife is sent to stay with relatives, he
goes to Chicago to work. Lewiston's life spirals downward, and it is only near the end
of the story that he is able to recover, but only through unskilled slave-like labor. As his fortunes dissolve, the wealthy wheat dealers who caused his decline seek to destroy one another with market speculations driven by fraud. These machinations are nothing more than fun and games for the rich men but represent life-and-death struggles for the proletariat, which is negatively affected by the speculations.

When Lewiston arrives in Chicago, he has a job in a hat factory, but even that is taken away from him when an import duty on felt is repealed and the home market is flooded by cheap imports. Here we see the adverse results to the workers when government refuses to protect the jobs of its own citizens against incursions by foreign markets. Although Norris says no more about this situation, the reader is reminded that the government of a free-market economy will always be run by the wealthy and for the good of the wealthy. In such a government, the proletariat is powerless and has no say in the decisions that affect day-to-day living.

Tragically, Lewiston finds himself homeless and living a hand-to-mouth existence. His lack of success at keeping a job, coupled with the breakup of his family, lends a heartbreaking poignancy to his situation, which is repeated in any society where the ruling class is not answerable to the working class.

Juxtaposed to the poor worker, Norris shows us the moneyed capitalists who are responsible for the farmer's plight. The capitalists, Truslow and Hornung, are out to do as much damage to one another as possible, and in their war of greed, the worker is ruthlessly victimized. In the course of the story, Hornung attempts to corner the market on wheat in order to drive up the price. He sells a load of wheat to Truslow but has second thoughts: although he is set to make a fortune, he wonders if he should drive the price of wheat so high that Truslow is forced into bankruptcy. He longs to destroy his great enemy, and in this desire, Norris plainly shows us one of the more immoral facets of capitalism, that of the need for the wealthy to climb to success by oppressing others, even of the same class.

The selfish destructiveness of ruthless and powerful men affects all levels of a society.

Hornung's plan backfires because Truslow perpetrates a scam on Hornung. When Hornung discovers the scam, he laughs it off, thus revealing that to both these men, their avaricious machinations are nothing more than sport. Although the two have managed to wreck the lives of untold numbers of families, they blithely go on playing their games. Unfortunately, their sport has caused the price of wheat to be driven up even further, and their game has consequences that are devastating. Many others like Lewiston are unable to make a go of the family farm, and thus another American tradition is destroyed by big business.

In a pivotal scene, Lewiston finds himself late at night in a long line waiting to receive free bread from a local bakery. Many other men who also suffer the same plight are in the line, and Norris portrays this scene in imagery that calls to mind the deathlike stillness of a cemetery. Norris describes the setting as being "very dark and absolutely deserted," with Lewiston standing in the "enfolding drizzle, sodden, stupefied with fatigue." The weary men merely stand without talking so that even their basic social need to communicate with each other has been destroyed by capitalist greed. This powerful and heartrending scene stands out because it bluntly reflects the way materialism strips away the humanity of the working class. The author's use of the dank, depressing graveyard imagery constitutes a metaphor for the death of working class people at the hands of the society that should nurture it.

One evening, as the men are standing in line, a sign is posted on the bakery door saying that the price of wheat has risen so high the bakery can no longer give away bread. Here, we see that even this small perquisite is taken away from the desperate men. Symbolically, Norris is showing us that the rapacious greed of the ruling class is stealing the very bread from the mouths of the workers.

Bread is the most basic of human food, and Norris's symbolic use of wheat speculation and the starving men awaiting handouts of free bread cuts to the very core of the economic dilemma of the worker and exposes its rotten marrow. This battle for the fundamental symbol of life is emblematic of the class struggle of the proletariat for a fair share of society's goods and services.

Also symbolically, Norris uses exchange market terminology to label Truslow as the Great Bear and Hornung as the bull. In market jargon, a bear speculator profits from a falling market, and a bull profits from a rising market. Whether the market is rising or falling, the bourgeoisie will control the purse strings of the nation, and the bottom line for both men is profit, but only for themselves. In the story, the two men display the worst characteristics of the animals they represent, recklessly attempting to destroy each other in a territorial fight with animalistic shortsightedness. The bull lords it over his herd, driving away weaker males and thus making the social decisions. The ones driven away become isolated, and, deprived of the life-giving society of the herd, they starve to death. The bear is a large predator that destroys other animals in order to survive. The bull and the bear control the power base in their territories, ensuring the maintenance of their positions by the "wealth" of their strength and size. They also manipulate their respective societies by enforcing a class structure in which the weaker males are not allowed to breed, thus even establishing control over the genetic makeup of their societies. Hornung and Truslow, in their unchecked
Throughout history people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity. . . . Nor will you have escaped worrying over this problem—those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply—you are yourselves the problem.

SIGMUND FREUD, LECTURE 33,
New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis and Other Works

If a woman has her Ph.D. in physics, has mastered quantum theory, plays flawless Chopin, was once a cheerleader, and is now married to a man who plays baseball, she will forever be "former cheerleader married to star athlete."

MARYANNE ELLISON SIMMONS,
wife of Milwaukee Brewers' catcher Ted Simmons

When a school of literary criticism is still evolving, trying to make a definitive explanation of it can be a perilous undertaking. Feminist criticism, for example, is difficult to define because it has not yet been codified into a single critical perspective. Instead, its several shapes and directions vary from one country to another, even from one critic to another. The premise that unites those who call themselves feminist critics is the assumption that Western culture is fundamentally patriarchal, creating an imbalance of power that marginalizes women and their work. That social structure, they agree, is reflected in religion, philosophy, economics, education—all aspects of the culture, including literature. The feminist critic works to expose such ideology and, in the end, to change it so that the creativity of women can be fully realized and appreciated.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although the feminist movement stretches back into the nineteenth century, the modern attempt to look at literature through a feminist lens began to develop in the early