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Marksizm ve Edebiyat

Marxism and Literature

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Born the son of a Welsh railroad worker, Raymond Williams became a communist while studying at Cambridge University. He has trained many thinkers and theorists such as Terry Eagleton, also an essential Marxist literary theorist, and with his ideas and works, he has become one of the names that have led to the formation of a highly respected worldwide school such as British Cultural Studies (Inglis 2005). Since his speciality is English Literature, his work explores the infrastructural processes of culture and cultural production. However, following his work, it can be seen that Williams is not an orthodox Marxist who overemphasizes economic reductionism. He follows a broader discipline in addressing power and power relations from an economic perspective (McGuigan et al.: 2014).

In his work *Marxism and Literature*, he refers to Marxist definitions and phenomena such as “historical consciousness”, “praxis”, “thingification”, and “alienation” many times. However, since he was a Marxist, he was not contented only with “class analysis”; he also put human experiences at

the centre of his work (Eagleton: 1976).

The book’s main aim is to explain the period of change in literature by developing Marxist analyses and discussing the old and contemporary forms. In the introduction to the book, Williams states this in the following sentences:

I began to study the history of Marxism and, in particular, I searched for a formulation that was decisive in cultural and literary analysis, a formulation that I now know was formalized by Plekhanov, aided by the last works of Engels, and disseminated by the dominant tendencies of Soviet Marxism (Williams 1978: 5).

With these first sentences, Williams hints that he will bring a literary analysis outside the Soviet mould, and indeed, he attempts to develop a new Marxist literary form in response to the Soviet-influenced theories, which were quite common among Marxist theorists of his time and were dogmatized almost like a “credo”. The State of the Soviet Union, like any other state, developed a policy of introducing Marxism to the whole world in many areas in line with the power of a large capitalist organization, but also imposing the “Soviet form” while introducing it. Not only in the political field, as in the case of Communist Yugoslavia and its conflicting line with Josip Broz Tito, but also in many other fields, Marxism was, in a sense, mixed with the propaganda of the Soviets. Artists and especially Western Marxists began to question this mixture, which was seen at many points in the political field, and this questioning reached its climax with the wave of internationalist revolts in 1968, which was perhaps the most audible point of this questioning.

In this work, which is one of the books in which his theory of “structures of feeling”, which came to the forefront in the writing world in 1954, is dealt with, Williams has produced the phenomenon he calls structures of feeling, which is similar to the concepts of “worldview” or “ideology”, in a way to cover the qualities that are missing in the expressions of these two. The structures of feeling, which he refers to as “forms of experience that static texts do not mention and never recognise” (Williams 1978: 106), are, in a sense, the totalities of feeling. The expressions that continue throughout the book and circulate this concept at various points make it impossible to define “structures of feeling” in a simple way. According to

Williams, “structures of feeling” are sedimented structures that can be socially analysed and separated from other forms of social semantics (Williams 1978: 107).

In his work *Marxism and Literature*, Williams, unlike many Marxist thinkers, softens the interpretation of the determinism of the structures of production. He adopts a highly critical attitude towards the strict judgements of technological determinism. According to Williams, society has meanings far beyond such determinisms.

According to Williams, society is also a constitutive process with an indeterminable number of powerful pressures. These pressures manifest in political, economic and cultural formations and are internalised into “individual wills”. This kind of determinism -the complex and interrelated process of boundaries and pressures- is present throughout and at every point in the social process. An abstracted “mode of production” is not the only determinant of this, but an important one. To see determinism as controlling is incapable of capturing the various dimensions of social relations. To abstract autonomous categories such as “mode of production” used as prior knowledge is to render invisible and incomprehensible the specific and always relevant determinants that are the actual social process (Williams 1978: 81).

In the chapter titled “Language” in the book, Williams expresses that language is a phenomenon that constitutes human beings in the following sentences:

“A definition is language always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world. The received major categories –‘world’, ‘reality’, ‘nature’, ‘human’- may be counterposed or related to the category ‘language’, but it is now a commonplace to observe that all categories, including the category ‘language’, are themselves constructions in language, and can thus only with an effort, and within a particular system of thought, be separated from language for relational inquiry (Williams 1978: 21).”

Raymond Williams is one of the critical thinkers in this chain of questioning before this climax. Traces of these inquiries can be seen in her book *Marxism and Literature*. In the sections of her work on Marxism, Williams generally presents orthodox approaches to language, etc. However, he adopts some parts of this approach and develops it from a different perspective by finding some parts culturally deficient (Williams 2015: 73). In the book, he moves away from the reading of culture only in terms of language and economy, touches upon everyday language, lifestyles and power relations, and brings the impact of these expansions on literature into the field of discussion with historical examples. Stating that the concept of “culture” is at the centre of much of modern thought and practice, the author discusses the stages and contradictions of the concept throughout its development.

Williams asks, “is man the maker of history?”. He also goes into the thoughts of Vico and Herder and shows the evolution of this question. However, he defends the rightness of Marxism and says that interpreters before Marx missed the power relations in the way the concept of “civilization” is handled. “Marxism’s most significant later departure was its rejection of what Marx called ‘idealist historiography’ and in this sense the theoretical operations of the Enlightenment” (Williams 1978: 20). However, Williams criticizes Marx in the following respect. According to him, “culture” is considered only as a superstructure and its constituent elements are covered by economic reductionism.

Addressing the issue of language in the next chapter, Williams states that Marxism still needs to address this issue and that he will attempt to develop Marxism in this regard. Indeed, Marx did not address the issue of language. Williams does not take Joseph Stalin’s statement in his book *Marxism and Language* (it is not sure that he wrote it) that language is reduced to infrastructural relations of thousands of years, not to infrastructural relations of a particular moment, but refers to the “Soviet Language School”, which can be taken seriously at this point, says that there are two points that concern Marxism in the

development of language studies. These are “language as activity” and “the study of language history”. The approach to language as an activity parallels the idea of “man creating his own society” as it developed in the eighteenth century. In the section on the history of language, where he examines its historical process, Williams expresses the period from Plato to the ideas of the Soviet Language School (Volashinov) beautifully.

Before analyzing his views on literature and the changes in literature, he explains the theories of language and consciousness. However, he explains the process of language neither by emphasizing only its social aspect like Volashinov nor by basing it only on the biological evolutionary process like Chomsky. He acknowledges both but expresses the influence of changing social practices more dominantly. Nor does he reduce the shifts in meaning brought about by these changing social practices to a substructural process.

In the book on ideology section, he summarizes what Marxism understands by ideology. He summarizes it as the specific set of beliefs of a particular class or group, the imaginary belief that is the opposite of reality, and the general process of producing meaning and thought. However, Williams, who states that the Marxist concept of ideology has had many meanings over time, goes to the historical uses of the concept of "ideology" and states that Marx and Engels were influenced by the pejorative meanings used in France, especially in the early period.

In the substructure-superstructure debate, he stated that this process of structural interaction is based on one of Marx's two different expressions and attempted to explain the concept of superstructure: Legal processes indicating modes of production, forms of consciousness, the position people occupy, which they feel to some extent (Brenkman, 1995). Williams takes the study of these as a study of their relations with the substructure and each other. He first analyzes the visible expressions of each field. Combining this with the knowledge gained in the next chapter (productive forces), Williams argues that the concept of productive forces lies at the heart of the debate on infrastructure and superstructure. However, he states that it is essential to know the changes in this concept to understand Marxist orientations and embarks on this. He states that the productive forces are all the means that produce and reproduce life. In general, in this section, Williams shows the impact of the interpretations of Marxism in its historical process on the determination of this substructure.

Williams discusses the constitution of art and develops this discussion in the section titled “From Reflection to Mediation”. He states that orthodox Marxist views deal with the idea of reflection and defines reflection as the statement that “in the last instance, it will necessarily be a reflection of a material reality”. Since the artist's mind is also affected by material processes, it is causally of material origin. However, activity, that is, the activity of the individual, is excluded here. In this activity, the elements of culture should be noticed. Mechanical materialism excluded this activity. However, historical materialism interpreted this activity as one of its foundations. In the end, what is produced is not art but ideology. However, orthodox Marxism takes some concepts negatively. Mediation is one of them. According to the thinker, the contributions of the Frankfurt School have shown that this concept is not harmful.

Mediation is inherent to the object and, therefore, to reality. Of course, in the end, Williams interprets the elements that develop it in a materialist way. Having emphasized the importance of topicalization in the Marxist understanding of art, the author explains how this concept later became homology. Walter Benjamin uses the same phenomenology with a different term, dialectical imagination.

Raymond Williams, who has written theoretically on communication, has used his methods of approaching literary theories to address issues related to communication and has made significant contributions to the literature on communication (O'Connor, 2006). The fact that

Marxist or at least socialist or communist approaches to political and economic analysis dominated the European literature in his time and that the author grew up in a working-class family and was raised in trade union debates had an impact on the views in his work. The cultural and literary debates, trade union clubs and discussions he witnessed in Cambridge shaped his political position, and this book is an extension of all these processes (Williams: 2007).

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