**What is Marxist Criticism interested in?**

* It examines the ways in which writers and readers are operating within specific socioeconomic circumstances; it challenges the idea that literature is the product of free and independent minds.
* Karl Marx ‘Foreword’ to *Towards a Critique of Political Economy* 1859: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.”
* Marxist theory argues that the way we think and the way we experience the world are largely conditioned by the way the economy is organised. Eg the **base** of a capitalist society is its **economic structure** (goods are produced by large concentrations of capital in factories/multinational companies, and then sold on a free, competitive, market); this then shapes the **superstructure** of a society (education, law, religion, philosophy, the arts).
* The implication of this is that thought is subservient to the material conditions under which it develops; there is no such thing as ‘free’ thought.
* According to Marxist thinking, capitalism exploits the workers and reduces them to a ‘function’ – a cog in a machine, a pair of hands on an assembly line in a factory. They are alienated from seeing themselves as full human beings – capitalism turns people into things.
* Instead of seeing authors as primarily inspired individuals whose genius and creative imagination enables them to produce original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as formed by their social contexts in ways which they might not admit or even be aware of. A Marxist critic would therefore be very interested in the social class from which a writer comes.
* A Marxist critic would also be interested in the social/political assumptions of the time period in which a text is ‘consumed’ – that is, the biases and prejudices of the reader of a text.
* Marxist theory is interested in the power relationship between classes.
* Marxist critical theory looks at ways this might not just affect the content of a writer’s work but also a writer’s style. For example, the tightly regulated form of the sonnet and iambic pentameter are a reflection of social stability, decorum and order.