



## AN ANALYTICAL INSIGHT OF WALTER BENJAMIN'S *THE AUTHOR AS THE PRODUCER*

**K. ABARNA SRIPREETHI,**  
M. Phil Research Scholar,  
Research Department of English,  
The American College,  
Madurai, (TN), **INDIA.**

### ABSTRACT

*Walter Benjamin was a German Jewish philosopher and cultural critic. An eclectic thinker, combining elements of German idealism, Romanticism, Western Marxism, and Jewish mysticism, Benjamin made enduring and influential contributions to aesthetic theory, literary criticism, and historical materialism. He was associated with the Frankfurt school, and also maintained formative friendships with thinkers such as playwright Bertolt Brecht and Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem. Among Benjamin's best known works are the essays "The Task of the Translator," "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History."*

### INTRODUCTION

Marxist philosophy or Marxist theory are works in philosophy that are strongly influenced by Karl Marx's materialist approach to theory, or works written by Marxists. Marxist philosophy may be broadly divided into Western Marxism, which drew out of various sources, and the official philosophy in the Soviet Union, which enforced a rigid reading of Marx called dialectical materialism, in particular during the 1930s. The key characteristics of Marxism in philosophy are its materialism and its commitment to political practice as the end goal of all thought.

This text is a speech given by Walter Benjamin at the Institute for the study of Fascism in Paris. He begins his address by referring to Plato's question of 'poets' right to exist.' Though Plato had a high idea of the 'power of poetry,' he considered it 'destructive,' and 'superfluous.' The question of Plato obviously concerns the poets' autonomy to write whatever he pleases. But the present social situation forces the writer to perform the activity for the benefit of whom it will serve. The bourgeois author or writer works for certain class interests. On the other hand a progressive or advanced type of writer determines to place his activity on the basis of class struggle, he places himself on the side of proletariat. He directs



his energies towards what is useful for the proletariat in the class struggle. *'This is usually called pursuing a tendency or commitment.'*

Walter Benjamin goes on to talk about the concept of *'Political tendency.'* He says that a work of art can be politically correct, only if it is also correct in literary sense. Discussing the *"relationship between tendency and quality in literature is, in Benjamin's view, another way of discussing the relationship between 'form' and 'content.'*" He further says to simply decree what this relation is

- A work which exhibits the correct political tendency need demonstrate no further qualities.
- A work which exhibits the correct tendency must necessarily exhibit all other qualities.

Benjamin points out to social relations which are determined by production relations. When a work of art is examined by materialist criticism it is accustomed to ask the relationship of the work with that of a social production relation of its time. This is an important and difficult question to answer. Even the answer to this question is ambiguous, because of this Benjamin poses or suggests a question, which is modest, less encompassing and which has a better chance of being answered. Instead of asking *'How does a literary work stand in relation to the relationship of production of a period?'* Benjamin would like to ask: *'What is the position within them?'* This question aims at the function that the work has within literary relationship of production of a period. It is directly concerned with the literary *'technique.'*

With the concept of technique, Benjamin gives access to a direct social analysis and materialist analysis of literary products. The concept of technique gives a dialectical starting-point from which the opposition between form and content can be overcome. This concept also helps to determine correctly the relationship between tendency and quality. So it could be affirmed more precisely that literary tendency can be found in the progress or regression of literary technique.

Benjamin turns his attention to the concept of *'Operating writer.'* Russian writer Sergei Tretyakov is a good example of operating writer. The concept of operating writer is juxtaposed to the concept of *'informing writer.'* The mission of the operative writer is *'not to report but to struggle, not to play the role of spectator, but to intervene actively.'*

Benjamin proceeds to give a preface to *'New objectivity'* i.e., supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limits of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature. The point of fact is that, there has been no shortage of proof in Germany over the last decade-that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate an astonishing number of



revolutionary themes and can even propagate them without seriously placing its own existence or existence of the class that possesses them into question. Benjamin says that the so called left-wing writers have no other social function than to draw new effects from the political situation in order to amuse the public. New objectivity has made *'reportage'* or documentaries fashionable. But the question is *'to whom this technique is useful.'*

To give a greater clarity to *'New objectivity,'* Benjamin shifts to *'Photographic reportage.'* He brings in Dadaism. The revolutionary force of Dadaism lay in the fact that it lays the authenticity art to test. The Dadaist made *'still life of tickets, spools of cotton, cigarette stubs, and mixed them with pictorial elements.'* Then it was shown to public, *'look, your picture frame destroys time, the smallest authentic fragment of everyday life says more than painting.'* just as the bloody fingerprint of a murderer on the page of a book says more than the text. He says that the subsequent development of photography has become more and more subtle, more and more modern and the result is that it no longer photograph a run-down apartment house or a pile of manure without transfiguring it. Photography has succeeded in making misery itself an object of pleasure, by treating it stylishly and with technical perfection. For the *'new objectivity,'* photography functions to bring to the people who have not enjoyed previously-spring, movie stars, foreign countries, by reworking them according to the current fashion.

Here one has a drastic example of what it means to pass on an apparatus of production without transforming it. Changing it would have meant breaking down one of the barriers, overcoming one of the contradictions which fetter the production of intellectuals. In this case there is a barrier between writing and pictures. What should be done is to demand the photographer to give a caption which would tear it away from fashionable clichés and give it a revolutionary use value.

Benjamin proceeds to speak about writers' *'commitment.'* Commitment is necessary, but it is never sufficient, for this the writer should have a teachers' attitude. *'A writer who does not teach other writers teaches nobody.'* The work of a writer should serve as a model for other writers. Secondly the writers must present other writers with an improved apparatus for their use. This apparatus will be better because, it brings more consumers and producers in contact. There already exists a model, Brecht's epic theatre.

Benjamin talks about Epic theatre, which does not reproduce the conditions, rather it discloses or uncovers them. This uncovering of condition is interrupted by dramatic process, but this is interrupted by dramatic process, but this interrupting does not act as catalyst or stimulant, it has an organizing function. This brings the action to a standstill in mid-course and thereby the spectators are compelled to take up a position towards the action and actor to take up a position towards his part. Benjamin gives an example, he asks the pupil to picture to themselves a family row; the wife is just about to pick up a bronze statue and hurl it at the



daughter, the father is opening a window to call for help. At this moment a stranger enters. Now the process is interrupted. Now it becomes apparent from the strangers view; disturbed faces, open windows, a devastated interior. At this juncture a viewpoint exists, i.e., '*the more normal scenes of present day life do not look very different from this.*' This is the viewpoint of the epic dramatist.

Benjamin finally concludes his speech by saying that the only demand on the writer is the '*demand to think,*' -to reflect upon his position in production process.

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