

CHAPTER III

EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Extrinsic elements, as defined by Wellek and Warren (1943:73) in their book *Theory of Literature*, are the relationships between literary works and non-literary factors outside the work itself, such as social background, history, author biography, ideology, and cultural conditions. These extrinsic aspects are supportive, not substitutive, to the analysis of the literary work itself. In short, extrinsic factors influence the creation and interpretation of the work beyond intrinsic analysis.

3.1 Socio-Economic Background of Ohio's Rust Belt in the 2000s – 2020s

The Rust Belt is the term used to describe the heavy industrial region spanning several states in the U.S. Midwest that flourished from the early 1870s to the early 1970s, establishing the U.S. as the world's dominant economic power (Kropf, 2023:220). Ohio, along with Michigan and Pennsylvania, is one of the core states of this region, with an economy heavily reliant on manufacturing, steel, and automotive industries (Faberman, 2002:3). When these industries experienced a major decline in the late 1970s through the 1980s, Ohio became one of the hardest-hit regions, with many counties losing more than 2 percent of total jobs (Feyrer, 2007:41). While economic cycles were driven more by job losses than by the creation of new jobs, with stagnant wage growth and a labor market dominated by established companies with low levels of innovation (Faberman, 2002:3).

By the 2000s, these structural conditions had become increasingly entrenched, giving rise to a distinct pattern of stagnation. Faberman (2002:5–7)

notes that low-growth metropolitan areas in Ohio, such as Cleveland, Youngstown-Warren, and Toledo, are characterized by low rates of both job creation and job destruction, with a dominance of small, stagnant, and old companies. The average age of firms in these regions reached approximately 42 quarters, older than in higher-growth regions, while wages also fell behind. Furthermore, Feyrer et al. (2007:43) identified the decline in the quality of urban facilities as the most enduring legacy of the Rust Belt's economic shock. The number of bars and restaurants per capita in affected areas fell by about 13 percent between 1977 and 1997, far exceeding the population decline rate. The quality-of-life rankings of cities like Cleveland consistently lag about 39 places behind the average for other American cities.

From the 2010s to the 2020s, the long-term impacts of deindustrialization became increasingly evident in the physical landscapes of Ohio's Rust Belt cities. Rhee (2025:2067) notes that despite various efforts such as urban restructuring, green space development, and pro-business policies, decline continues in many areas. Rhee's (2025:2079) spatial analysis of Cleveland reveals a distinctive urban structure. The city center is surrounded by large industrial zones, which in turn are encircled by residential zones increasingly fragmented by empty spaces left by demolished buildings. Rhee (2025:2080) argues that these empty spaces actually hold great potential for development into public spaces, given their strategic location between the city center and residential areas. Overall, Ohio's Rust Belt cities find themselves in an ambivalent position. While unemployment rates have returned to near the national average, in terms of population growth, facility quality,

and the coherence of the urban fabric, the gap with other regions has yet to show any meaningful recovery.

3.2 Marxist Concept of the American Capitalist System

According to Marx in *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867), capitalism organizes society through relations between those who control the means of production and those who sell their labor. The capitalist structure of production is the exploitation of workers, who must produce surplus value for the benefit of capitalists. In line with that, the *World Economic Forum* reported that the concentration of wealth in America is currently in the top 1%, with a large gap between worker productivity and wage increases. The instability of the system due to the widening gap also indicates a pattern of exploitation that is becoming more severe, as well as wage stagnation, which is causing the younger generation to be poorer than the previous generation. This reinforces the Marxist view that capitalism's contradictions are deepening over time.

3.2.1 Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is a framework for understanding how society, particularly its economy, changes over time. In their work, Marx and Engels (1845:6) introduced the concept of historical materialism in *The German Ideology*, defining it as the view that history and human consciousness are determined by material conditions and productive activity. The way humans produce the necessities of life determines social structure, human relationships, and their modes of thought. This is further explained in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique*

of *Political Economy* (1859). Marx (1859:4) writes that the mode of production of material life determines the social, political, and intellectual life processes. It is not human consciousness that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

In line with Marx, Nielsen (1985:49) explains that productive forces shape relations of production, and these relations of production, in turn, shape ideology, social consciousness, law, morality, and political institutions. Thus, the economic structure is the most fundamental determinant of social change. Both Marx and Nielsen view history as a material process driven by production and class relations, while ideas and ideologies shape ways of thinking, moral values, and even views of what is normal or just. However, people's ways of life and thinking change as the economic and social conditions in which they live change. Historical materialism, in its effort to understand societal dynamics, focuses on examining the distinctive social order of production within the society under study (Nielsen, 1985:49).

3.2.2 Base and Superstructure

In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859:4) writes that the mode of production of material life determines social, political, and intellectual processes. The productive forces shape the relations of production. In turn, these relations shape law, ideology, social awareness, morality, and political institutions of the society (Nielsen, 1985:49).

The economic base is the material foundation that includes the forces of production, such as technology, labor, and resources. On the other hand, the relations of production refer to the relationship between capital owners and workers. Above this stands the superstructure, which encompasses all non-economic elements that arise from the economic base. The superstructure includes ideologies, educational institutions, laws, cultural values, and the way society thinks.

3.2.3 Class Struggle

According to Karl Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), the history of society is the history of class struggle. Class struggle is part of human history, marked by class divisions in the economic system, namely the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Class struggle is also related to individuals' positions within the economic structure. According to Marx (1848:28), class position refers to the placement of individuals based on their ownership of the means of production, namely, whether they are capitalists or workers.

He further explains in his book, *Capital, Vol. 1* (1867), that the relationship between capital and labor results in exploitation. This exploitation occurs because capitalists obtain surplus value, the added value produced by labor that is not paid to workers as wages (Marx, 1867:158). This position then forms class condition, the material conditions individuals experience, such as working hours, wage levels, and daily living conditions, influenced by the capitalist production system (Marx, 1867:384).

Marx also explains that the development of capitalism creates various forms of class struggle through the relationship between capital and labor. One of these appears when technology and machines replace human labor in the production process, creating structural unemployment and increasing workers' dependence on capitalists (Marx, 1867:293). In this system, coercion against workers is no longer physical, as in slavery, but it is in an economic way. Workers are required to sell their labor to survive because they do not own the means of production. As a result, workers remain dependent on the capitalist system that regulates economic production and distribution (Marx, 1867:249).

As noted by So (1991:43), it encompasses economic, organizational, and political dimensions and does not always lead to revolution. It can result in reform through negotiated compromise or reproduce class alienation and fragmentation. Thus, class struggle is an eternal force that creates social change. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat can take two paths: revolution or reform. Revolution will occur when the proletariat succeeds in destroying the capitalist system, and reform will occur if the conflict results in compromise or gradual change in the social structure.

3.2.4 Levels of Consciousness

In his book *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács distinguishes two levels of consciousness: objective and psychological. Before discussing these two, it is important to understand the concept of reification as their foundation.

Reification is an inevitable and immediate condition for everyone living in a capitalist society (Lukács, 1923:197).

First, Immediate or Experiential Consciousness is consciousness that arises from direct observation without critical thought. Here, social reality appears as self-contained, unchangeable facts. In reality, however, this condition is a historical product that has been reified to the point that it feels natural. The social world of capitalism appears as a haphazard composition of isolated facts (Lukács, 1923: 94). All rules, norms, and conditions in capitalist society are actually man-made and born of a long historical process, not created directly from the start.

Second, Individual or Psychological Orientation is an empirical consciousness formed from a person's actual thoughts and feelings regarding their daily life. Lukács refers to these as psychologically explicable ideas that humans form about their life situations (Lukács, 1923: 51). This consciousness often does not align with the objective interests of their class because it is overly focused on narrow, personal experiences. Consequently, social conditions that should be changeable instead feel like personal fate.

These two levels of consciousness reinforce and lock each other in place, as reification continues to operate until the structure of reification sinks deeper, becomes more inevitable, and more definitive within human consciousness (Lukács, 1923: 93). Only by transcending both through historical mediation does social transformation become possible. Individuals feel they are faced with a life situation that seems to stand alone, rather than within a historical social structure.

On the other hand, Lukács also mentions distorted consciousness, an outcome of class situation. The barrier that transforms bourgeois class consciousness into objectively false consciousness is none other than the class situation itself (Lukács, 1923:54). This means that this distortion arises not merely from the individual mind, but from the structure of capitalist relations of production, which systematically prevents any class from viewing social totality from a perspective that extends beyond its immediate material position.

