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As Marxist criticism is so extensive, part of the difficulty when planning the seminar was simply to select what we should leave out. At the same time, due to its history and influence, we were wary of simply offering to participants a series of doxa and conventions. The richness of the Marxist tradition is the product of over a century of stimulating argument, disagreement, and debate, and it was this spirit that we wanted to capture for the purposes of our seminar.

We also saw the workshop as an excellent opportunity to develop and experiment with our own teaching practices. None of us had given a lecture before, so the workshop gave us a chance to see first hand how these things work, and to experiment with our delivery of the material. It was crucial for us to find the balance between introducing the key concepts useful for the purposes of critical practice, on one hand, and opening up areas of debate for the discussion to follow, on the other.

The first question was the lecture. While we did not want to ignore the historical debate, we decided to start from the materialist notion of history, which is one of Marxism's most original contributions to thought, and to use this to develop our our discussion of literature and literary criticism. Thus, we divided the lecture into three parts which deal respectively with (1) the idea of historical materialism, (2) literature and ideology, and (3) the role of the critic. The second question was the structure of the seminar itself. In order to encourage more involvement between participants, we thought it would be interesting to bring together a mixture of different kinds of activities together in each block, namely group discussions based on key concepts, and individual presentations on our research, and on the participants' research projects. We hope that this innovative structure prompts original pedagogic dynamics and avenues of discussion. To facilitate this, we put together a handout with short extracts from a range of classic and less well known texts that we could use as a common point of reference throughout the seminar.

Each of us has some experience with different aspects of Marxist criticism, and have used it in our own work in various ways. We have learnt a lot from each other in the process of preparing this workshop and we hope that our different areas of expertise as well as the sustained dialogue we have had over the last few months will make for a rich and rewarding experience for the participants on the day.