Terry Eagleton was born in Salford, England, and educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became the student and disciple of Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams. Since the death of Williams in 1988, Eagleton has been regarded as the premier British Marxist literary critic. Born a working class Catholic, Eagleton has spent his adult career as a thorough academic, known to be tenacious, bold and combative, Eagleton began publishing in 1966 in “Slant”, the journal of the Catholic Left, with ‘Politics and Benediction’, an essay which quickly drew fire for being politically intemperate. He had made the uncomfortable suggestion that Catholicism was complicit with capitalism.

Eagleton’s central concern as a literary critic is that criticism should go ahead and admit to being politics, and then make the most of its considerable power, by changing society for the better. Eagleton has effectively renovated what was a vestigial Marxist critical tradition in Britain. He influenced Marxist theorists such as Fredric Jameson and
kindled reaction from liberal humanist antitheorists, Marxist and non-Marxist critics alike. Throughout his career he has entered, in a strikingly persistent manner, into a critical dialogue with both past and contemporary literary and cultural criticism. He has launched powerful arguments for the necessity of both literary theory and socialist criticism.

Eagleton ranks among the major Marxist cultural theorists of the twentieth century. His intellectual and political development falls into three, or perhaps four phases. His journey towards historical materialism effectively began at Cambridge University in the 1960s. Here, under the influence of Williams, he reacted against the prevailing critical orthodoxies of the New Criticism (with its treatment of the literary text as autonomous and especially those inspired by F.R. Leavis’s liberal humanism. This reaction is evident in Eagleton’s first book, *The New Left Church* (1966), which attempts to reconcile Roman Catholicism with socialist humanism; the feasibility of such a synthesis was in part given ideological sanction by the ecumenical and modernistic spirit of the Vatican Council of the 1960s. Again, Eagleton’s subsequent *Shakespeare and Society: Critical Studies in Shakespearean Drama* (1967) treats William Shakespeare’s work not as autonomous but as inseparable from fundamental social issues. In this first phase of his activity, Eagleton became for a short time the editor of the left-wing Christian journal ‘Slant’.
Eagleton’s next phase, announced by the publication of *Criticism and Ideology: A study in Marxist Literary Theory* (1976) and the expository work *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976), marked both his abandonment of his Catholic socialist humanism and the formulation of an approach that would have a broad impact on the practice of literary criticism. In this approach, even the expository text is subjected to a resolute contextualization and demystification of “Liberal bourgeois humanist” notions: that art somehow “transcends” its time, that it can be “explained” by individual psychology, that the artist is a “creator”, and that aesthetics is merely a question of “style”. Eagleton shows how a Marxist criticism tries to grasp “forms, style and meanings as the products of a particular history” and even individual psychology as a social product. The artist, however, does not “create” from nothing, but rather produces: his or her starting materials are to a large extent given, and he or she participates in the production of forms that are determined ultimately by their historical and ideological content. At this stage Eagleton viewed artistic form, itself “a way of perceiving social reality”, as comprising a complex unity of three elements: a “relatively autonomous” literary history of forms, certain dominant ideological structures, and a specific set of relations between author and audience. In these years, he defined ‘ideology’ as the way men live out their roles in class society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions.
Having examined the diversity of Marxist criticism, Eagleton rejected the Hegelian Marxist tradition, of which George Lukacs is the major representative. Lukacs’s ideological demand that a literary text be properly “realist”, that it re-creates a totality shattered by the configurations of capitalism (with its separation of general and particular, conceptual and sensuous, social and individual), is, in Eagleton’s eyes, more Hegelian than Marxist. It is a demand which led Lukacs dogmatically to denounce what he himself had termed the fragmented, alienated “ontological image” of humanity in modernist texts. Eagleton prefers Pierre Macherey’s view of the text as ‘decentred form”, exposing ideological contradictions through what it fails to say (its “absences” ) and its incompleteness of structure. Eagleton also expresses sympathy with Walter Benjamin’s assertion of the need for a “revolutionary” art, as exemplified in the openness and fragmentedness of Brechtian theatre, which, by its “alienation effect”, defamiliarizes experience previously accepted as ‘natural” by the audience.

In this second phase, Eagleton accomplished the major task of articulating with immense subtlety the foundational categories of a materialist aesthetics. During this period, Eagleton was influenced by Louis Althusser, particularly with regard to the epistemological break between the earlier “humanistic” and later “scientific” attitudes which Althusser claimed to have found in Karl Marx’s work- hence Eagleton’s
view that “criticism must break with its ideological pre-history, situating itself outside the space of the text on the alternative terrain of scientific knowledge”. He launched a sustained critique of that pre-history, especially of Leavis’s liberal humanist project as enshrined in his journal ‘Scrutiny’, as well as of Williams’s achievements and deficiencies in the light of the absence of a revolutionary critical tradition in England.

Eagleton formulated materialist categories (such as general and literary modes of production and general, authorial and textual ideologies) out of his detailed scrutiny of the relations between literary text and ideology. His notion of ideology is derived from Macherey: the text produces ideology rather than reproducing or reflecting it. For Eagleton, the object of the text is not history but ideology. So, as with the performance of a play, the text is effectively the production of a production: it “produces” already produced ideological representations of reality into an imaginary object. Fiction, for example, does not represent imaginary history, but an ideological experience of real history. Its ultimate signifier and signified is history, but this fact is only apparent to criticism, not in the text itself. Eagleton rejects both Althusser’s view of ideology as homogenous and Macherey’s characterization of ideology as somehow “illusory”: There subsists, moreover, an internal relation between text and ideology; the text’s
“truth” is not an essence, but the practice of its relation to ideology and ideology’s relation to history.

Eagleton’s Althusserian phase in the 1970s was inspired by a major revival of radical political activity in Western society as a whole. Within such a political milieu, Althusser’s work had yielded key theoretical concepts such as the relative autonomy of superstructures; in its “scientific” antihumanism, it appeared politically revolutionary.

The third phase of Eagleton’s writing, however, was marked by a break with, or at least a far more critical attitude towards, Althusserian Marxism. That this change corresponds with a new focus on Benjamin’s work is itself symptomatic of a shift in Eagleton’s stance towards the relatively autonomous possibility of Marxist theory. Eagleton was inspired by the antihistoricism inherent in Benjamin’s attitude towards bourgeois history, an approach which advocates “blasting open” and demystifying the bourgeois continuum so as to redeem the past for revolutionary purposes. Eagleton seems no longer to be searching for a unity or coherence internal to theory; instead, coherence must be a function of the very internality of relation between theory and political practice. Eagleton says that in altered political conditions offering dwindling opportunities for radical politics, trapped between “essentialistic notions of social totality” and “an equally
ineffectual politics of the fragment or conjuncture” (both of these being variants of bourgeois ideology), critics cannot hope to resolve theoretical dilemmas without further developments in political history. This view is reminiscent of Marx’s own analyses of German ideology. Yet Eagleton in this phase produced a series of intricate, if avowedly provisional, dialogues between his own Marxism and other contemporary movements in literary-cultural theory.

Eagleton’s engagement with non-Marxist literary theory can be viewed as entailing a compromising “strategic” relativism and pluralism. Eagleton has embraced only those aspects of deconstructionist, psychoanalytic, or structuralist theory which either already overlap with Marxist theory or can subserve the extrapolation of Marxist analysis into traditionally unexplored realms. The unconscious, for example, can itself be a site of ideological struggle; the “always already written” of Jacques Derrida, can be translated into the “historical condition of possibility”, since historical (including unconscious and linguistic) determination is already an implicit deconstruction of the self-identity of any entity, as shown by G.W.F. Hegel. Eagleton, it should be said, has little sympathy with those of Derrida’s acolytes who indulge in an unbridled play of the signifier, and unrestrained dance of semantic plurality; what he does share is Derrida’s own view that “truth” is institutional. Eagleton distinguishes,
moreover, between the “right” and “left” interpretations or uses of deconstruction.

Eagleton’s brilliantly argued *Literary Theory* offers a coherent statement of his own theoretical position regarding non-Marxist theory. His invaluable achievement here, as in other works, has been to show from a balanced and sane perspective how the historical and ideological conditions of such theory yield an understanding of its significance and its limitations. A strategic integration of perspectives informs Eagleton’s penetrating studies of individual writers such as Samuel Richardson and Shakespeare. Characterizing Shakespeare as a “conservative patriarch”, Eagleton sees his political ideology as productively disrupted by the subversive energies of his language.

Eagleton’s treatment of recent critical trends places them in the context of the entire history of modern criticism. In *The Function of Criticism* (1984), he argues that modern bourgeois criticism emerged through a “public sphere” of rational consensus. This sphere gradually disintegrated and criticism finally committed “political suicide” when it was institutionalized in the nineteenth-century universities. The argument of *The Function of Criticism*, as Eagleton states in the Preface, is that criticism today lacks all substantive social function. It is either part of the
public relations branch of the literary industry, or a matter wholly internal to the academies. He says that this has not always been the case, and that it need not even today be the case. He tries to show this by a drastically selective history of the institution of criticism in England since the early eighteenth century. The guiding concept of this brief survey is that of the public sphere first developed by Jurgen Habermas in his _Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere_ (1962),

In _The Function of Criticism_ at the very outset, Eagleton makes his observation about modern European criticism:

Modern European criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state. Within that repressive regime, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European bourgeoisie begins to carve out for itself a distinct discursive space, one of rational judgement and enlightened critique rather than of the brutal ukases of an authoritarian politics. Poised between state and civil society, this bourgeois ‘public sphere’, as Jurgen Habermas has termed it, comprises a realm of social institutions – clubs, journals, coffee houses, periodicals -in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding
themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the form of a powerful political force (9).

Some major issues arrested Eagleton’s attention. They are: How is it possible that modern criticism which was born of the struggle against the absolutist state, could be reduced to its current status as part of the public relations branch of the literary industry? How is it that forms of criticism generated in the vibrant context of the eighteenth-century ‘public sphere’ - of clubs, journals, coffee-houses, periodicals - and which embraced free and open discussion of cultural, political and economic questions, could degenerate into post-structuralist exercises carried out by academic literary specialists who revel in their own practical impotence? Exercised by these issues, in *Function of Criticism*, Eagleton traces the birth of criticism in Enlightenment England and its subsequent mutations over time under the pressures of the development of capitalism, the rise of a ‘counter-public’ from below, and the specialization of the intellectual division of labour.

In a survey of the last two hundred years of cultural criticism spanning from Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and Samuel Johnson to Matthew Arnold, Leslie Stephen and F.R. Leavis, Eagleton firmly places the modern trends of New Criticism, Structuralism and Deconstruction in a social and historical perspective. However, Eagleton also makes a powerful
and passionate case for contemporary criticism to rediscover its original function by reconnecting the cultural and the political, discourse and practice, and thereby to play a role in radical social transformation. In this context he endorses Peter Hohendahl’s concept of criticism:

In the Age of Enlightenment, writes Peter Hohendahl, ‘the concept of criticism cannot be separated from the institution of the public sphere’. Every judgement is designed to be directed toward a public; communication with the reader is an integral part of the system. Through its relationship with the reading public, critical reflection loses its private character. Criticism opens itself to debate, it attempts to convince, it invites contradiction and becomes a part of the public exchange of opinions. Seen historically, the modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century. Literature served the emancipation movement of the middle class as an instrument to gain self-esteem and to articulate its human demands against the absolutist state and a hierarchical society. (Hohendahl 52)
Eagleton says that the English bourgeois public sphere of the early eighteenth century, of which Steele’s ‘Taller‘ and Addison’s ‘Spectator‘ are central institutions, is indeed animated by moral correction and satiric ridicule of a licentious, socially regresssive aristocracy: but its major impulse is one of class-consolidation, a codifying of the norms and regulation of the practices whereby the English bourgeois may negotiate an historic alliance with its social superior. Eagleton agrees with Macaulay to his statement that Joseph Addison knew how to use ridicule without abusing it. Eagleton points to Addison’s cultural and social criticism saying that Addison knew how to upraid the traditional ruling class using ridicule, avoiding the divisive vituperation of Pope or Swift.

According to Eagleton, the hallmark of the English public sphere is its consensual character; the ‘Tatler‘ and ‘Spectator‘ are catalysts in the creation of a new ruling block in English Society, cultivating the mercantile class and uplifting the profligate aristocracy. The single daily or thrice-weekly sheets of these journals, with their hundreds of lesser imitators, bear witness to the birth of a new discursive formation in post-Restoration England - an intensive intercourse of class-values which fused the best qualities of Puritan and Cavalier and fashioned an idiom for common standards of taste and conduct.
Eagleton remarks that the periodicals of the early eighteenth century were a primary constituent of the emergent bourgeois public sphere. In this context he makes reference to the nature of Addison’s criticism and literary criticism as a whole:

Addison is somewhat more analytical, but his criticism, like his thought in general, is essentially empiricist and affective in the mould of Hobbes and Locke, concerned with the pragmatic psychological effect of literary works rather than with more technical or theoretical questions. Literary criticism as a whole at this point, is not yet an autonomous specialist discourse, even though more technical forms of it exist; it is rather one sector of a general ethical humanism, indissociable from moral, cultural and religious reflection. The ‘Tatler’ and ‘Spectator’ are projects of a bourgeois cultural politics whose capacious, blantly homogenizing language is able to encompass art, ethics, religion, philosophy and everyday life; there is here no question of a ‘literary’ ‘critical’ response which is not wholly determined by an entire social and cultural ideology. Criticism here is not yet ‘literary’ but Cultural’: the examination of literary texts is one relatively marginal moment of a broader enterprise which explores attitudes to servants and the rules of gallantry, the status of women and familial affections, the
purity of the English language, the character of conjugal love, the psychology of the sentiments and the laws of the toilet. (TFC 18)

According to Eagleton, the critic is a cultural commentator. The critic as cultural commentator acknowledges no inviolable boundary between one idiom and another, one field of social practice and the next; his role is to ramble or idle among them all, testing each against the norms of that general humanism of which he is the bearer. Moreover, in the opinion of Eagleton, the frontiers between literary genres, as between authors and readers, or genuine and fictitious correspondents, are comfortable indeterminate. The ‘Tatler ‘ and ‘Spectator’ are themselves complex refinements and recyclings of previous periodical forms, borrowing a device here, polishing or discarding a style there, artfully recombining elements from a number of discrete sources. He goes on to say that the digest or abstract of learned books carried of busy readers by some seventeenth-century periodicals (the earliest ‘literary criticism’ in England) has now become elaborated into the full-blown literary critical essay. He adds that in the early periodicalists, English criticism is able to glimpse its own glorious origins, seize the fragile moment at which the bourgeoisie entered into respectability before passing out of it again. Eagleton directs our attention to Raymond Williams who once remarked that most literary critics are natural cavaliers, but since most of them are also products of the
middle class, the image of Addison and Steele allows them to indulge their anti-bourgeois animus on gratifying familiar, impecably moral terrain. If Addison and Steele mark the moment of bourgeois respectability, they also signify the point at which the hitherto disreputable genre of journalism becomes legitimate. Previous periodicals suffered from the ills of partisan truculence, rampant sectarianism, crude taste, and personal rancour. With Addison and Steele the literary periodical becomes respectable, and with essay writing journalism begins to lose its stigma.

The critic’s task, Eagleton pronounces, is a manifold one. In this context Eagleton observes:

Regulator -and dispensor of a general humanism, guardian and instructor of public taste, the critic must fulfill these tasks from within a more fundamental responsibility as reporter and informer, a mere mechanism or occasion by which the public may enter into deeper imaginary unity with itself. The ‘Tatler’ and ‘Spectator’ are consciously educating a socially heterogeneous public into the universal forms of reason, taste and morality, but their judgements are not to be whimsically authoritarian, the diktats of a technocratic caste.
On the contrary, they must be moulded and constrained from within by the very public consensus they seek to nurture.

(TFC 22-23)

Eagleton adds that valid critical judgement is the fruit not of spiritual dissociation but of an energetic collusion with everyday life. It is in intimate empirical engagement with the social text of early-bourgeois England that modern criticism first makes its appearance; and the line from this vigorous empiricism to F.R. Leavis, along which such criticism will at a certain point mutate into the ‘Literary’, remains relatively unbroken. In Eagleton’s view, such ‘spontaneous’ engagements were made possible only by a peculiarly close interaction between cultural, political and economic. The early eighteenth century coffee-houses were not only forums, they were also nubs of finance and insurance. Both politicians and the authors would congregate at the coffee houses to compare notes and form the whole public opinion of the day. Cultural and political idioms continuously inter-penetrated: Addison himself was a functionary of the state apparatus as well as a journalist, and Steele also held government office.

Eagleton remarks that the collaborative literary relations established by the ‘Tatler’ and ‘Spectator’ find a resonance elsewhere, though
with a markedly different ideological tone, in the writings of Samuel Richardson. Richardson’s perpetual circulation of texts among friends and correspondents, with its attendant wranglings, pleadings, revisions, interpretations comes to constitute an entire discursive community of its own, a kind of public sphere in miniaturized or domesticated form within which, amidst all the petty frictions and anxieties of hermeneutical intercourse, a powerfully cohesive body of moral thought, a collective sensibility, comes to crystalize. Eagleton tells us that such a writer, like Richardson, actively constructed his own audience.

As the eighteenth century drew on, the rapid expansion of the forces of literary production began to outstrip and overturn the social relations of production within which such projects as the early periodicals had flourished. By the 1730s, literary patronage was already on the wane, with a concomitant increase in bookseller power; with the expansion of wealth, population and education, technological developments in printing and publishing and the growth of a middle class eager for literature, the small reading public of Addison’s day, largely confined to fashionable London, was spawning to support a whole caste of professional writers. By about mid-century, then, the profession of letters had become established and literary patronage was in its death throes. This period witnessed a marked quickening of literary production,
a widespread diffusion of science and letters and, in the 1750s and ’60s, a veritable explosion of literary periodicals. Writing then was becoming a very considerable branch of the English commerce. The book-sellers were the master manufacturers of employers. The several writers, authors, copyers and sub-writers were the workmen employed by the said master-manufacturers.

Eagleton draws our attention to the shift towards moral dogmatism, a loosening and disturbing of that easy amicability set up between the early periodicalist and his readers with the emergence in eighteenth-century England of the professional critic, the rise of a ‘new tribunal’ in which the interpersonal discourse of coffee-house gradually yields ground to the professional critic whose unenviable task is to render an account of all new books. Dr. Johnson’s ‘The Rambler’ devoted more space to criticism than any previous journal. One of Johnson’s most signal achievements, with the widely selling Lives of the Poets was to popularize for a general reading public a literary criticism previously associated with pedantry and personal abuse. According to Eagleton, what made such a general appeal possible was in part Johnson’s renowned common sense; for him, as for Addison and Steele, the act of literary criticism inhabits no autonomous aesthetic sphere but belongs organically with ‘general ideology’. Eagleton tells us that we are still not at a point where we can speak of ‘literary criticism as
an isolable technology, though with Johnson we are evolving towards just that rift between literary intellectual and social formation out of which a fully specialist criticism will finally emerge. In his view, in the trek from the cultural politics of Addison to the ‘words on the page’ the philosophical moment of Samuel Johnson - a mind still laying ‘amateur’ claim to evaluate all social experience, but now isolated and abstracted in contrast to the busily empirical Addison - is a significant milestone.

In his *The Function of Criticism* Eagleton attempts to examine the factors responsible for the gradual disintegration of the classical public sphere. He finds that among these factors, two are of particular relevance to the history of English criticism. The first is economic as capitalist society develops and market forces come increasingly to determine the destiny of literary products, it is no longer possible to assume that ‘taste’ or ‘cultivation’ are the fruits of civilized dialogue and reasonable debate. Cultural determinations are now clearly being set from elsewhere - from beyond the frontiers of public sphere itself, in the laws of commodity production of civil society. The second reason for the decline of the public sphere is a political one. Like all ideological formations, the bourgeois public sphere thrives on a necessary blindness to its own perimeters. Its space is potentially infinite, able to incorporate the whole of the ‘polite’ : no significant interest lies beyond its reach  The nation-society as a whole - is
effectively identical with the ruling class; only those wielding a title to speak rationally, and thus only the propertied, are in a true sense members of society.

Eagleton reminds us of the class struggle and the emergence of a ‘counter-public sphere’ in the England of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In the corresponding societies, the radical press, feminism and the dissenting churches, a whole oppositional network of journals, clubs, pamphlets, debates and institutions invades the dominant consensus, threatening to fragment it from within. Great changes in the public mind are produced by this diffusion and such changes must produce public innovation. Eagleton, in this context, calls upon us to contrast the tone of the early eighteenth-century periodical with that of their early nineteenth-century counterparts. What distinguishes the bourgeois periodical press of the latter period is its ‘partisan bias’, the vituperation, the dogmatism, the juridical tone, the air of omniscience and finality with which it conducts its critical business. Eagleton would like to remind us that it is the scurrility and sectarian virulence of the ‘Edinburgh’ and the ‘Quarterly’ which have lingered in the historical memory, in dramatic contrast to the ecumenism of Addison or Steele. In these vastly influential journals, the space of the public sphere is not much less one of bland consensus than of ferocious contention. Under the pressures of mounting
class struggle in society as a whole, the bourgeois public sphere is fissured and warped, wracked with a fury which threatens to strip it of ideological credibility.

Eagleton informs us that if criticism had, to some degree, slipped the economic yoke of its earlier years, when it was often no more than a thinly concealed puff for booksellers wares, it had done so only to exchange such enthralment for a political one. Criticism was not explicitly unabashedly political: the journals tended to select for review only those works on which they could loosely peg lengthy ideological pieces, and their literary judgements, buttressed by the authority of anonymity, were rigorously subordinated to their politics. Criticism was still in no full sense the product of literary ‘experts’. The ‘Quarterly’ savaged Keats, Hazlitt, Lamb, Shelley and Charlotte. ‘Blackwood’s ran a vicious campaign against the ‘Cockney school’ clustered around the ‘London Magazine’. Jeffrey of the ‘Edinburg’, self-appointed guardian of public taste, denounced the Lake poets as regressive and ridiculous, a threat to social rank and the high seriousness of bourgeois morality. Dismayed by such strife, Leigh Hunt looked back nostalgically to the more sedate years of the early century, proclaiming his desire to criticize others in an uncritical spirit of the old fashion. “The truth is”, Hunt lamented, “that criticism itself for the most part, is a nuisance and an impertinence: and no good-natured, reflecting
men would be critics, if it were not that there are worse (Hunt 387). The periodical-essayist, in Hunt’s view, is a writer who claims a peculiar intimacy with the public; but the age of periodical philosophy is on the wane, driven out by press advertising and the ‘mercantile spirit’.

Eagleton goes on to tell us that an edition of the ‘Spectator’ of 1831 entered a plea for the classical public sphere, stating that journalism was nothing but the expression of public opinion. It also stressed the fact that a newspaper that should attempt to dictate must soon perish. Such highmindedness had in fact long been overtaken by the fissiparousness of public opinion, the commercialization of literary production and the political imperative to process public consciousness in an age of violent class conflict. Eagleton tells us that even Leigh Hunt, committed though he believed himself to be to the disinterested pursuit of philosophic truth, uneasily acknowledged the need to write with something less than complete candour. He emphasised the fact that the growth of public opinion implied the fostering of it and such fostering of what was then by implication a partially benighted readership a certain diplomatic delicacy. In this context, the critic is the mirror, but in fact the lamp- his role is becoming the ultimately untenable one of expressing a public opinion he covertly or flagrantly manipulates.
Eagleton further says that criticism, then, has become a locus of political contention rather than a terrain of cultural consensus and it is in this context that we can perhaps best evaluate the birth of the nineteenth century ‘sage’. What the sage represents, one might claim, is an attempt to rescue criticism and literature from squalid political infighting which alarmed Leigh Hunt, constituting them instead as transcendental forms of knowledge. Eagleton informs us that the growth of idealist aesthetics in Europe, imported into England by Coleridge and Carlyle, is concomitant with this strategy. From the writing of the later Coleridge, through to Carlyle, Kingsley, Ruskin, Arnold and others, literature is extricated from the political arena and elevated to a realm where all might meet and expatiate in common. Eagleton reminds us that literature will fulfill its ideological functions most effectively only if it sheds all political instrumentality to become the repository of a common human wisdom beyond the sordidly historical. If the sage is driven by history into transcendental isolation, spurred into prophetic print by his vision of cultural degradation, he can nevertheless turn this isolation to ideological advantage, making a moral virtue out of historical necessity. If he can no longer validate his critical judgements by sound public standards, he can always interpret the consequent mysteriousness of such judgements as divine inspiration. Eagleton tells us in his Function of Criticism that Carlyle, sagest of the sages contributed to ‘Fraser’s Magazine, but considered it a chaotic,
fermenting dung-hill heap of compost, and dreamt of the day when he would be free to write independently. Thackeray praised Carlyle for his supposed refusal to subordinate critical judgement to political prejudice. It is Carlyle who has worked more than any other to give art its independence. The sage is no longer the co-discoursing equal of his readership, his perceptions tempered by a quick sense of their common opinion. The critic’s stance in relation to his audience is now transcendental, his pronouncements dogmatic and self-validating, his posture towards social life chillingly negative. Sundered on the rocks of class struggle, criticism bifurcates into Jeffrey and Carlyle, political lackey and specious prophet. The only available alternative to rampant interest, it would seem, is a bogus ‘disinterestedness’.

Eagleton adds that yet disinterestedness in the Romantic period is not merely bogus. In the hands of Hazlitt, the natural disinterestedness of the human mind becomes the basis of a radical politics, a critique of egocentric psychology and social practice. The ‘sympathetic imagination’ of the Romantics is disinterestedness as a revolutionary force, the production of a powerful yet decentred human subject which cannot be formalized within the protocols of rational exchange. In the Romantic era, the depth and span of critique which would be equal to a society wracked by political turmoil is altogether beyond the powers of criticism in its
traditional sense. The function of criticism passes accordingly to poetry itself - poetry as, in Arnold’ later phrase, a ‘criticism of life’, art as the most absolute, deep-seated response conceivable to the given social reality. In the opinion of Eagleton, criticism in the conventional sense no longer be a matter of delivering verifiable judgements according to shared public norms, for the act of judgement itself is not tainted with a deeply suspect rationality, and normative assumptions are precisely what the negating force of art seeks to subvert. Criticism must therefore either become the enemy of art, as Jeffrey is of Wordsworth, corner for itself some of the creative energy of poetry itself, or shift to a quasi-philosophical medication of the nature and consequences of the creative act.

The Romantic critic, according to Eagleton, is in effect the poet ontologically justifying his own practice, elaborating its deeper implications, reflecting upon the grounds and consequences of his art. Once literary production itself becomes problematical, criticism can no longer be the mere act of judgement of an assured phenomenon: on the contrary, it is now an active principle in the defending, and deepening of this uneasy practice of the imagination, the very explicit self-knowledge of art itself. Such quasi-philosophical self-reflection will always be ironic, for if truth is nothing less than poetry, any non-poetic discourse cannot hope to capture the reality of which it speaks, ensnared as it is in a rationality - that of social
discourse itself - which reaches out for truth but can never be equal to it. The critic, then, is no longer in the first place judge, administrator of collective norms or locus of enlightened rationality; nor is he in the first place cultural strategist or political catalyst, for these functions are also passing over to the side of the artist. He is not primarily a mediator between work and audience, for if the work achieves its effects it does so by an intuitive immediacy which flashes between itself and reader and could only be dissipated by passing through the relay of critical discourse. And if the work does not succeed, then it is because there is in truth no fit audience to receive it, because the poet is a nightingale singing in the dark, and thus once again no place for a mediator.

Eagleton drives home to us a piece of noteworthy information. With the decline of literary patronage and the classical public sphere, the abandonment of literature to the market and the anonymous urbanization of society, the poet or sage is deprived of a known audience, a community of familiar co-subjects. And this severance from any permanent particular readership, which the sway of commodity production has forced upon him, can then be converted to the illusion of a transcendental autonomy which speaks not idiomatically but universally, not in class accents but in human tones. Moreover, this transcendental autonomy turns scornfully from an actual ‘mass’ public and addresses itself instead to the people, to the future,
to some potential mass political movement, to the poetic genius buried in every breast to a community of transcendental subjects spectrally inscribed within the given social order. ‘Rational’ criticism can find no hold here, for it evolved in response to one form of (political) absolutism, and finds itself equally at a loss when confronted with another form of self-grounded absolutism in the realm of transcendental spirit.

In the third chapter of the book *The Function of Criticism*, Eagleton elaborates on the category ‘man of letters’. He observes:

The nineteenth century was to produce a category which yoked sage and critical hack uneasily together: ‘man of letters’ It is an interestingly elusive term, broader and more nebulous than ‘creative writer’, not quite synonymous with scholar, critic or journalist (45)

Eagleton tells us that like the eighteenth century periodicalists, the man of letters is the bearer and dispenser of a generalised ideological wisdom rather than the exponent of a specialist intellectual skill. He is one whose synoptic vision, undimmed by any narrowly technical interest, is able to survey the whole cultural and intellectual landscape of his age. Such comprehensive authority links the
man of letters on one side with the sage; but whereas the sage’s synopticism is a function of transcendental detachment, the man of letters sees as widely as he does because material necessity compels him to be a jack-of-all trades, deeply embroiled for survival in the very commercial literary world from which Carlyle beat his disdainful retreat. The man of letters as much as he does because he cannot make a living out of only one intellectual specialism. The expansion of the reading public by the mid-nineteenth century, and consequently of the periodical market greatly enhanced opportunities of professional writing. We know from Eagleton that the man of letters was in this sense a hack; but he is a figure of sage like ideological authority too, and in the Victorian period one can observe this unsettling co-existence as often as not within the same individuals.

Further Eagleton hints at the same conflict - whether men of letters saviours of society or unheeded hacks - which Thomas Carlyle hoped to resolve by elevating the man of letters to heroic stature. He tells us that in ‘The Hero as Man of Letters’, Carlyle writes of the power of print in spreading the word of parliament (literature) and of the press as having superseded both pulpit and senate. Printing brings with it democracy, creating a community of the literate ‘men of letters’ - with incalculable influence. The whole essay (‘The Hero as Man of Letters’) represents a
strained, nostalgic reinvention of the classical bourgeois public sphere, lauding the power of discourse to influence political life and raising parliamentary reporters to the status of prophets, priests and kings. Carlyle felt that the ‘men-of-letters’ go dismally unrecognized. The reason he gives for this is that the ‘literary class’ is disorganic, socially diffuse and disorganized, something less than Guild-like in its corporate social being. Eagleton informs us that in the statement of Carlyle there is an echo of the later Coleridge’s fear of a rootless, disaffected caste of intellectuals, which he believed had done much to bring about the French Revolution. He goes on to say that the unspoken contradiction in Carlyle’s effusion - are men of Letters savours of society or unheeded hacks? - is familiarly Romantic: the poet as unacknowledged legislator, a dream of power continually crossed with what porports to be a description of the actual.

Eagleton observes that the man of letters, attached to one or more of the great Victorian periodicals, was still striving to weld together a public sphere of enlightened bourgeois discourse. His role, like that of Addison and Steele, is to be commentator, informer, mediator, interpreter, populizer; like his eighteenth century predecessors he must reflect as well as consolidate public opinion, working in close touch with the broad habits and prejudices of the middle-class reading public. The ability to assimilate and interpret is rated as a higher quality than the ability to
report special knowledge. The extent that the Victorian man of letters achieved considerable success in this task, the bourgeois public sphere may be said to have survived in some form into the maid-nineteenth century. Through their news-papers, periodicals and books, the men of letters wrote directly for all the people who counted in decision-making. Many of them in addition had close personal and familial relations with men of affair and the ruling class. Sharing common standards with their audience, they could write out of an instinctive sense of what would be popular, intelligible and acceptable.

Eagleton pinpoints the role of the man of letters in the Victorian era. The Victorian intellectual climate was one of deep ideological turmoil and insecurity, and in such a situation the men of letters cannot be an exactly equal partner in the dialogue with his audience. His task is to instruct, consolidate and console - to provide a disturbed, ideologically disoriented readership with the kind of popularizing summaries of contemporary thought, all the way from geological discoveries to the Higher Criticism, which might stem the socially disruptive tides of intellectual bemusement. The man of letters was expected to help the audience through the troubles of economic, social and religious change. His function was to explain and regulate such change as much as to reflect it, thus rendering it less ideologically fearful. He must
actively reinvent a public sphere fractured by class struggle, the internal rupturing of bourgeois ideology, the growth of a confused, amorphous reading public hungry for information and consolation, the continued subversion of ‘polite’ opinion by the commercial market, and the apparently uncontrollable explosion and fragmentation of knowledges consequent upon the accelerating division of intellectual labour. His relation to his audience must be one of subject to object as well as in some sense subject to subject; a nervous responsiveness to public opinion must find its place within a didactic, covertly propagandist posture towards his readership, processing knowledge in the act of providing it. In this, Eagleton says, the man of letters is contradictorily located between the authoritarianism of the sage and the consensualism of the eighteenth-century periodicalists, and the strains of this dual stance are obvious enough. He must be at once source of sage like authority and canny popularizer, member of a spiritual clerisy but plausible intellectual salesman. The critic is not both inside and outside the public arena, responding attentively from within only the more effectively to manage and mould opinion from some superior external vantage-point. It is a posture which threatens to invert the priorities of correction and collaboration evident in the ‘Tatler ‘ and ‘Spectator’, where the former was possible and tolerable only on the basis of the latter.
Eagleton now passes on to the cultural unevenness of the nineteenth century reading public. In the epoch of Addison and Steele, the frontiers between ‘polite society’ and the rest of the nation were rigorous and palpable. There were naturally, many degrees of literary in eighteenth century England; but there was an obvious distinction between those who could ‘read’, in a sense of the term inseparable from ideological notions of gentility, and those who could not. The nineteenth century man of letters must suffer the blurring and troubling of this reasonably precise boundary. What is now most problematical is not illiteracy, which is after all a sort of absolute, determinable condition, but those who are not quite able to read in a culturally valorized sense. They threaten to deconstruct the fixed opposition between ‘influential persons’ and ‘multitude’ - According to Eagleton, what is most ideologically undermining is a literary which is therefore literacy, a form of reading which transgresses the frontier between blindness and insight, a whole nation which reads but not in a culturally valorised sense, and which is therefore neither quite literate nor illiterate, either firmly within one’s categories not securely the other of them. It is not this deconstructive point, this aporia of reading that the critic finds himself addressing an audience which is and is not his equal. Poised precariously between clerisy and market forces, he represents the last historical attempt to suture these realms together; and when the logic of commodity production will render such strivings obviously Utopian, he will
duly disappear from historical sight. The twentieth-century man of letters is a more notable ‘minority’ figure than his Victorian predecessor.

Eagleton goes on to say that if the task of the man of letters was to assess each strain of fresh specialist knowledge by the touchstone of a general humanist, it is gradually becoming clear that such an enterprise cannot withstand the proliferating division of intellectual labour in English society. In Victorian England, the critic as mediator of middleman, shaping, regulating and reviving a common discourse, is at once ideologically imperative and, with the professionalization of knowledges, warring of ideological standpoints and rapid expansion of an unevenly educated reading public, a less and less feasible project. Eagleton contends that the very conditions which provoke such a role into existence defeat its possibility. The critic’s traditional role as mediator was proving redundant.

Dickens, for example, required no middleman between himself and his public; the popular authors were themselves assuming one of the critic’s functions, moulding and reflecting the sensibility by which they were consumed. The critic cannot defeat the laws of the literary commodity, much as he might quarrel with them. A ‘juridical’ critical discourse on such writers is still appropriate in the periodicals, measuring how far particular literary products violate to conform to certain aesthetic-ideological norms; but this discourse—must be conducted at “a distance from the market”, and
it is the market, not the critical discourse, which has the upper hand in determining what is acceptable. The place in Victorian society where these two apparatuses - commercial and juridical - most powerfully intersect is in the twin figures whom one might well term the period’s most important literary critics; Charles Mudie and W.H. Smith. The censorious, moralistic owners of the two major circulating libraries, Mudie and Smith effectively monopolized Victorian literary production, determining not the form and character of what was actually written. Both men actively intervened in the selection of books for their libraries, and regarded themselves as the protectors of public morality. In the face of such massively concentrated economic and cultural power, no classical public sphere was remotely conceivable.

According to Eagleton, there was another reason for the critics growing redundancy. For if criticism’s task was more moral than intellectual, a matter of guiding, uplifting and consoling a dispirited middle class, nothing could more effectively fulfill these ends than literature itself. The most searching, invigorating social critic was the writer himself; for all those who turned to Walter Bagehot for spiritual solace, there were a great many more who opened Adam Bede or ‘In Memoriam’. Once criticism had identified one of its major tasks as ideological reassurance, it was in danger of arguing itself out of a job -for this was precisely what literature itself
was, among other things, designed to provide. In the estimate of Eagleton, George Eliot’s contributions to the ‘Westminster Review’ are those of a distinguished woman of letters, but the specialist knowledge she occasionally trades in here will only become truly efficacious when fleshed out in fictional form. As woman of letters, Eliot is from time to time partisan spokesperson for minority ‘progressive’ views; as novelist, she can supposedly transcend such prejudices, gathering them into that many-sided totality that is literary realism. If the middle-class masses will suffer edification only in graphic, economical, non-systematic form there could be no better medium of such enlightenment except literature. A question that comes up at this juncture is as to where that leaves the critic.

Eagleton opines that critical partisanship is in general less ferocious in mid-century than it had been in the earlier decade- but it still poses an obstacle to the consensual task which must set itself, whether in the militant Utilitarianism of the ‘Westminster’, the radical free thought of the ‘Fortnightly’ or the Toryism of the ‘Quarterly’. The ‘Fortnightly’ had tried to break with the rampant sectarianism of the older journals, offering itself as a platform for the discussion of all questions by the light of the pure reason. Another attempt at ‘disinterestedness’ arrived with the establishment of the ‘Saturday Review’, in which criticism strove to sever itself once and for all from the public realm. Run as a hobby by its editor
Beresford Hope, the ‘Saturday’ was an organ of Oxford high culture, given to snobbish contempt for such popular authors as Dickens. Its contributors assumed a pose of lofty condescension and infallibility which gave their utterances an oracular rather then argumentative tone. Characterized by dry and ungenerous negativism, the ‘Saturday’ poured scorn upon popular taste and the mass literary market. It reverted to an eighteenth-century aristocratic attitude towards literacy men, regretting the growth of a professional layer of writers with no significant role in the sphere of public affairs. It was a prime example of that higher journalism which provided an ideal medium of cultural authority ready, to serve the newly awakened ambitions of the universities. At the turn of the century, Eagleton tells us, journalism had been in low repute, and later on, journalism was one of the obvious means by which the universities might speak to the nation. What they told the nation, however, was for the most part insolently reproving; in this sense the pulling of some periodical journalism into the orbit of an aloof, socially alienated academia represents another stage in the dissolution of the classical public sphere. The higher journalism signifies less a renewal of that sphere than a partial annexation of it by a sullenly ant-social criticism.

Eagleton says that the ‘Saturdays’ dignified retreat to traditionalist culture in the face of mass literature and the professional writer was one drastic response to crisis of the Victorian criticism. Like the role of the
man of letters, however, it was a strategy doomed to failure. The dilemma of Victorian criticism began with the two paths open to it, those of hack and sage. The man of letters is on the point of being overtaken by intellectual specialization and the unpalatable truth that the public taste he seeks to form is now decisively determined by the market. The sage, partly in reaction to this dismal condition, removes himself from the social arena to less contaminated heights, but in doing so merely lapses into ineffectual idealism. In the words of Eagleton, this is nowhere more graphically illustrated than in the work of Matthew Arnold. If the ‘Saturday’ viewed itself, deludedly enough, as disinterested, it was still not disinterested enough for Arnold, who considered its tone too assertive, its views too provincial, for it to serve as a true bastion of unbiased intelligence. Eagleton informs us that Arnold himself desires a criticism so supremely objective and non-partisan that it will transcend all particular social classes and interests, seeing the object as it really is. For this purpose, criticism must steadfastly refuse to enter upon the realm of social practice, which is quite distinct from the sphere of ideas. It must seek to establish what is best in human thought irrespectively of practice, politics and everything of the kind.

The politicization of criticism in the sectarian polemics of the journal, according to Eagleton, is an obstacle to the free play of the mind;
criticism, accordingly, must withdraw, for a while at least, into the academic sphere, encircled as it is by a society incapable of fine discrimination. From this serene vantage-point it will equally survey all interests, innocent of any tendentiousness itself beyond the will to truth. But the more capaciousely universal its discourse thus becomes, the more it will lapse into utter vacuousness.

Eagleton contends that criticism has the unwelcome choice of preserving a political content. What actually happened in the course of the nineteenth century was that criticism entered those institutions which Arnold had looked for the harmonious culture lacking in the periodicals; the universities. English literature as an academic subject in Victorian England fulfilled a number of ideological purposes. English was, among other things, a project designed to pacify and incorporate the proletariat, generate sympathetic solidarity between the social classes, and construct a national cultural heritage which might serve to undergird ruling-class hegemony in a period of social instability. In this sense, the emergence of “English” brought to fruition the enterprise of the sales, establishing literature as a transcendental object of enquiry. But the founding of English as a university ‘discipline’ also entailed a professionalization of literary studies which was quite alien to the sage’s ‘amateur’ outlook, and more resolutely specialist that the man of letters could afford to be. The man of letters was
an academic without university, an ‘extra-mural’ scholar responsive to the demands of the public world. The academicization of criticism provided it with an institutional basis and professional structure; but by the same token it signalled its final sequestration from the public realm. Criticism achieved security by committing political suicide; its moment of academic institutionalization is also the moment of its effective demise as a socially active force. Within academic English, the conflict between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ was to continue, transposed into a quarrel between ‘criticism’ and ‘scholarship’; academic literary scholarship develops apace from the Victorian period onwards as a technical specialism, while academic criticism retains some nebulous preoccupation with ‘life’ as well as ‘letters’.

Eagleton further enlightens us on the fact that the final quarter of nineteenth century witnesses the establishment of the specialized intellectual journal -’Mind’, ‘Notes and Queries’, the ‘English Historical Review’ - in which the growing professionalization and compartmentalization of knowledges is directly reflected. The traditional man of letters, his authority diminished by the universities as centres of specialized research, is also selectively ignored by a mass readership. Intellectual rather than ‘intellectual-cum-moral leadership takes over, and the man of letters is despised by late nineteenth-century academics for his shallow eclecticism, partisanship and moral pretensions.
In his brilliant new critique *The Illusions of Post Modernism* (1996), Terry Eagleton explores the beginnings, ambivalences, histories, subjects, fallacies and contradictions of postmodernism. Concerned less with recherché formulations of postmodern philosophy than with the culture or milieu, or even the sensibility, of postmodernism as a whole, he has in his sights, above all, a particular kind of student, or consumer, of ‘popular’ brands of postmodern thought.

Although Eagleton’s view of the topic is, as he says, generally negative one, he draws attention equally to postmodernism’s strengths as well as its failings. He sets out not just to expose the illusory, but, by subtly grounded argument, to show the students he has in mind that they never believed what they thought they believed in the first place. In the process his devastating gifts for irony and satire sharpen the reader’s pleasure, just as his commitment to the ethical and the vision of just society inspire engagement and a refusal to acquiesce in the appalling mess which is the contemporary world.

In the preface to *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) Eagleton makes a distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. The word ‘postmodernism’ generally refers to a form of contemporary culture, whereas the term ‘post modernity’ alludes to a specific historical period.
Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of skepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities. This way of seeing, according to Eagleton, has real material conditions. It springs from an historic shift in the West to a new form of capitalism to the ephemeral, decentralized world of technology, consumerism and the culture industry, in which the service, finance and information industries triumph over traditional manufacture.

Eagleton says that if postmodernism covers everything from punk rock to the death of metanarrative, fanzines to Foucault, then it is difficult to see how any single explanatory scheme could do justice to such a bizarrely heterogeneous entity. If post modernism were nothing but the backwash of a political debacle, it would be hard to account for any of its more positive attributes. One would, for example, be forced to claim that its single most enduring achievement- the fact that it has helped to place questions of sexuality, gender and ethnicity so firmly on the political agenda that it is impossible to imagine them being erased without an
almighty struggle was nothing more than a substitute for more classical forms of radical politics, which dealt in class, state, ideology, revolution, material modes of production.

According to Eagleton, the politics of postmodernism have been at once enrichment and evasion. If they have opened up vital new political questions, it is partly because they have beat an undignified retreat from older political issues not because these have disappeared or been resolved, but because they are for the moment proving intractable. In the early 1970s, cultural theorists were to be found discussing socialism, signs and sexuality, in the late 1970s and early 1980s they were arguing the toss over signs and sexuality, by the late 1980s they were talking about sexuality. This was not a displacement from politics to something else, since language and sexuality are political to their roots, but it proved, for all that, a way of valuable reaching beyond certain classical political questions, such as why most people do not get enough to eat, which ended up by all but edging them from the agenda.

It is interesting to note Eagleton’s argument when he says that feminism and ethnicity are popular today because they are markers in the mind of some of the most vital political struggles we confront in reality. They are also popular because they are not necessarily anti-capitalist and so
fit well enough with a post-radical age. Post-structuralism, which emerged in oblique ways from the political ferment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and which like some repentant militant became gradually depoliticized after being deported of *Kitsch*. Further, Eagleton says, it has put the *skids* under a number of complacent certainties, *prised* open some paranoid totalities, contaminated some jealously protected purities, bent some oppressive norms and shaken some rather frail-looking foundations. As a result, it has properly disorientated those who knew only too well who they were, and disarmed those who need to know who they are in the face of those only too willing to tell them.

Eagleton’s list of allegations against post-modernism is an unending one. He continues that postmodernism has demystified the most stubbornly naturalized institutions by laying bare the conventions which govern them, and so has sometimes run headlong into a brand of neo-sophism for which, since all conventions are arbitrary anyway, one might as well conform to those of the Free World. Postmodernism, according to Eagleton, by contrast, cannot really come to a conclusion any more than there could be an end to post Marie Antoinette. It is not, in its own eyes, an ‘historical stage’, but the ruin of all such stagiest thought, according to him. It does not come after modernism in the sense that positivism comes after idealism, but in the sense that the recognition that the emperor has no
clothes comes after gazing upon him. And so, just as it was true all along that the emperor was naked, so in a way postmodernism was true even before it got started. It is, at one level at least, just the negative truth of modernity, an unmasking of its mythical pretensions, and so was presumably just as true in 1786 as it is today.

Then Eagleton takes up the question of postmodern subject. The postmodern subject is one whose body is integral to its identity. The body has become one of the most recurrent preoccupations of postmodern thought. Mangled members, tormented torsos, bodies of emblazoned or incarcerated, disciplined or desirous. Eagleton says that sexuality began in the 1960s partly as an extension of radical politics into regions they had lamentably neglected. But as revolutionary energies were gradually rolled back, a concern with the body came gradually to take their place. The fetish, for Freud, is that which plugs an intolerable gap; and there is a case for claiming that sexuality has now become the most fashionable fetish of all. The discourse which first launched the notion of sexual fetishism in a grand way has itself become a very good example of it.

According to Eagleton, the body has been at once a vital deepening of radical politics, and a wholesale displacement of them. There is a glamorous kind of materialism about body talk, which compensates for
certain more classical strains of materialism now in dire trouble. Eagleton opines that as a stubbornly local phenomenon, the body fits well enough with postmodern suspicions of grand narratives, as well as with pragmatism’s love affair with the concrete.

Eagleton reckons it remarkable to see how the epoch of postmodernity has been characterized by a veering away from Nature and a sharp swing towards it. On the one hand, everything is now cultural; on the other hand, we must redeem a damaged Nature from the hubris of civilization. These apparently opposed cases are, in fact, secretly at one: if ecology repudiates the sovereignty of the human, culturalism relativizes it away.

The focus of attention now shifts to the philosophers and psychologists for whom the mind is still a sexy notion. But literary critics have always been wary of the unhoused intellect, preferring their concepts to come fleshed and incarnate. In this sense, the new somatics represents the return in a more sophisticated register of the old organicism. Eagleton tells us that instead of poems as plump as an apple, we now have texts as material as an armpit. This turn to the body sprang partly from a structuralist hostility to consciousness, and represents the final expulsion of the ghost from the machine.
Eagleton says that it is important to see, as postmodernism largely does not, that we are not ‘cultural’ rather than ‘natural’ creatures, but cultural beings by virtue of our nature, which is to say by virtue of the sorts of bodies we have and the kind of world to which they belong. Because we are all born prematurely, unable to look after ourselves, our nature contains a yawning abyss into which culture must instantly move, otherwise we would quickly die. And this move into culture is at once our splendour and our catastrophe. Like all the best falls it was a fortunate one, a fall up into civilization rather than one down to the beasts.

The linguistic animal, Eagleton observes, has the edge over its fellow creatures in all kind of ways: it can be sardonic or play the trombone, torture children and stockpile unclear weapons. Language is what emancipates us to a degree from the dull constrains of our biology, enabling us to abstract ourselves from the world (which includes for this purpose our bodies), and so to transform or destroy it. Language liberates us from the prison-house of our senses, and becomes an entirely weightless way of carrying the world around with us. Eagleton adds that only a linguistic animal could have history, as opposed to what one imagines for a slut is just the damn thing over again.
Eagleton argues that because it has language, the human animal is in danger of developing too fast, unconstrained by its sensuous responses and so of over-reaching itself and bringing itself to nothing. Human existence is thus exciting but precarious, whereas the career of a slug is tedious but secure. Slugs and beavers cannot lunge at each other with knives, unless they are doing it on the quiet, but neither can they practise surgery. A creature condemned to meaning, Eagleton says, is an animal continually at risk. It belongs to our nature that we are able to go beyond it, as it belongs to the system of language that it is able to generate events known as speech acts which can transgress the system itself. Poetry, Eagleton says, is one such example.

Myths of Power (1975) is a Marxist study of the Brontës. Eagleton is concerned in this study to identify in the Bronte’s fiction a recurrent ‘categorical structure of roles, values and relations. He takes this phrase ‘categorical structure’ from the Marxist critic Lucien Goldmann, who uses it to designate those shared categories which inform apparently heterogeneous works, and shape the consciousness of the particular social group or class which produces them. Regarding the concept ‘categorical structure’, Eagleton observes in his introductory chapter of Myths of Power
Since my admiration for Goldmann’s work is laced with strong reservations, my use of the concept in this book will be deliberately free, even though, like Goldmann, I shall employ it as an essential mediation between literary text, social consciousness and historical forces. By ‘categorical structure’, then, I seek to identify the inner ideological structure of a work, and to expose its relations both to what we call literary ‘form’ and to an actual history. (4)

Eagleton continues that the ideological structure arises from the real history of the West Riding in the first half of the nineteenth century. It is, in the belief of Eagleton, imaginatively grasped and transposed in the production of the Brontes’ fiction. It is found embedded in Charlotte’s work, for example, a constant struggle between two ambiguous, internally divided sets of values. On the other hand are ranged the values of rationality, coolness, shrewd self-seeking, energetic individualism, radical protest and rebellion; on the other hand lie the habits of piety, submission, culture, tradition, conservatism. Eagleton calls these patterns of value ‘ambiguous’ because the elements of one may be displaced or ‘inverted’ into the other. For it is possible to decipher in the conflicts and compromise between them a fictionally transformed version of the tensions and alliances
between the two social classes which dominated the Bronte’s world: the
industrial bourgeoisie, and the landed gentry or aristocracy.

In this context Eagleton observes:

I read Charlottes novels as ‘myths’ which work towards a
balance or fusion of blunt bourgeois rationality and
flamboyant Romanticism, brash initiative and genteel
cultivation, passionate rebellion and cautious conformity; and
those interchanges embody a complex structure of
convergence and antagonism between the landed and
industrial sectors of the contemporary ruling class (MP 4)

Eagleton informs us that the Brontes lived through an era of
disruptive social change, and lived that disruption at a peculiarly
vulnerable point. For from being sublimely secluded from that history, that
history entered, shaped and violated the immost recesses of their personal
lives. Indeed, so finely meshed were the strands which bound their history
and biography into unity that one needs, to interpret their situation, in terms
of the Althusserian concept of ‘overdetermination’. Eagleton says that
Althusser has borrowed this concept form Freud. By ‘overdetermination’,
Althusser seeks to describe the way in which major contradictions in
society never emerge in ‘pure’ forms, on the contrary, they act by
consensing into complex unity an accumulated hest of subsidiary conflicts, each of which conversely determines the general contradiction. The Brontes’ situation, in the opinion of Eagleton, is overdetermined in precisely this sense.

The major historical conflict which Eagleton’s book *Myths of Power* selects as its focus is that between landed and industrial capital, and the conflict is sharpened and complicated for the Brontes by a host of subsidiary factors. Their situation is certainly unique, but unique in its classical condensing of an unusually wide range of historical tensions. Eagleton says that the Brontes happened to live in a region which revealed the friction between land and industry in peculiarly stark form, starker than in a purely agrarian or industrial area. The same part of the country witnessed working class struggle at an extraordinary pitch of militancy, and in that sense too highlighted certain ‘typical’ historical trends. These pervasive social conflicts were then peculiarly intensified by the sisters’ personal situation.

It is curiously interesting to note Eagleton’s observations of the Brontes. He says that they were placed at a painfully ambiguous point in the social structure, as the daughters of a clergyman with the inferior status of ‘perpetual curate’ who had thrust his way up from poverty. They strove
as a family to maintain reasonably ‘genteel’ standards in traditionally rough-and-ready environment. They were, moreover, socially insecure women-members of a cruelly oppressed group whose condition reflected a mere exploitation. And they were educated women, trapped in an almost intolerable deadlock between culture and economics, between imaginative aspirations and the cold truth of a society which could use them merely as ‘higher’ servants. They were isolated educated women, socially and geographically remote from a world with which they nevertheless maintained close intellectual touch, and so driven back on themselves in solitary emotional hungering. Eagleton tells us that, at certain points in their fiction, indeed, that loneliness becomes type and image of the isolation of all men in an individualist society. Moreover, they were forced to endure in their childhood an especially brutal form of ideological approach – Calvinism.

Eagleton says that in the unique imaginative formation of the Brontes, social, sexual, cultural, religious and geographical issues fuse into an over-determined unity. We need to be rather more precise abot their ambiguous – social standing. Their father, Patrick Bronte, was the son of a poor Irish peasant family who had fought their way from cabin to cottage to tenant-farm. He himself was by turns blacksmith, linen-weaver and schoolmaster, and finally blazed a trail to Cambridge and Anglican orders.
Marx’s general characterization of the petty bourgeoisie – ‘contradiction incarnate’ – seems in his case peculiarly apt.

The sisters’ entry into Cowan Bridge school and then Roe Head, marks the moment of their traumatic break from the imaginative freedom of the parsonage to an inflexibly disciplined, harshly restrictive regime. That crucial transition from sheltered settlement to crippling social pressure haunts their novels as a kind of primordial fall, a spiritual rupture impossible to erase from memory. From here on, the sisters move into an exhausting confrontation with practical necessity which only Charlotte was to survive. All three women were directly trapped in the educational machinery set up by the rich to exploit the sons and daughters of the ‘genteel’ poor. And this drastically tightened the social contradictions latent in their domestic context. Becoming a governess meant moving into a higher circle as well as glad opportunity to exercise one’s intellectual talents; but it also meant entering that desirable society precisely as a servant, as socially subservient to the very men and women to whom one felt culturally superior. The sisters moved physically into the class to which they ‘spiritually’ belonged – the cultivated society of Miss Branwell’s nostalgic memories, belgoned – the cultivated society of Miss Branwell’s nostalgic memories, only to suffer an acute sense of rejection and inferiority.
Eagleton further contends that the Brontes’ traumatic transition from the protected enclave of the parsonage, where exotic fantasy was allowed free rein, to the hard exigencies of a working world, has a representative rather than a purely personal significance. In that particular movement can be traced the shape of a more general historical phenomenon: that of the Romantic imagination being beaten down by society, stifled and shackled my mechanistic routine, hammering hopelessly at external limits. According to Eagleton, it is a contradiction between imagination and society of which Charlotte herself was acutely aware.

In the Brontes’ careers as governess, the historical frictions were fleshed, realised and brought home as immediately personal experience. They felt, on the one hand, a fierce petty bourgeois bitterness for those idly gentry whose pampered offspring they were required to englighten. They experienced on the other hand a patronizing distaste for the vulgar philistinism of the nouveau riche. Because they came of a professional rather than a commercial family they were able to feel culturally superior to the arrivistes around them. That feeling was constantly shot through with a blunt, exasperated criticism of the traditional gentry which relates them to the plain, taciturn, hard-headed world of the old yeomanry and the new industrial capitalists.
As Eageton asserts, we find in the Brontes, an abnormally stark opposition between a kind of ‘pre-industrial’ imaginative creativity, feeding off the resources of myth, archetype, rhetoric, melodrama, and the felt pressurer of a drably spiritless society to which that imagination must either tortuously adapt or suffer extinction. Eagleton says that the fact that the Bronte sisters were compelled to real life to negotiate the rift between imagination and society is crucial for an understanding of their fiction. There was, on the one hand, the simple imperative to earn a living - the need for energy and drive the respect for whatever was hardy, shrewd and stoical, the fellow-feeling for the victimised and dispossessed, the contempt for all that was pampered and parasitic. And yet there was the admiration for civilized delicacy, a fascination with the genteel coupled with a distaste for the brash and pushing. That ambiguity, Eageton says, was structural to the Brontes’ social situations, estranged as they were at once from the rough life on their Haworth doorstep and the gentility in their neighbourhood. Eagleton sees embodied in those personal deadlocks wider historical conflicts, between the ideologies of landed gentry and bourgeoisie, which is the deep structure of the novels themselves.

Eagleton brings to our notice that it is easy to see how the sisters’s respect for the shrewd, hardy and energetic calls into play the identifiably bourgeois values of a progressive world, yet in a sense those values also
refer nostalgically backwards, to the dour, settled milieu of the traditional Yorkshire yeomanry. Between these two classes in the West Riding there existed a certain community of sensibility; the yeomanry, like the radical whig manufacturers, had traditionally a spirit of equality and republican independence which linked them in common antagonism to the conservative, jealousy, exclusive and hierarchical gentry.

Eagleton tells us that his aim is a structural analysis of Charlotte’s fiction. Text, author, ideology, social class, productive forces: these are the terms he will seek to bring together by the mediatory concept of categorical structure. He adds that the aim of historical criticism is not to add specialist footnotes to literature; like any authentic criticism, its intention is to possess the work more deeply.

Terry Eagleton’s criticism of fiction is noteworthy. For him, as for Raymond Williams, the novels of D.H Lawrence show repeatedly how an instinctive allegiance to a working-class culture and a desire or determination to move beyond it can co-exist in painful and perpetual tension. The essay forms the closing chapter of *Exiles and Emigres*, a formidable study of expatriatism in modern literature, which seeks to understand the dominance in early twentieth-century writing of such ‘emigres’ as Joseph Conrad, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B.
Yeats and James Joyce. All of these authors were compelled to write about the seeming collapse and disintegration of Western civilization and all were able to draw on experience and perspectives outside conventional English Society. Lawrence, by contrast, was English, yet his working class milieu afforded him a powerful critique of England that possessed both the distance and detachment of the outsider and the intimacy and inwardness of the native.

*Exiles and Emigres* develops and tends the influential theories of realism proposed by the Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukacs. Among the key terms in the book are ‘totality’ and ‘totalization’ with which Lukacs described the capacity of literary works to embody a complete vision of society, bringing together both personal feeling and public event, both local insight and general understanding. Like Raymond Williams, whose study of the realist fiction *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* was published the same year (1970), Eagleton modifies the Lukacsian view of social realism, claiming that the process of grasping any culture as a whole becomes much more problematic in fiction from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. *Exiles and Emigres* insists that the achievement of a comprehensive vision of society in nineteenth-century realism is decisively ruptured in the early twentieth century. In a social condition perceived as fragmentary and flawed, the common difficulty is that of discovering a
vantage point from which a coherent vision might be possible. In this respect, the book is concerned not just with the perspectives of non-English writers, but with the ways in which English writers such as George Orwell and Graham Greene were exiles within their own society, driven by the search for some point of transcendence from which their society might be explained and understood. It is here that the novels of D.H. Lawrence prove most revealing.

In some ways, according to Eagleton, Lawrence appears to the archetypal modern exile, a wanderer in Europe, America, Australia and New Mexico, but the concern in Exiles and Emigres is with the nature of Lawrence’s exile and estrangement within English culture. Adopting the vocabulary of Raymond Williams, Eagleton identifies pervasive ‘structures of feeling’ in Lawrence’s novels, including the powerful pull between settlement and transcendence that characterizes Sons and Lovers. Ironically, Paul Morel moves beyond the boundaries of the family into a broader social sphere, but the force which impels him – his mother’s influence – also brings him home. The recurrent rhythm of intimacy and estrangement, relatedness and autonomy, is played out over different generations in The Rainbow. One of the highlights of the essays is its superb analysis of the closing paragraph of The Rainbow, with its high
praise for Lawrence’s totalizing achievement and his ‘intensely persuasive vision of an entire culture’.

According to Eagleton, Women in Love seems to reduce the complex social fabric of the earlier novels by focusing too intensely on a restricted set of relationships, while the relationships themselves have an attenuated quality (A criticism Lukacs frequently makes of modernist literature). Eagleton goes on to say that in Lady Chatterley’s Lover the conflict between Lawrence’s increasing alienation from English society and his increasing determination to recover a lost sense of value in that society finally proves disabling. Even so, Lawrence is regarded as unusual among twentieth-century writers in presenting both an intimate understanding of English society and a comprehensive radical criticism of its forms and directions. It is worth comparing this early essay on Lawrence with another study in Criticism and Ideology (pp. 157-61), in which a decisive break is made with the work of Georg Lukacs. In the later book, Lawrence’s ‘vision’ is reconfigured in terms of ideology and its complex relationship with literary form.

A further study of Lawrence can be found in Literary Theory (pp.151-5), where the ideas of Jaques Lacan are put to use in a psychoanalytical reading of Sons and Lovers. This chapter of the book is
entitled ‘Psychoanalysis’. In the previous few chapters Eagleton has suggested a relationship between developments in modern literary theory and the political and ideological turmoil of the twentieth century. He says that such turmoil is never only a matter of wars, economic slumps and revolutions: it is also experienced by those caught up in it in the most intimately personal ways. It is a crisis of human relationships, and of the human personality as well as a social convulsion, and of the human personality as well as a social convulsion. It does not mean that anxiety, fear of persecution and the fragmentation of the self are experiences peculiar to the era from Matthew Arnold to Paul de Mann: they can be found throughout recorded history. What is perhaps significant is that in this period such experiences become constituted in a new way as a systematic field of knowledge. That field of knowledge is known as psychoanalysis, developed by Sigmund Freud in late nineteenth-century Vienna.

Eagleton states that if Marx looked at the consequences of our need to labour in terms of the social relations, social classes and forms of politics which it entailed, Freud looks at its implications for the psychical life. The paradox or contradiction on which his work rests is that we come to be what we are only by a massive repression of the elements which have gone into our making. We are not of course conscious of this, any more than for
Marx men and women are generally conscious of the social processes which determine their lives. Indeed we could not be by definition conscious of this fact, since the place to which we relegate the desires we are unable to fulfil is known as the unconscious. One question which immediately arises, however, is why it is human beings who should be the neurotic animal, rather than snails or tortoises. According to Eagleton, it is possible that this is normally a Romantic idealization of such creatures and that they are secretly a good deal more neurotic than we think; but they seem well-adjusted enough to an outsider, even though there may be one or two cases of hysterical paralysis on record.

In his celebrated book *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Eagleton has given us valuable ideas and concepts of literature and the English language. His essay “Literature and the Rise of English is an assortment of passages from two initial chapters of his famous book *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Faced with the task of defining literary theory, Eagleton first proceeds to define literature, which is the subject of literary theory. The question why we consider the writings of certain writers literature but not certain others leads him to define literature as “fine writing”, writing that is considered good. An immediate objection this definition meets with concerns the question of bad and good literature. If all literature is “fine”, how do we distinguish good
and bad literature? Eagleton overcomes the objection by slightly modifying the definition that now states, literature is the kind of writing that is generally judged fine. A particular work of literature may be bad, but “it may be an inferior example of a generally valued mode”. Other kinds of writing – such as astronomy or ornithology, for example – even when good of their kind, cannot be considered literature because they do not belong to the kind that is generally valued “fine”.

The definition of literature as a highly valued kind of writing brings it under the purview of value judgments. What is literature and what is not depends on judgments based on a set of notions that are generally considered values by each age. And since these values constantly undergo changes, literature ceases to be a stable, objective category. That is, literature is no longer works with an “assured, unalterable value”, but works that are considered valuable when judged against the specific preoccupations of an age. Works cannot be valuable in themselves because value itself is not a term denoting some inherent significance, but a “transitive” term referring to what is valued by people in certain situations. In other words, works that are considered valuable now can cease to be considered so later if the principles of judgment used by society change. Eagleton states that even the literary canon, a set of works that belong to the ‘great tradition’ of national literature, is a construct
influenced by the values that are held important by the age that creates the cannon. Thus, a society may emerge later that does not consider Shakespeare as literature. The enjoyment of literature comes from the possibility of reading it in the light of our own specific interests and preoccupations. This also means that when we read a literary work from the past we are probably not reading the same work after all. Literary works that are valued outside their own time are read according to differing sets of values and, therefore, are re-written in every age.

Eagleton does not trace this instability of literary values to the subjective nature of values compared to the objective nature of facts. According to him, even a factual statement like. This cathedral was built in 1612” can be considered a statement that presumes a set of values. It takes for granted that such statements are valid to make, and the one who makes it is entitled to make it. No statements, including factual ones, can be wholly disinterested. Our whole discourse is facilitated and made significant by this invisible network of values categories. This concealed structure of values is part of what we call ‘ideology’.

Eagleton defines ideology as “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power relations of the society we live in”. That is, ideology implies the modes of feeling, values, but are
shared by the society as a whole. This point is illustrated by a literary example. I. A Richards’s practical criticism project demonstrated how subjective judgments of poetry could vary widely from each other. But what even Richards did not notice is the remarkable agreement on modes of perception and interpretation these varying judgments showed. All their judgments shared the values of the generation of young. White upper the values of the generation of young, white, upper or upper-middle-class English people that they were. In other words, even the practical criticism project, which purported to be most objective, is subject to a set of values, beliefs and prejudices. Eagleton thus comes to the conclusion that literature is an ideology.

The ideological nature of the institution of literature is illustrated by the history of the development of English literary studies in late nineteenth century. The nineteenth century marked a gradual decline in the importance of religion due to the impact of the growing scientific temperament and social change. Religion, which worked through images and symbols, was a very efficient ideological tool. Its efficiency was increased by the fact that it rarely used explicit concepts or formulated doctrines. Religion also was a pacifying force engendering meekness and self-sacrifice. The Victorian ruling class was troubled by the loss of this very efficient tool and was on the book out for another discourse of
comparable power. They were fortunate to discover in English literature a discourse that was capable of carrying the ideological burden of providing the social values and myths needed to protect the wholeness of a turbulent class society. Thus in George Gordon, Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot literature becomes a suitable replacement for religion capable of carrying out most of religion’s traditional ideological functions.

Eagleton’s definition of the term literature and his ensuing introduction to the rise of English studies use the categories of Marxist analysis to establish literature as an ideological construct that is both produced and consumed in a historical manner according to specific sets of values, beliefs and prejudices.

Eagleton’s essay ‘Literature and the Rise of English’ begins with the statement that we have still not discovered the secret of why Lamb, Macaulay and Mill are literature while Bentham, Marx and Darwin are not. He goes on to suggest that the simple answer is that the first three are examples of fine writing whereas the last three are not. Therefore Eagleton comes to the conclusion that people term ‘literature’ writing which they think is good. The term ‘fine writing’ or ‘belles letters’ denotes a sort of writing which is generally regarded good even though it does not
necessarily commit you to the opinion that a particular specimen of it is ‘good’.

Eagleton opines that the suggestion that ‘literature’ is a highly valued kind of writing is an illuminating one. But it has one fairly devastating consequence. It means that we can drop once and for all the illusion that the category ‘literature’ is ‘objective’ in the sense of being eternally given and immutable. Anything can be literature and anything, which is regarded as unalterably, and unquestionably ‘literature’ Shakespeare for example- can cease to be literature. Eagleton goes on to explain that when he uses the words ‘literary’ and ‘literature’ in this book he places them under an invisible crossing out mark to indicate that these terms will not really do, but as he has no better ones at the moment, he is using them.

Next he emphasizes the fact that the so-called ‘literary canon’, the unquestioned ‘great tradition’ of the ‘national literature’ has to be recognized as a ‘construct’, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time. Then he explains that the fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns might be one reason why certain works of literature seem to retain their value across the centuries. But it may also be that people have not actually
been valuing the ‘same’ work at all even though they think they have. ‘Our’ Homer is not identical with the Homer of the middle ages or ‘our’ Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries, it is rather that different historical periods have constructed a ‘different’ Homer and Shakespeare for their own purposes and found in these texts elements to value or devalue though not necessarily the same ones. And this is one reason why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair. Eagleton goes on to explain that he does not mean that it is unstable because value judgements are subjective. According to this view the world is divided between solid facts ‘out there’ like Ground Central station and arbitrary value judgements ‘in here’ such as liking bananas.

Next Eagleton explains what is meant by ideology. According to him, the largely concealed structure of values, which informs and underlies our factual statements, is part of what is meant by ‘ideology’. He specifically states that he does not mean by ‘ideology’ simply the deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people hold. He means more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power.
Eagleton states vehemently that the Cambridge critic I.A. Richards through his *Practical Criticism* (1929) sought to demonstrate how whimsical and subjective literary value judgements could actually be by giving his undergraduates a set of poems withholding from them the titles and author’s names and asking them to evaluate them. The resulting judgements notoriously were highly variable: time-honoured poets were marked down and obscure authors celebrated. This was not really surprising because “all the participants in this experiment were presumably young, white upper or upper middle class, privately educated English people of the 1920s and how they responded to a poem depended on a good deal more than purely ‘literary’ factors. Their critical responses were deeply entwined with their broader prejudices and beliefs. Therefore Eagleton states that as there is no critical response, which is not so entwined, there is no such thing as a ‘pure’ literary critical judgement. He concludes by stating that if we cannot see literature as ‘objective’ descriptive category, we cannot see it as just what people whimsically choose to call literature. There is nothing at all whimsical about such kinds of value judgement because they have their roots in deeper structures of belief, which are as apparently unshakeable as the Empire State building.

In the part ‘The Rise of English’, Eagleton states that the growth of English studies can be attributed to the failure of religion. By the mid-
Victorian period this traditionally reliable immensely powerful ideological form, religion, was in deep trouble under the twin impacts of scientific discovery and social change. The last paragraph of the essay quotes George Godon, early professor of English literature at Oxford commenting that English Literature had a triple function to delight and instruct the English man and above all to save their souls and heal the state. Eagleton believes that had it not been for this dramatic crisis in mid-nineteenth century ideology, we might not today have had such a plentiful supply of Jane Austen’s casebook and Bluffer’s guide to Pound. As religion progressively ceases to provide the social ‘cement’, affective values and basic mythologies by which a socially turbulent class society can be welded together, English is construed as a subject to carry this ideological burden from the Victorian period onwards.

Eagleton’s The Ideology of the Aesthetic (1990) is not a history of aesthetics. As Eagleton himself says “the book is rather an attempt to find in the category of the aesthetic a way of gaining access to certain central question of modern European thought – to light up, from the particular angle, a range of wider social, political and ethical issues” (1) ‘Eagleton tells us that anyone who inspects the history of European philosophy since the Enlightenment must be struck by the curiously high priority assigned by it to aesthetic questions. For kant, the aesthetic holds out a promise of
reconciliation between Nature and humanity. Hegel grants art a lovely status within the theoretical system, but nevertheless produces a lengthy treatise on it. The aesthetic for Kierkegaard must yield ground to the higher truths of ethics and religious faith, but remains a preoccupation of his thought. For Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, in sharply contrasting ways, aesthetic experience represents a supreme from of value. Eagleton says that in the contemporary debates on modernity, modernism and postmodernism, ‘culture’ would seem a key category for the analysis and understanding of late capitalist society.

Eagleton confesses that the book is a Marxist study and “the book could be accused at times of straying into a species of left – functionalism which reduces the internal complexity of the aesthetic to a direct set of ideological functions.” Eagleton elaborates: (TIA 4)

In writing this book, I am clearly concerned to argue against those critics for whom any linkage of aesthetics and political ideologies must appear scandalous or merely bemusing. But I must confess that I also have in my sights those on the political left for whom the aesthetic is simply ‘bourgeois ideology’ to be worsted and ousted by alternative forms of cultural politics. The
aesthetic is indeed, as I hope to show, a bourgeois concept in the most literal historical sense, hatched and nurtured in the Enlightenment, but only for the drastically undialectical though of a vulgar Marxist or ‘post-Marxist’ trend of thought could this fact cue automatic condemnation. (TIA 8)

Eagleton says that from the ‘Communist Manifesto’ onwards, Marxism has never cased to sing the praise of the bourgeoisie – to cherish and recollect that in its great revolutionary heritage from which radicals must either endurably learn, or face the prospect of a closed, illiberal socialist order in the future. The emergence of the aesthetic as a theoretical category is closely bound up with the material process by which cultural production, at an early stage of bourgeois society, becomes ‘autonomous’ – autonomous of the various social functions which it has traditionally served. Eagleton states that once arte facts become commodities in the market place, that exist for nothing and nobody in particular, and can consequently be ationalized, ideologically speaking, as existing entirely for themselves. According to Eagleton it is this notion of autonomy or self- referentiality which the new discourage of aesthetics is centrally concerned to elaborate.

In his introduction to the book Eagleton admits of two major omissions in this work. The first is of any extensive reference to the British
traditions of aesthetic thought. But at the same time, Eagleton says, readers will find a number of echoes of that history, of Coleridge and Matthew Arnold and William Morris in the mainly German writing he examines. The other omission is of any examination of actual works of art. In this context Eagleton observes.

Those trained in literary critical habits of thought are usually enamoured of ‘concrete illustration’ but since I reject the idea that ‘theory’ is acceptable if and only if it performs the role of humble handmaiden to the aesthetic work, I have tried to frustrate this expectation as far as possible by remaining for the most part resolutely silent about particular artefacts. I must admit, however, that I did originally conceive of the book as a kind of doubled text, in which an account of European aesthetic theory would be coupled at every point to a consideration of the literary culture of Ireland. (TIA 11)

Eagleton says that Aesthetic is born as a discourse of the body. In its original formulation by the German Philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, the term refers not in the first place to art, but as the Greek “aisthesis” would suggest, to the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought. Eagleton clarifies
further that the distinction which the term ‘aesthetic’ initially enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not one between ‘art and ‘life’, but between the material and the immaterial between things and thoughts, sensation and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind.

Eagleton states that while the German middleclass languished beneath the yoke of nobility, their English counterparts had been energetically at work transforming a social order still heavily aristocratic in nature to their own advantage. Uniquely among European nations, the English landowning elite had itself long been a capitalist class proper, already accustomed to wage labour and commodity production as early as the sixteenth century. They thus anticipated by a considerable period that conversion from feudal to capitalist agriculture which the Prussian Junkerdom would accomplish, more partially and precariously, only in the wake of its defeat in the Napoleonic wars.

Eagleton adds that at once the most stable and wealthy estate-owners in Europe, the English participate succeeded superbly in combining high capitalist productivity on the land with an enviable degree of cultural solidarity and unbroken continuity. It was within this unusually favourable matrix, offering at once the general preconditions for further capitalist
development and a resilient political framework to safeguard it, that the English mercantile class was able to inaugurate its own key institutions (the stock exchange, the Bank of England), and secure the predominance of its own form of political state (parliament), in the aftermath of the 1688 revolution. Under these propitious conditions, Britain was able to emerge in the eighteenth century as the world’s leading commercial power, vanquishing its foreign rivals and extending its imperial sway across the globe. By the mid-eighteenth century, London had become the largest centre of international trade, the premier port and warehouse of the world, and witnessed the forging of some spectacular fortunes. The Hanoverian state, staffed and controlled by the aristocracy, protected and promoted mercantile interests with impressive zeal, securing for Britain a rapidly expanding economy and an immensely profitable empire.

Eagleton further informs us that in eighteenth century Britain, there was a robust, well founded unity of agrarian and mercantile interests, accompanied by a marked ideological rapprochement between new and traditional social elites. The idealized self-image of this ruling social block is that of a public sphere – a political formation rooted in civil society itself, whose members are at once individualist and linked to their fellows by enlightened social intercourse and a shared set of cultural manners. Assured enough of its political and economic stability, this governing block
is able to disseminate some of its power in the forms of a general culture and ‘civility’. Eagleton opines that ‘civilized’ conduct takes its cue from traditional aristocratism its index is the fluent, spontaneous, taken for granted virtue of the gentleman, rather than the earnest conformity to some external law of the petty bourgeois.

Then Eagleton moves on to the project of early German aesthetics. The project of early German aesthetics is to mediate between general and particular, elaborating a kind of concrete logic which will clarify the sensory world without abstracting it away. Eagleton then focusses his attention on the bourgeois public sphere of eighteenth century England. He says that Shaftsbury is a firm upholder of civic liberties, and in this sense an eloquent spokesman for the bourgeois public sphere of eighteenth century England. Yet he is also a notable traditionalist, an aristocratic neo-Platonist freely antagonistic to bourgeois utility and self-interest. Horrified by a nation of Hobbesian shopkeepers, Shaftesbury speaks up for they aesthetic as its alternative: for an ethics entwined with the sensuous affections, and for a human nature which is a self – pleasuring end in itself. His philosophy unites the absolute law of the old school with subjective freedom of the new, sensualizing the one while spiritualizing the other.
Eagleton goes back to Shaftesbury’s idea of the ‘aesthetic.’ To live ‘aesthetically’ for Shaftesbury is to flourish in the well–proportioned exercise of one’s powers, conforming to the law of one’s free personality in the casual, affable, taken for granted style of the stereotypical aristocrat. What the middle class can learn from this doctrine is its stress on autonomy and self–determination – its deconstruction of any too rigid opposition between freedom and necessity impulse and law. If the aristocrat gives the law to himself individually, the bourgeoisie aspires to do so collectively. To this extent, the middle class inherits the aesthetic as a legacy from its superiors. The aesthetic as the rich, all round development of human capacities is bound to prove something of an embarrassment for a class whose economic activity leaves it spiritually impoverished and one-sided. According to Eagleton, the bourgeoisie can appreciate the aesthetic as self–autonomy, but much less as wealth of being, realized purely for its own sake.

Eagleton tells us that the whole of social life is aestheticized, and what this signifies is a social order so spontaneously cohesive that its members no longer need to think about it. Virtue, the easy habit of goodness, is like art beyond all mere calculations. A sound political regime is one in which subjects conduct themselves gracefully where the law is no longer external to individuals, but is lived out. Eagleton states emphatically
that the aesthetic is in this sense no more than a name for the political unconscious: it is simply the way social harmony registers itself on our senses, imprints itself on our sensibilities. The beautiful is just political order lived out on the body, the way it strikes the eye and stirs the heart. The unity of social life sustains itself, requiring no further legitimation, anchored as it is in our most primordial instincts. Like the work of art, it is immune from all rational analysis, and so form all rational criticism.

Eagleton says that Shaftesbury’s unity of ethics and aesthetic, virtue and beauty, is most evident in the concept of manners. Manners for the eighteenth century signify that meticulous disciplining of the body which converts morality to style, deconstructing the opposition between the proper and the pleasurable. Eagleton further clarifies that if the process of hegemony is to be successful, ethical ideology must lose its coercive force and reappear as a principal of spontaneous consensus within social life. The subject itself is accordingly aestheticized, living with all the instinctual rightness of the artefact. Like the work of art, the human subject introjects the codes which govern it as the very source of its free autonomy. Eagleton remarks that the growing aestheticization of social life represents a major hegemonic advance on the part of the governing block.
Eagleton says that the aesthetic experience of the sublime is confined to the cultivated few. According to him, like the sublime, labour is a masochistic affair, since we find work at once painful in its exertion, yet pleasurable in its arousal of energy. He further clarifies that the sublime, with its delightful horror, is the rich man’s labour invigorating an otherwise dangerously complacent ruling class. At the same time, the aesthetic clearly cannot serve as a dominant ideology for the middle class, which in the turmoil of industrial capitalist accumulation will need something a good deal more solid than sentiment and intuition to secure its rule.

Eagleton goes on to say that the aesthetic is one answer to the vexed question of how values are to be derived, in a condition where neither civil society nor the political state would seem to provide such values with a particularly plausible foundation. He points to the difficulties involved for the middle class in founding its spiritual solidarity on the degraded basis of civil society and says that an alternative strategy is therefore to turn in Arnoldian style to the state, as the ideal locus of ‘culture’. He adds not throughout the nineteenth century, many a thinker had recourse to this apparently promising solution.
Eagleton elaborates that the birth of aesthetics as an intellectual discourse coincides with the period when cultural production is beginning to suffer miseries and indignities of commodification. The peculiarity of the aesthetic is, in part, spiritual compensation for this degradation it is just when the art is becoming debased to a petty commodity producer that he or she will lay claim to transcendent genius. But, to Eagleton, there is another reason for the foregrounding of the artefact which aesthetics achieves. What art is now able to offer, in that ideological reading of it known as the aesthetic, is a paradigm of more general social significance – an image of self referentiality which in an audacious move seizes upon the very functionlessness of artistic practice and transforms it to a vision of the highest good. As a form of value grounded entirely in itself, without practical rhyme or reason, the aesthetic is at once eloquent testimony to the observe origins and enigmatic nature of value in a society which would seem everywhere to deny it.

Eagleton says that the aesthetic does more than figure a new concept of value. If it is on the one hand autonomous of the real, it might also hold out a promise of reconciling the sundered realms of fact and value. For Baumgarten, the aesthetic is a region adjacent to but distinct from the cognitive; with Hume, cognitive is steadily reduced to a form of sensibility not far removed from the aesthetic.
Eagleton draws our attention to the relation between the aesthetic and the cognitive. When science contemplates the world, what it knows is an impersonal space of causes and processes quite independent of the subject and so alarmingly indifferent to value. But the fact that we can know the world at all, however grim the news which this knowledge might have to deliver, must surely entail some fundamental harmony between ourselves and it. For there to be knowledge in the first place, our faculties must be somehow marvelously adjusted to material reality. And for Immanuel Kant it is the contemplation of this pure form of our recognition of its very enabling conditions, which is the aesthetic. According to Eagleton, the aesthetic is no longer on this view a mere supplement to reason, or a sentiment to which that reason can be reduced, it is simply that in which common knowledge, in the act of reaching out to its object, suddenly arrests and rounds upon itself, forgetting its referent for a moment and attending instead, in a wondering flash of self estrangement, to the miraculously convenient way in which its inmost structure seems geared to the comprehension of the real. Eagleton informs us that the aesthetic and the cognitive are thus neither divisible spheres nor reducible to one another. Indeed, the aesthetic is not a ‘sphere’ at all, according to him. It is just the moment of letting go of the world and clinging instead to the formal act of knowing it. Eagleton sums up by saying that if society has cleaved human experience down the middle, confronting an object drained of intrinsic
value with a subject now forced to generate all value from itself, the aesthetic will become, in Kant’s hands, a way of healing that rift, reuniting humanity with a world which seems to have turned its back on it.

Eagleton argues that since aesthetic judgment does not engage any determinate concept, we are quite indifferent to the nature of the object in question. Some of the pleasure of the aesthetic, then arises from a quick sense of the world’s delightful conformity to our capacities. In this context Eagleton observes:

Aesthetic judgement is then a kind of pleasurable free-wheeling of our faculties, a kind of parody of conceptual understanding, a non-referential pseudo-cognition which does not nail down the object to an identifiable thing, and so is agreeably by free of a certain material constraint. (TIA 85)

Eagleton holds the view that the beautiful and the sublime are in fact, essential dimensions of ideology. The sublime in one of its aspects in exactly the chastening, humiliating power, which decentres the subject into an awesome awareness of its finitude its own petty position in the universe just as the experience of beauty shores it up.
Eagleton tells us that the Kantian sublime is in effect a kind of unconscious process of infinite desire, which like Freudian unconscious continually risks swamping and overloading the pitiable ego with an excess of affects. The subject of sublime is accordingly decentred, plunged into loss and pain, undergoes a crisis and fading of identity. Yet, Eagleton says, without the unwelcome violence we would never be stirred out of ourselves, never prodded into enterprise and achievement. Kant associates the sublime with the masculine and military, useful antidotes against a peace which breeds cowardice and effeminacy.

Eagleton says that ideology must not so thoroughly centre the subject as to castrate its desire, instead we must be both cajoled and chastised, made to feel both homeless and at home, folded upon the world yet reminded that our true resting place is in infinity. According to Eagleton, it is part of the dialectic of the beautiful and the sublime to achieve this double ideological effect. It is now almost a commonplace of deconstructive thought to see the sublime as a point of fracture and fading.

Eagleton further states that the psychoanalytic register of the imaginary involves a peculiarly intimate relation of the infant to the mother’s body, and it is possible to catch a glimpse of this body suitably screened, in Kant’s aesthetic representation. According to Eagleton, the
beautiful representation, like the body of the mother, is an idealized material representation, like the body of the mother, is an idealized material form safely defused of sensuality and desire, with which in a free play of its faculties, the subject, can happily sport. The bliss of the aesthetic subject is the felicity of the small child playing in the bosom of the mother, entralled by an utterly indivisible object which is at once intimate and indeterminate, brimming with purposive life, yet plastic enough to pup up no resistance to the subject’s own ends.

Eagleton informs us that there is a difficult tension within bourgeois society between the ideology of production and the ideology of consumption. Since the former realm is generally unpleasant, sanction and discipline are required for the subjects to buckle itself to its tasks. There is no suggestion that this world of production exists for the subject but things are different in the arena of consumption where the commodity ‘hails’ the individual and implies a special relationship with him. Eagleton adds that capitalism continually centres the subject in the sphere of values, only to decentre it in the realm of things. Moreover, one can trace something of this movement in the dialectic of the beautiful and the sublime. If things in themselves are beyond the reach of the subject, the beautiful will rectify this alienation by presenting reality, for a precious moment, as given spontaneously for that subject’s powers.
Eagleton says that aesthetic judgments are at once subjective & universal. To judge aesthetically is implicitly to declare that a wholly subjective response is of the kind that every individual must necessarily experience. The aesthetic, Eagleton says, is in this sense the very paradigm of the ideological. Like aesthetic judgement, ideological utterances conceal an essentially emotive content within a referential from characterizing the lived relation of a speaker to the world in the act of appearing to characterize the world. This is not to suggest, as Eagleton claims, that ideological discourses do not in fact contain referential propositions which may be assessed as either true or false. In this context Eagleton observes:

Ideology does indeed importantly contain many false proposition, such as the claim that Asians are inferior to Europeans or that the Queen of England is highly intelligent, but the falsity of such claims is not what is peculiarly ideological about them, since not all false propositions are ideological and not all ideological statements are false. What makes such false claims ideological is the motivation of their falsity, the fact that they encode emotive attitudes relevant to the reproduction of social power. The same is true of the many ideological utterances which happen to be true such as the claim that the queen of England takes her job seriously and is devoted to her work. (TIA 94)
Eagleton comes to the point that ideology cannot primarily be characterized in terms of false statements not because it does not contain more than its fair share of them, but because it is not at root question of propositionally at all. It is a matter of wishing, cursing, fearing, reverencing, desiring, denigrating and so on, says Eagleton.

Eagleton brings out the difference between art and aesthetics. Art is a capitalist mode of production. Art is autonomous of them, by being integrated into the capitalist mode of production. When art becomes a commodity, it is released from its traditional social functions within church, court and state into the anonymous freedom of the market place. Now it exists, not for any specific audience, but just for anybody with the taste to appreciate it and the money to buy it. And in so far as it exists for nothing and nobody in particulars, it can be said to exist for itself. It is independent because it has been swallowed up by commodity production. Eagleton tells us that art itself may thus be an increasingly marginal pursuit, but aesthetics is not.

Eagleton draws our attention to the formulation that aesthetic is born at the moment of art’s effective demise as a political force, flourishes on the corpse of its social relevance. Eagleton maintains:
Though artistic production itself plays less and less of a significance role in the social order (Marx reminds us that the bourgeoisie have absolutely no time for it), what is able to bequeath to that order, as it were, is a certain ideological model which may help it. Out of its mess—the mess which has marginalized pleasure and the body, ratified reason, and struck morality entirely empty. The aesthetic offers to reverse into division of labour, to bring these three alienated regions back into touch with one another, but the price it demands for this generosity is high it offers to interrelate these discourses by effectively swallowing up the other two. Everything should now become aesthetic. (TIA 368)

Eagleton tells us that morality is converted to a matter of style, pleasure and intuition. There is finally the question of politics. He says that the aestheticizing lineage can take either a left or a right turn. The left turn means smashing truth, congnition and morality which are all just ideology and living luxuriantly in the free, groundless play of one’s creative powers. Eagleton says that the right turn, from, Burke and Coleridge to Heidegger, Yeats and Eliot meant forgetting about theoretical analysis, clining to the sensuously particular, viewing society as a self-grounding organism, all of whose parts miraculously interpenetrate without conflict.
Eagleton then draws our attention to the left-aesthetic tradition. He says that the left aesthetic tradition, from Schiller and Marx to Morris and Marcuse, has much to be said for it: art as critique of alienation as an exemplary realization of creative powers, as the ideal reconciliation of subject and object, universal and particular, freedom and necessity, theory and practice, individual and society. All these notions, he claims, could be equally deployed by the political right, but which the bourgeoisie is still in its progressive phase, this style of thinking comes through as a powerfully positive utopianism. Eagleton says that from the end of the nineteenth century, this heritage begins to turn sour, and this is the moment of modernism. Modernism is one of the inheritors of this radical aestheticizing, but in the negative mode: art, in Adorno’s phrase, as the ‘negative knowledge of reality’. Eagleton informs us that modernism in art, and later the Frankfurt school and post-structuralism in theory are helped off the ground because the more positive aesthetic tradition has run out of stream, found the system too powerful to break.

Eagleton further clarifies that the aesthetic becomes the guerilla tactics of secret subversion, of silent resistance, of stubborn refusal. Art will pulverize traditional form and meaning, because, Eagleton says, the laws of syntax and grammar are the laws of the police. He adds that art will dance on the grave of narrative, semantics and representation, celebrate madness.
and delirium, speak like a woman, dissolve all social diabetics into the free flow of desire. Its form will become its content, a form which repulses all social semantics and might allow one a glimpse of what it might conceivably be like to be free.

Eagleton then directs our attention to the avant garde. He says that the aesthetic lineage, the avant grade has two aspects, one negative and the other positive. The negative aspect of the avant grade takes up the negative aesthetic of modernism and destroys meaning. Moreover, the avant garde’s response to the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic is quite unequivocal. Eagleton says that the avant grade failed, rolled back by Stalinism and fascism. The intuitionalization of modernism had set in. But the social order on which modernism turned its back was rapidly changing too.

Eagleton drives home to us that the wholesale aestheticization of society had found its grotesque apotheosis for a brief moment in fascism, with its panoply of myths, symbols and orgiastic spectacles, its repressive expressivity, its appeals to passion, racial intuition, instinctual judgment and the sublimity of self sacrifice.

Eagleton opines that in the post war years a different form of aestheticization was also to saturate the entire culture of late capital, with its
fetishism of style and surface, its cult of hedonism and techniques, its reifying of the signifier and displacement of discursive meaning with random intensities. In its early stages, Eagleton informs us, capitalism had sharply served the symbolic from the ceramic, now the two sphere are incongruously reunited, as the economic penetrates deeply into symbolic realm itself and the libidinal body is harnessed to the imperative of profit. This was the era of postmodernism.

Eagleton observes that postmodernism represents the latest iconoclastic upsurge of the avant garde, with its demotic confounding of hierarchies its self – reflexive subversion of ideological closure, its populist debunking of intellectualism and elitism. Eagleton directs our attention to postmodernist culture. In this context he observes:

Much postmodernist culture is both radical and conservative, iconoclastic and incorporated, in the same breath. This is so because of a contradiction between the economic and cultural forms of late capitalist society, or more simply between capitalist economy and bourgeois culture. Bourgeois culture of a traditional humanistic kind tends to value hierarchy, distinction, unique identity; what threatens constantly to undermine this exquisitely well-ordered structure is not
so much the political left as the cavortings of the commodity.

(TIA 373-74)

Eagleton says that from Nietzsche onwards the base of capitalist society begins to enter into embarrasing contradiction with its superstructure. The legimating forms of high bourgeous culture, the versions and definitions of subjectivity which they have to offer, appear less and less adequate to the experience of late capitalism but on the other hand cannot merely be abandoned. Eagleton opines that the mandarin culture of the high bourgeos epoch is progressively called into question by the later evolution of that very social system but remains, at certain ideological levels indispensable. It is indispensable, Eagleton says, partly because the subject as unique, autonomous, self-identical and self–determining remains a political and ideological requirement of the system, but partly because the commodity is incapable of generating a sufficiently legitimating ideology of its own. Discourses of God, freedom and family of the unique spiritual essence of the individual, retain much of their traditional force, but come also to have something of an implausible ring to them, in a social order where the highest empirical value is clearly profit. Eagleton says that the United States, which tends to wear its ideology on its sleeve in contrast to the more oblique and naturalized ideological modes of Europe, is a particularly striking instance of this discrepancy.
According to Eagleton, a work like Joyce’s *Ulysses* is at its most scandalous and subversion in its critique of the bourgeois myth of immanent meaning. As the type of all anti-erotic texts, a mechanical recycling of a sacred document, *Ulysses* pulverizes this mythology by eroding the distinctions between high and low, holy and profane, past and present authenticity and derivativeness, and does so with all the demotic vulgarity of the commodity itself. Eagleton says that *Ulysses* marks the historic point at which capital began to penetrate into the very structures of the symbolic order itself, reorganizing this sacrosanct terrain in accordance with its own degraded, emancipatory logic.

Eagleton says the postmodernism has been eager to interrogate traditional conceptions of truth, and this skepticism of absolute, monological truth claims has produced some genuinely radical effects. Eagleton adds that postmodernism has been equally concerned to diseredit the concept of totality, and has valuably challenged the various idealist and essentialist versions of this notion, which in Marxism and elsewhere, have long been on offer.

Eagleton’s commitment to Marxism had surfaced in the book on the Brontes, *Myths of Power*. Following publication of *Criticism and Ideology*, Eagleton sought a more popular form in which to convey his interest in
Marxist critical thought. *Marxism and Literary Criticism* is nevertheless a clear and closely discriminating volume. Here, Eagleton opens himself fully and directly to theory. But at the same time Eagleton’s ability to perform particulars analyses seems to have gained in sensitivity and force. Perhaps this is because Egaleton is now writing on authors who, like him are theorists, inspiring in him deeper enthusiasm. One of the Marxist critics celebrated in the above mentioned work is Walter Benjamin friend of Bertholt Brecht.

Benjamin is the subject of Eagleton’s next far weightier and more narrowly specific study, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (1981), and to date Eagleton’s first and only book length study of a single Marxist critic. The first part of the book is on Benjamin himself. The second is more broadly concerned with revolutionary criticism, a thematic disunity which no doubt reflects the fact the sections had been previously published in article from. Writing on Benjamin, Eagleton thus finds a distance from his personal, merely individual and perhaps he reflects from his point of view worryingly bourgeois concerns as Marxist critic and is using him as mouthpiece, or persona. But it is in this book that we also see signs of Eagleton’s suddenly expanding consciousness of his own growing critical importance and influence that being a Marxist has helped him achieve. In the preface reflects for the benefit of increasing numbers of
readers following his career on his personal development and change of perspective, since the time of Criticism and Ideology. He confesses that there have been certain deep-seated changes in his personal and political life since the writing of Criticism and Ideology. In his own mind, Eagleton has moved from being merely a writer on the relations between the individual and society (as in Shakespeare and Society) to being a living example of them. Eagleton’s consciousness of his own significant historical role appears in the dynastic catalogue of names of the major Marxist aestheticians of the century to date on page 96: Lukacs, Goldmann, Sartre, Caudwell, Adorno, Marcuse, Della Volpe, Macherey, Jameson and Eagleton.

Yet Eagleton is also responding to non-Marxist features of ‘revolutionary literary criticism’ in his book on Benjamin, even though, in 1981, these new wings of the ‘radical’ critical movement were not as congenial to him as they have since become. Radical feminism, though recognized by Eagleton as in many senses an ally of Marxist criticism, is strongly chastised. In a series of agonized, self–flagellating ‘reservations’ it is stigmatized as follows:

Anti-theroetical, rampantly idealist and frequently sectarian, such ‘radicalism' represents the presence within the women’s
movement of a familiar brand of petty-bourgeois ideology.

(WBTRC 99)

Fellow Marxists are warned of likely tragic consequences of its success. The advent of Deconstruction, the “death drive at the level of theory” (WBRTC 136) is more extensively considered, as linked to and yet fundamentally at odds with the Marxist programme. In its non-commitment, it is in many ways only an inflection of the liberal humanism from which Eagleton now sees himself as completely divorced.

But Eagleton overcomes these reservations in his next book, The Rape of Clarissa (1982). Although the ostensible subject of this book is the work of the novelist Richardson, it differs from Eagleton’s earlier, author-specific, studies on nineteenth and twentieth century literary works in an important respect. Where Criticism and Ideology is the vehicle for Eagleton’s Marxist theory, The Rape of Clarissa becomes the vehicle for the theoretical positions which were once seen as at odds with Marxism, feminism and deconstruction.

In the Benjamin study, Eagleton had noted in passing that “…..nothing could be easier to hear than the ideological and psychoanalytic discourses that truly “write” Pamela and Clarissa, discourses that resound
Eagleton takes up these themes in the Richardson study, analyzing *Pamela*, *Clarissa* and in a postscript *Sir Charles Grandison*. In so doing he suggests the increasing appeal that non-Marxist movements in radical critical theory have begun to have for him, perhaps partly under the acknowledged influence of such Oxford feminist critics as Toril Moi. As Eagleton (within limits of this ‘radical’ school) accommodates himself to these other ‘radical’ approaches, Marxism ‘pure’ is proportionately demoted. Marxism, or ‘historical materialism’, Eagelton says simply, is now merely his book’s ‘third method’. The other two are ‘various post-structuralist theories of textuality’ and ‘a feminist and ‘psycho- analytical perspective’ (TRC viii)

By 1982, Eagleton’s Marxism has merged with a family of third or fourth generation Marxian notions and is no longer at loggerheads with them. In Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Eagleton has found a focus for his expanded empire of radical ideas. He is therefore now able to take up, via *The Rape of Clarissa*, the patriarchal oppression of woman, arguing that woman is incarnate in Clarissa, victim of forces (embodied in the seductive aggression of Lovelace) that history is later to overthrow. As feminism is blended with Marxism, Modern feminist preoccupations are given voice (albeit by a male critic) in study of the historical and artistic developments of the Novel. Class is still a significant issue, but Eagleton is not concerned
with relations between the middle class and the workers, as at least to some extent he may have been in his Marxist study of the Brontes. What interests him now is the changing relation of the aristocracy to the middle class as it is signified by the re-negotiated formal and sexual relations between women and men.

Since the writer of *Clarissa* was an author-cum printer, at least one aspect of the old-new Marxist conception of literary creation can however be retained. *Clarissa*, in an unusually, literal sense, is the fruit of a ‘system of production’. But Eagleton is also opening the door to semiological concerns for which his choice of text is tactically convenient. In the epistolary novel, such as *Clarissa*, the text (a novel) and the subject (a series of letters) really are one. By the same theory Richardson, as author, is important only in providing Eagleton with a text with which to display his grasp of the latest (to Eagleton) body of critical ideas.

In *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, the best-selling students’ guide to critical ideas published in the following year, Eagleton is however unimpeded by need to relate comments to any particular author. Though the work gives theoretical support to the relationship between text and critic appearing in applied form in the Richardson study, for the time being Eagleton has abandoned the need to apply his ideas. Instead, Eagleton’s
survey of theory becomes itself an opportunity to advance theory. But although Eagleton is all the time drawing on Marxist or structuaralist or feminist theory, all of which imply the possibility of common ground (the common human nature which Eagleton had at one time valued), his own theory wishes to deny it. The reason literary works seem to retain their value across centuries, says Eagleton, is that we always interpret (them) to some extent in the light of our own ‘concerns’. Ostensibly, Eagleton is here recalling the appeal to common human nature made earlier in his career. Actually, he is rejecting this position by extending the case to the point where each generation, even each individual, interpretation produces a different work. Therefore, whatever people may think they are appreciating, the critic can always know better:

‘Our’ Homer is not identical with the Homer of the Middle Ages, nor ‘our’ Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries; it is rather that different historical periods have constructed a ‘different’ Homer and Shakespeare for their own purposes … All literary works, in other words, are ‘rewritten’, if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a ‘re-writing’ (LT 12)
Since our Homer and Shakespeare are not identical to the Homers and Shakespeares of times past, and since their works (like ‘All literay works’) are in any case their works (like ‘All Literary Works’), are in any case rewritten by each age, Eagleton’s own critical procedure may be vastly simpler. The only critical assumptions one now ever need bother with are one’s own.

From the individualism (but not in one sense the Marxism) of this position, Eagleton can attack the negative collectivism he diagnoses in ‘The Rise of English Studies’, a conspiracy of twentieth-century bourgeois political, social and educational forces responsible for the stability he abhors in the English literary canon. These forces have produced the spurious unity of the subject ‘English’. The persons who have channelled them have not done so because, unlike him, they are untheoretical (as Eagleton had once claimed of Leavis), but for the opposite reason: because the rise of English studies has accommodated a variety of apparently hostile but really mutually sustaining literary theories, theories of criticism or approaches to literature. These theories, Eagleton’s Literary Theory then goes on to survey Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory, Structuralism and semiotics, Poststructuralist and Psychoanalysis. But in the conclusion, Eagleton changes his tack. Having spent so much time in his book on theories, the whole notion of ‘literary theory’ is questioned on
the grounds that literature itself, as discrete category of phenomena, does not or should not exist. And since literary theory depends on literature, and literature is a construct of bourgeois (and therefore, for a critic with residual Marxist proclivities, ungenial) Political assumptions, literary theory (by which Eagleton also means literary criticism) should give way to the study of discourse or rhetoric. The fruits of this would be a new educational programme. Eagleton says that more time would be spent studying Hollywood films, the press and working – class writing. Literature, as the term is presently understood, would take part in, but not dominate, this programme.

But, in Eagleton’s next critical book it becomes clear that Eagleton himself, whatever his own theory, is not the one to be actually tackling a widened artistic field. Instead, Eagleton’s *The Function of Criticism* (1984) looks inwards to his favourite genre: criticism of critics. As in *Literary Theory* Eagleton is advancing a personal theory. But where, in *Literary Theory*, Eagleton is drawing up the terms of reference for others, in *The Function of Criticism* he may be seen as opening a way for himself. How has modern criticism, he asks, become what is is? As an answer Eagleton outlines the story of literary criticism from the eighteenth century to the present with particular respect, at different points in history, to relations between criticism and society. Eagleton’s point is that the function of critics
has changed with society. In Addison’s day the critic was the voice of a public. He shared in ideals of classical bourgeois culture. Now, through socially and politically polarizing influence of the nineteenth century, the literary critic has assumed a professional, specialist and socially alienated role. But while. The Function of Criticism maps this progress, it also records Eagleton’s frustration with the political and social impotence of modern criticism, including perhaps his own. Since political and social commitments have not been enough to change society, Eagleton’s advice to the modern critic is that his role is, after all, traditional. It is in essence Addison’s Eagleton is not now seeking a return to eighteenth-century critical ideas but rather the opposite; the modern critic: like the critic in the eighteenth-century, must avail himself of the intellectual life of his time; become more, not less, a creature of his age as Eagleton has himself tried to do. Eagleton’s theory of criticism’s function is thus adapted to conform with his own broadened conception of legitimate study outlined in Literary Theory:

“English Literature” is now an inherited label for a field within which may diverse preoccupations congregate: “Semiotics”, psychoanalysis, film studies, cultural theory, the representation of gender, popular writing, and of course the conventionally valued writings of the past. (12)
One may raise a question as to whether Eagleton ever lives up to this critical ideal in his practice. To decide this, we can turn to one of the most recent examples of Eagleton’s applied theoretical work. In *William Shakespeare* (1986), Eagleton returns to methods of *The Rape of Clarissa* and thus contributes to the last of the categories designated in *The Function of Criticism* as legitimate areas for the modern critic’s concern: “the conventionally valued writings of the past”. But in so far as he is concerned with the ‘conventionally valued’, Eagleton, seems here to have stayed safely within the academy’s walls, where Shakespeare is for many critics other than Eagleton the keystone in a liberal – humanist arch they all want to demolish. *William Shakespeare* is thus internationally radical: a far cry from the staid, pre-Marxist 1967 study, *Shakespeare and Society*. In the earlier volume Eagleton had written as a young critic, in hope of approval from elders and betters. In *William Shakespeare*, Eagleton’s comparative boldness (as it appears) is that of an established critic, general Editor of the ‘Re-Reading Literature’ series. Even so, Eagleton is not trying to write Shakespeare off; or even to diminish his importance in the literary canon. Instead, he seems rather inspired, albeit rather late in the day, by the searches that fellow radical theorists have conducted for an ‘Alternative Shakespeare’. Therefore, compared with *Shakespeare and Society* Eagleton can seem to have more to say, and take more exuberant pleasure in saying it.
Even so, there are clearly similarities between earlier and later books. Of the eight plays (plus *Timon of Athens*) considered in *Shakespeare and Society*, seven are recalled in *William Shakespeare*. Several passage are reminiscent of the earlier study. Chapter 1 of *Shakespeare and Society* had been devoted to analysis of *Troilus and Cressida*. Here Eagleton had focused on the circular structure of debates between Triolus and Hector in Act II on Helen’s value. Hector believes in ‘permanent values accessible to reason’. Triolus, meanwhile, believes that value is a human creation, humanly conferred; things have value’ in so far as an intensity of human activity gives them it, and value is thus something which grows within the process of activity…. The conflict is a direct one, between essentialist and existentialist vision. Hector sees value as “an amalgam of the intrinsic worth of a thing, and the actual worth it derives from its context” (SS 25)

Twenty years later in *William Shakespeare*, Eagleton discusses the same passage from *Troilus and Cressida* in similar terms. ‘Hector wants a fusion of intrinsic and assigned values…. Triolus, by contrast, holds to an existentialist rather than essentialist theory of value. (59) The basic point is the same : meaning is relative. But while in *Shakespeare and Society* the determinant was cultural, in *William Shakespeare* the orientation is linguistic. The difference reflects Eagleton’s widening contact in intervening years, with post-Saussurean critical thought.
But William Shakespeare is also a narrower, more personal (less Marxist) study than Shakespeare and Society. Eagleton rejects the appeal to common humanity – a point of reference (the ‘radical’ substance) of the earlier book, replacing common human values in William Shakespeare are the ideas of various specialized radical cults. Shakespeare is important to the extent that he anticipated such ideas, he exists as far as he can be reconstructed through them, in which view Eagleton is practising the theory of Literary Theory. He can therefore farm the statement that Shakespeare was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida. This is because while writing on Shakespeare, Eagleton’s stance is defined entirely in terms of a personal assortment of modern critical, political, sexual and linguistic dieta. Three plays are discussed in each of the chapters of the book. With each chapter, Eagleton starts from an abstraction designed to reflect a current, theoretical domain. Language, Desire, Law, ‘Nothing’, Value, Nature. The new readings of Shakespeare take place in relation to these concepts, even if they seem to depend on a body of rather old readings of Shakespeare, such as the application of an ‘Elizabethan world picture’ conception of Shakespeare’s in the claim that Shakespeare belief in social salability is jeopardized by the very language in which it is articulated.
But, knowing Shakespeare’s beliefs Eagleton, by virtue of a privileged contact with post-Marxist, post-Freudian, post-Saussurean and feminist ideas, can point out the dilemma that any belief entails. Shakespeare’s dilemmas thus defined serve to anticipate modern radical struggle in all its forms. Thus, in the section devoted to ‘Desire’ we learn that Shakespeare’s witty excess at points in his comedies reveals workings, through language, of anarchic sexuality concern with marriage runs counter to the anarchy of sex. In political terms, Shakespeare, despite shortcomings, is for Eagleton a pre-Marxist in a post-Marxist war:

Social and sexual identities have the mystifying mutuality of a paltering language or counterfeit currency, anything can be exchanged with anything else. This is particularly working for Shakespeare, since it seems like a grotesque caricature of his traditionalist belief that all identity is reciprocally constructed, constituted by social bonds and fidelities. (WS 22-23)

Eagleton’s ‘re-reading’ of Shakespeare thus rests on academic notions of Shakespeare plays that ought to have been hostile to him (from all he seems to have been saying about the rise of English studies and the role of scrutin) but the validity of which he does not question. But his
study of Shakespeare does not lack of luster of a modern critique. The modern social, sexual and political implications of Shakespearean drama, he says, can be found for example in Macbeth. The witches in Macbeth by releasing ambitious thoughts in Macbeth, expose a reverence for hierarchical social order for what it is, as the pious self-deception of a society based on routine oppression and incessant warfare. In Eagleton’s Macbeth, the witches are therefore the heroines of the piece, a fact not recognized by Shakespeare (nor, for that matter by almost all literary critics). This judgment is based on a variety of Freudian, linguistic and feminist values and ideas, the witches inhabit ‘their own sisterly community;’ ‘they are devotees of female cult, radical separatists who scorn male power and lay bare the hollow sound and fury at its heart’, their ‘teasing word play infiltrates and undermines Macbeth from within’; they figure as the “unconscious” of the drama. These Freudian, linguistic and feminist values and ideas replace ordinary human ones used by past critics to judge the plays. Eagleton announces his book in the preface to William Shakespeare as an ‘exercise in political semiotics. Macbeth, accordingly, ends up chasing an identity which continually eludes him, he becomes a floating signifier in ceaseless doomed pursuit of an anchoring signified.
Eagleton illustrates the remark with a famous speech by Macbeth on life.

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That Struts and frets his hour upon the stage  \textit{(Macbeth} Act V Sene v 24,25\textit{)}

In the actual speech, Macbeth had compared life to the figure of an actor. But Eagleton does not make life (the subject of Macbeth’s speech) but Macbeth himself (who is supposed to be speaking the lines) the actor. He is reduced to “a ham actor, unable to identify with the role” (WS ix.2,3) Eagleton interprets Shakespeare’s poor player” as ‘ham actor’ (poor for Eagleton, means ‘bad’). In \textit{The Body as Language} Eagleton had written that Macbeth comes to see himself, finally, as a bad actor, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. (TBL.11) Eagleton substitutes a stoppardian preoccupation with relations between actor and role. He thus excludes the universal human application of Macbeth’s speech, prohibiting possibility of sympathetic fellowship with the actor’s plight. It is one of many moments in \textit{William Shakespeare} where Eagleton’s attitudes are precisely and deliberately the reverse of the common and human.

In \textit{Measure for Measure}, Insabella, by risking her brother’s life to preserve virginity is protecting society from all such blackmail attempts. In
The Merchant of Venice, it is to Shylock and not, as is traditionally the case, to Antonio or Portia that we are to look for the ethical ‘baseline’, of the play. In standing up for law as abstraction, by insisting on his pound of flesh, Shylock overrides a bourgeois obsession with the rights of individual humanity on which Eagleton’s own criticism seems all the time to insist. Antonio, in this scheme, is a ‘racist’, while Shylock’s stance is subversive of ‘class law’. Portia’s famous speech in defence of mercy is, by this standard, ‘dubious’, ‘Would it have been admirably merciful, or an obscene insult to the dead, to have allowed a later anti-semite Adolf Eichmann, to go free ’? (WS 47).

William Shakespeare thus says more about the strategies and conventions that are possible in modern criticism than it does about Shakespeare, and it is surely intended to do so. Though on the one hand the ‘text’ is the wing, and not Shakespeare, reader–responses to Shakespeare’s text (his words, phrases, images, speeches and poetic effects etc) are on the other hand not invited or encouraged. They are permitted only so far as they are bounded by the intellectual walls of Eagleton’s current collection of radical ideas. From these, dissent is forbidden and escape impossible. Eagleton’s critical patter is constant and diverting, his technique being to place one challengeable assertion next to another, and then another, creating an unbroken string. Since one does not know where to start first, one
generally does not bother. Apparent through all is the extraordinary agility, verbal novelty and intellectual derring – do of the cult-critic Eagleton himself.

The impression Eagleton’s criticism creates depends on our being intrigued, shocked or amused, not by Shakespeare, but by him: Eagleton’s criticism replaces an interest in the Shakespearean text, which is used as a foil. In his ‘radical’ strokes, Eagleton is often self–consciously iconoclastic and reminiscent of a lecturer who has mastered the means to capture an audience’s attention by fair means or foul.

Pointedness is not the staple of Eagleton’s prose. In small does his style is more compelling because clearer, than most structuralese, hence Eagleton’s popularity as critic. But long stretches of text can be tiring. This is because of the absence of modulation in Eagleton’s critical prose, the lack of that quality which would normally mark and control writings by a critic sensitive both to the varying emotional contours of his literary text, and the interest likely to be taken by readers in comments upon it. Eagleton’s prose, by contrast, has the texture of something that is able endlessly to regenerate itself, for its own ends, according to laws of its own, independent of reader and text. Therefore it may, when experienced in large swathes, seem churned out. With Eagleton turning the handle, the text as
product rolls without let or hindrance off the end of the critical – theoretical assembly line. The effect is to reduce the variety of emphasis that we normally, if unconsciously, rely on to enable us to know when the important point in a critical discussion is being made. Eagleton is somehow always elsewhere; an absentee from his text, he is never quite available for challenge in the sentence one happens at any time to be reading. But in this way, Eagleton’s critical manner achieves the relativity desired by his critical theory. No one statement quite stands on its own, or answer for itself. Since all in relatives he (the critic) cannot be pinned down. We are left with his critical text. The text may be ‘known’ Shakespeare either. But long after Eagleton has ceased to profess with any enthusiasm the virtues of a Marxist critique it realizes, in practice, his Marxist ethical dream; it ‘knows’ itself.

Even in Shakespeare the text of an English literary critic- there seems little to bring Eagleton up short. He is never struck dumb, as Samuel Johnson was at the death of Cordelia. The most painful scenes in Shakespeare are not problematic because they hurt. They are painful because they embody conceptual contradictions of binary opposition. On this topic, Eagleton is particularly eloquent. The liberal humanist ideology of a Johnson is fearlessly exposed by the following remarks from his
account of King Lear. In the chapter on ‘Value’ the death of Cordelia is covered:

Cordelia blends largeness and limitation on her first appearance in the play, when she reminds Lear that her love, though freely given, must be properly divided between himself and her future husband, and the same balance is present in her combination of physical rootedness and freedom of spirit. In this sense, she symbolically resolves many of the play’s formal antinomies.

The only problem, however, is that she dies. (WS 80)

According to Eagleton, Edgar’s closing words in the play denote that organic unity of body and language, ‘that shaping of signs by the senses, of which Cordelia is representative, but the play has also demonstrated that to speak what one feels is not easy business.’ (WS 83) In dying, Cordelia fails to resolve many of the play’s formal antinomies. But poetical justice is after all done. She is punished for speaking her mind. In dying, she proves that speaking one’s mind is not easy business. The sardonic comedy of this understatement is presumably meant.
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<td>Walter Benjamin, or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism</td>
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Chapter 5

Conclusion

In Raymond Williams’s seminal works the boundary between literary theory and criticism gets flouted. They are neither explications of literary texts nor attempts at establishing connections between literature and its background. Williams criticises literary texts from the point of view of various intellectual disciplines, and he formulates his own theories. Literary criticism reaches a level of theorization in such contexts. The theories of Williams directly or indirectly are in dialogue with the theories of some of the other major post-structuralist thinkers and critics. For example, Williams tries to define his concept of totality in relation to Goldmann’s “genetic Structuralism”. His sociological theories of literature find parallels in Theodor Adorno. He shares with Adorno the view of art as a superior reality. The structural similarity between Williams’s concept of totality and Roland Barthes’s structural sociology also situates Williams in the post-structuralist arena.

Another connection between Williams and post-structuralism manifests itself in his cultural criticism. Culture, as in the post-structuralist writings, operates on a trans-sociological trans-disciplinary plane in Williams. Culture, society and politics are the central preoccupations of post-structuralists like Foucault and Derrida. But it should be stressed in this context that there is
considerable difference between the trajectories of Williams and Derrida, the latter being a major force and recurrent reference point in contemporary literary theory. First of all the philosophical foundations of the two writers are different. It is generally agreed that in his deconstruction of Western metaphysics, the base of Derrida is provided by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Husserl. Williams, on the other hand, draws his sustenance mainly from the Marxian tradition. Placing Williams against Derrida and also Foucault only implies that Williams prefigures the post-structuralist non-empirical sociological strain and that he shares with post-structuralism its challenge to ideas of liberalism and concern with problems of theorization.

Williams differs from Derrida in his concern with the problem of theorization. Derrida inaugurated a new mode of reading and interpretation. But it is a widely held view that Derrida does not propose a comprehensive theory that would explain literature, language and philosophy. As theorists Williams and Derrida differ from each other. Derrida through his interpretation of theories of Rousseau, Plato, Saussure, Freud, Hegel, Kant, etc. initiated a new mode of interpretation, but did not attempt to evolve a theory of his own. None of his major works tries to formulate a unified theory. On the other hand, William’s engagement with theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in his seminal works results in his theoretical concepts like “structure of feeling”, “total culture” and “cultural materialism”.

Williams’s works are also considered significant in the post-structuralist rewriting of the relation between Marxism and literature. Contemporary Marxian aesthetics tries to incorporate into it recent theories from other traditions. Williams participates in the post structuralist redefinition of the contours of Marxian aesthetics not only by examining classical Marxism but also by entering into dialogue with writers who work along this line.

Arnold, I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and Coleridge can be regarded as the precursors of the genre of literary theory that occupies the centre stage of literary criticism in the latter half of the twentieth century. These theorists were keen on separating criticism from biographical and impressionistic modes of literary study prevalent during this period. But they formulated theories for the interpretation without any strong philosophical foundation. On the British critical scene, it is in the writings of Raymond Williams that we first came across theorization. This, nevertheless, does not imply an underestimation of the contributions of Arnold, Richards, Eliot, Leavis and Empson towards British literary theory. It is to be remembered in this context that the first rumblings of post-structuralist literary criticism are heard in the writings of Williams.

We must also remember that it is in his writings that the post-structuralist shift in the concept of theory manifests itself for the first time as far as the British critical scene is concerned. The heavy stress on theory, emphasis on the role of the reader in the production of meaning, pre-occupation with culture as a crucial
dimension of critical theory – these are some of the post-structuralist tendencies reflected in his works.

An assessment of William’s works from the perspective of New Historicism, which is considered a part of post-structuralism, would further illustrate his post-Structuralist tendencies. Williams’s rejection of the old Historicism certainty which established mechanical connection between history and literary text and his arguments against orthodox Marxist formula for “base and superstructure” situate him in the New Historicism terrain.

Williams’s early critical writings worked towards the new critical theories. Like many of the renowned writings in New Criticism, William’s early writings kept out of discussion the historical, sociological or psychological content of the work of art criticized. Moreover, the method Williams employed in his early period was the New Critical method of close analysis or practical criticism championed by I. A. Richards. Williams like Leavis adopted practical criticism as a method and upheld the independence of the text. In the matter of critical objective he disagrees with New Critics and becomes a follower of Leavis. During this stage Williams’s cultural and sociological orientation is in embryonic state, which later proliferates into various Marxist positions.

As with Eliot and Leavis, culture had been one of the central preoccupations with Williams. But there are certain essential differences between
Leavis and Williams in their approach to culture. Williams strongly condemns the cultural pessimism in Eliot and Leavis. Moreover, there is a basic difference between Leavis and Williams in their attitude to working class. In his early period what brings Williams close to Leavis is the emphasis on the organic relation between literature and society. Criticism, according to Williams, is a social activity.

Williams has written very little on poetry. But what little he has written amply reveals the influence of Richards and Eliot on him. The influence of Eliot is the common factor that binds the criticism of poetry of Williams and Leavis. Williams does not share with Caudwell, his immediate predecessor, any theoretical continuity. Williams does not imbibe anything from Caudwell. He develops his theory by passing what went before him. Caudwell’s “Ilusion and Reality” theory is rejected by Williams as it emerges from Caudwell’s misinterpretation of Marxism and its wrong way of application to literature.

Williams’s critique of Romanticism exhibits a true Marxist orientation. He connects Romanticism with Industrial Revolution along the Marxist line and rejects the idealistic and individualistic conceptions of Romanticism as a literary attempt to overcome “alienation”, “isolation” and “fragmentation of life” brought about by forces of industrial capitalist production. In this attempt, Williams’s critique of Romanticism acquires a materialistic, historical foundation. Again, Williams does not employ the base-super-structure phraseology in the analysis of
Romanticism. This points to the theoretical difference between William’s Marxism and the “vulgar Marxism” current in the nineteen thirties. William’s analysis of Romanticism goes beyond finding of correspondences between economic base and ideological superstructure. The criticism of Romanticism by Alick West and Chistopher Caudwell was limited to establishing the mechanical correspondences between economic substructure and ideological superstructure and making abstract generalizations. Williams’s intention in the analysis of Romanticism is not to establish the social determinants of Romantic poetry. Williams looks upon Romantic poetry as a record of the artist’s “opposition on general human grounds to the kind of civilization that was being inaugurated”. (Williams, *Culture and Society*, 36). He relates Romantic poetry not just to the economic structure of the capitalist society but to the “whole way of life” characteristic of it.

Again, Williams’s reassessment and redefinition of Marxism in formulating a Marxist literary theory is characteristic of the contemporary trend in Marxian aesthetics. Developments in contemporary Marxist theories have resulted from attempts at redefining Marxism and from association with non-Marxist thinking. This situation has precipitated an open-ended Marxist literary theory. Early Lukacs’s engagement with Hegel, Pierre Macherey’s with French Structuralism and Bakhtin’s with Russian Formalism gave rise to pluralistic situation in Marxist literary theory. Theories of Adorno, Goldmann and Benjamin can also be cited as examples of open-ended Marxist theory.
Williams expresses his strong conviction that Marxism is not a settled body of theory or doctrine. Literature also is not considered as a settled body of work with general causalities and proportions. Williams looks upon Marxist tradition as an active, developing, unfinished and persistently continuous body of thinking. According to Williams, “Marxism in many fields, and perhaps especially in cultural theory, has experienced at once a significant revival, and a related openness and flexibility of theoretical development”. (Williams. Marxism and Literature. I). It is mainly this acceptance of the revival, openness and flexibility in the theoretical development of Marxism that situates Williams outside Orthodox Marxism, relates him to neo-Marxists and makes his contribution to British Marxist criticism unique and significant.

One thing to be specially noted in Williams’s literary criticism is that nowhere in his literary criticism does Williams use base-superstructure model mechanically or deterministically. Theoretically, he revises the model and adds the elements of complexity and mutual interaction. He rejects the model because “even if the economic element is determining, it determines a whole way of life, and it is to this rather than to the economic system alone, that literature has to be related”. (Williams, Culture and Society, 231).

Williams rejects the ideas of the anti-Marxists who find Marxism as a reductive and determinist kind of theory. The anti-Marxists oppose Marxist cultural theory on the ground that it allows normal and significant cultural activity
and that it reduces art as a direct or indirect expression of some preceding and controlling economic content. Williams argues that this objection from anti-Marxist was occasioned by a common form of Marxism which Williams wants to correct and redefine.

Importantly, Marxism as a philosophical and political doctrine is rejected by Williams. He emphasizes the need to understand Marxism historically. As orthodox Marxism is against this emphasis, it gives rise to abstract objectivity. According to Williams, this abstract objectivity is the basis of what became widely known, in Marxism, as “economism”. For Williams, as a philosophical and political doctrine it is worthless, but it has to be understood historically.

Williams’s Marxism has many similarities and contrasts with Lukac’s Marxian discourse. The theoretical position adopted by Lukacs is neither that of the orthodox Marxists nor that of neo-Marxists. Williams shares with Lukacs the view that literary theory is inseparable from history in general. Lukacs insisted that both kinds of history must be brought to bear on a given work in order to reveal its complete significance. Studies in European Realism and The Historical Novel make use of this theory. Though Williams follows Lukacs’s theory in The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence and The Modern Tragedy, he discards the evaluative basis of Lukacs’s theory. Lukacs applied his theory in a reductive way to works he did not consider realistic.
One similarity between Williams and Lukacs is that both of them reject the view that there is a simple deterministic relation between literature and socio-economic reality. Though Williams did not share with Lukacs the belief in a pre-existent social reality with which the literary model can be compared, he considered Lukacs’s insistence on social reality as a dynamic process, a great advance in Marxian aesthetics. Williams uses Goldmann’s structuralist theory to overcome the pitfalls in the theory of Lukacs. Williams shares with Goldmann the basic assumption that literary works arise out of social consciousness. Goldmann introduced the concepts of mental structure and the structure of a literary work explains the socio-political connections of a literary work. Goldmann’s genetic structuralism, which owes its debt to the psychologist, Jean Piaget, is different from a historical structuralism. According to Goldmann, a historical structuralism is the last of the bourgeois ideologies. Williams accepts Goldmann’s structuralist Marxian theory or “the genetic model” as it tries to solve the limitations of reflection and mediation theories of art to explain the relation between art and social life.

Though Williams accepts Goldmann’s view, he finds Gramsci’s concept of ‘Hegemony’ more authentic and useful in defining the relation between art and society. He observes that Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony” solves the inadequacies in the theories of Lukacs, Goldmann and the Frankfurt School. Williams defines hegemony as a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and
constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. (Williams, Marxism and Literature, 110). Williams’s theory of totality and total culture is built on the Gramscian concept. Williams accepts Gramsci’s concept as a great contribution to Marxian aesthetics.

Williams emphasizes the need to go beyond historical materialism which accepts Marxism as a dogma. The neglect of the basic physical human condition, emotional conditions and situation in classical Marxism became the target of attack by Williams. A materialism which historically and critically analyses and appropriates the theories of Freud and Lacan is recommended by Williams. Williams exhibits a Marxian orientation in his critique of Naturalism.

Williams also found another defect in “Classical Marxism”. “Classical Marxism” failed to develop the question of human language. He believes that a definition of language is always implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world. Marxism, instead of making its own theory of language, had incorporated the concepts of language in other antagonistic systems of thought. Such a synthesis of a concept of language from antagonistic systems of thought with Marxist propositions will radically limit its social propositions. In Writing in Society Williams makes a thorough examination of English prose from the early eighteenth century to the twentieth century and shows how the change in style of English prose is deeply connected to the changing society. He considers the prose of Ulysses and To the Lighthouse the necessary and convincing prose of a
particular phase of consciousness. For Williams language is historical and it is practical consciousness. By making language historical and practical, Williams attributes a materialist foundation to language. Williams develops his theory of language in dialogue with the Marxist thinker Voloshinov and Rossi-Landi. From Voloshinov, Williams receives the notion of language as social practice and a historical institution. These are the theoretical foundations of his enquiry into dramatic dialogue and monologue in Shakespeare in Writing in Society and the language of the Avant-garde in The Politics of Modernism.

Williams’s contributions to historical linguistics is invaluable. Synchronic and diachronic enquiry into the changes and meanings of words forms a major part of his work. Almost all his major works begin with such an enquiry. Culture and Society begins with an investigation into changes and differences in the meaning of “culture”. Modern Tragedy explores the different meanings of tragedy. Williams here follows the historical changes in the meaning of tragedy and substantiates that the term ‘tragedy’ is used with diverse emphasis in different traditions. Key Words is an investigation of the social determination of the meaning of words. Williams examines how some of the words like class, culture, society, individual, ideology, etc., which are of cultural and social importance in the contemporary world have been originated and transformed to the current meaning and significance. The emphasis of Key Words is not only on the historical origin and development of words of social and cultural importance, but also on their present meanings, implications and relationships.
Williams’s concept of “totality” is another milestone in Marxist criticism. By “totality” Williams means a totality of man, nature and history. Williams’s emphasis on literature as notation and text as “system of signs” makes his theories closer to structuralism and semiotics. But Williams’s theoretical orientation is to semiotics rather than to structuralism.

Williams welcomes deconstruction as it looks for the system of signs as a mode of formation. He considers deconstruction a radical form of semiotics and finds in it more value than structuralism. It is here that Williams’s theoretical position requires comparison with the theories of Terry Eagleton, the most significant and prolific figure in contemporary British Literary criticism. Eagleton’s Marxist criticism emerges out of the tremendous influence of the philosophical writings of Althusser. Of the major European thinkers of the present century, Althusser is one to whom Williams has shown least predilection. Eagleton’s Criticism and Ideology is an outcome of the Althusserian influence on Eagleton. Eagleton in Criticism and Ideology rightly points out the lack of intensity and philosophical shallowness of Williams’s writings. But he acknowledges Williams’s pioneering role in British literary criticism.

One major difference between Williams and Eagleton is that while Williams emphasizes “a commitment to examining our most settled commitments”, Eagleton insists on commitment to a traditional conception of the political role and vocation for the Marxist critic. Eagleton says that the primary
task of the Marxist critic is to actively participate in and help direct the cultural examinations of the masses. (Eagleton. Towards a Revolutionary Criticism: Walter Benjamin, p.97). With reference to the theory of commitment Williams’s intention was to demolish the element of abstraction in the meaning of “commitment” and give it a materialistic foundation. But there is a coverage of the theories of Williams and Eagleton in the latest works of Eagleton. Eagleton’s Literary Theory and Significance of Theory are attempts to synthesize structuralist and post-structuralist theories with Marxist aesthetics. In his later work the Function of Criticism Eagleton approves the post-structuralist theoretical pluralism in Williams’. Williams’s recognition of structuralism and semiotics, critique of classical Marxism for neglecting the importance of language and emotional condition of man show the openness of his theories. It is this openness that makes Eagleton place Williams in the most dominant European tradition of Marxist criticism- the neo-Hegelian lineage of Georg Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Lucien Goldmann and Jea Paul Sartre. The post-structuralist rewriting of literature which found its powerful expression in the writing of Frederic Jameson in America and Terry Eagleton in Britain, has its beginning in the theories of Williams.

Sheer audacity has been one of the most enduring and appealing qualities in Terry Eagleton’s writings and lectures. It has helped to make him one of the most colourful and controversial figures in cultural politics today. There is a
convergence of cultural and political allegiances that lifted Eagleton’s interest well beyond the narrow confines of “English”.

Eagleton’s early literary criticism enthusiastically embraces the writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Graham Greene, probing the metaphysics of sin and guilt with an ardent religious scholasticism. As a subtle defender of the word and the truth, he later puts the brakes on the wilder flights of deconstruction. In his most recent critical engagement with postmodernism, he has turned to models of social justice and civic virtue that carry the imprint of radical Catholicism as well as revolutionary socialism. In his frequent forays into Irish cultural politics, from his early writings on Yeats to the massively ambitious Heathcliff and the Great Hunger in 1955, his instincts and sympathies have been those of a Catholic nationalist tradition.

When we examine a volume of critical writings by Terry Eagleton we can very well see that no one explains critical theory with greater clarity and cogency than he does. To call Eagleton the most gifted Marxist thinker of his generation is only a slender acknowledgement of his critical and creative achievements. There is simply no other cultural critic writing today who can match his popularity or his prolific output. His work has made an impact on the teaching of literary and cultural studies throughout Europe, and in almost every part of the world including China, Japan, India, Russia, Australia, Canada and the United States. For the post – 1970 generation of students, researchers and teachers currently
engaged in literary and cultural studies in Britain, Eagleton is the critic par excellence. The appeal of his work stems, in part, from the bold enquiry he has launched into the origins and aims of English Studies, and from a closely related and equally relentless questioning of the functions of criticism today. Almost single-handedly he has transformed the very nature of critical discourse, breaking down distinction between critical and creative writings, between academic seriousness and popular comedy, and generally making criticism a more companionable and hospitable domain.

A salient feature of his critical prose is its scintillating dialectical style, its shrewdly discerning grasp of social and cultural contradictions, and its hair-raising way of pushing conflicting arguments so forcefully into collision that they burst and suddenly reveal some unexpected insight or perspective. We are just as likely to be presented with a set of seemingly ridiculous, far-fetched assumptions, and then discover in the course of argument how just and reasonable they are. Such swift and agile reversals are the hallmark of his deft rhetorical style. Increasingly, his writing has adopted the deflationary humour, the epigrammatic wit and the delightful display of paradox that characterizes the critical essays of Oscar Wilde. Eagleton has a repertoire of rhetorical plays that effortlessly surpasses the skilful gambits of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. While not being averse to the occasional deconstructive spin in his own writing, he has no truck with Derrida’s evasion of political commitment.
Like Saint Oscar, Eagleton enjoys a fashionable flaunting of his dialectical tendencies, though strictly within the precincts of critical theory. At the same time, this fondness for ambivalence and disputation is not a merely academic inclination, but a way of articulating a deeply felt and lived response to the conflicts and injustice in class society. The early alignment of Marxist and Catholic beliefs produced an impressive series of books and essays, published in rapid succession between 1966 and 1970: *The New Left Church* (1966), *From Culture to Revolution* (1968), *Directions: Pointers for the Post – Conciliar Church* (1968) and *The Body as Language* (1970).

From the outset, Eagleton’s theoretical work has been in dialogue with various kinds of creative writing – poems, songs, fiction, plays - to the point where any neat distinction between the theoretical and the creative begins to blur. His essays and books have repeatedly acknowledged the end of English, and yet among his many publications from *Shakespear and Society* (1967) to *William Shakespeare* (1986), are some of the finest readings of established authors on the English literary syllabus: Richardson, Dickens, Gaskell, the Brontes, Hardy and Lawerences. A dazzling exponent of deconstruction, he has also been one of its most scathing critics. English by nationality but Irish by descent, he has given himself the task of dismantling the various conflicting narratives that have shaped the literature and history of British – Irish relations in the past two hundred years.
For over thirty years Eagleton has been steadfast in this commitment to the socialist transformation of class society, however outdated or obdurate that idea might seem amidst more fashionable postmodern pursuits. It is more than a shade ironic. Therefore, his critics seem to delight in the scandalous suggestion that Eagleton keeps changing his mind. At every stage of Eagleton’s engagement with theory, there is also a critical transformation of theory, an ability to use its insights and perspective in the interest of a radical socialist politics.

Eagleton’s first full-length book of literary criticism, Shakespeare and Society (1967) is dedicated to Williams, and its concern with breaking down the settled distinction between individual and society, between spontaneous life and social structure, derives from his former teacher and colleague, Raymond Williams. The novelty of the book, however, is that it responds to Shakespeare’s plays with an understanding of ‘self’ and society that post-dates the Industrial Revolution and stems in part from a cultural analysis of its disruptive effects. In 1967 the book attacked established opinion by explicitly suggesting that ‘What we judge in the plays as relevant, what we actually see, is shaped by what we see in our own culture in ourselves” (Eagleton Shakespeare and society P.9). As the conclusion to the book reveals, Eagleton is studiously extending the concerns of culture and society back into the work of Shakespeare but his notable addition of Edward Carpenter to the cultural prophets of the late nineteenth century gives his argument about ‘spontaneity’ a valuable and original dimension.
Exile and Emigres (1970) turns to the then dominant European tradition of Marxist Criticism, a tradition boldly led by Georg Lukacs and shaped by his uncompromising belief in the efficacy of social realism. Eagleton subtly modifies and extends the arguments that the realist novel reproduces the typical components of its history and functions as an ‘intensive totality’ of existing social relations. To anyone familiar with that tradition of Marxist literary theory, what is most striking is that Eagleton contradicts a fundamental tenet in the writing of Lukacs by giving a far more positive and appreciative response to the ideology of modernism than the Hungarian Marxist would have countenanced. In this, he is already moving toward the more considered Marxist critique of modernism proposed by Theodor Adorno. Eagleton disputed the notion that modernist experimentalism necessarily involves an attenuation of actuality and show how D.H Lawrence, for instance, achieves a marvellous tantalization of experience at the close of The Rainbow. By bringing colonialism to bear on the meaning and values of modernism, Eagleton enlarges and defines its possibilities as a subject of critical and cultural debate.

The methodological problem with which Eagleton grapples throughout the 1970s is how to root literature in its social conditions. In his writings on Thomas Hardy and the Brontes, he turns increasingly to the Marxist structuralism of Lucien Goldmann. For Goldmann, what provides mediating current between the organization or structure of history and the aesthetic structure of the text is the world view of mental structure of a particular social group or class. This
structuralist method yields impressive results in Eagleton’s *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes* (1975) especially in his reading of *Wuthering Heights*. By 1976, Eagleton was already moving away from the Lukacsian idea of totalization with its excessive pursuit of symmetry. “Marxist Literary Criticism”, a key essay published in 1977, berates the neo-Hegelian Marxism of Lukacs for its backward looking, idealist notion of wholeness and its stiff – necked, classicist contempt for modernist experiment (Eagleton. ‘Marxist Literary Criticism’ in Hilda Schiff (ed). Contemporary Approaches to English Studies . 99) . This was evidence of an increasing dissatisfaction with realist aesthetics. Even Goldmann’s Structuralism was posited on the idea that the text was expressive of social consciousness, if not social history. The leap from structuralism to post–structuralism was imminent.

Even before *Myths of Power* was published, Eagleton was working on another way of considering the structural relations between literature and history. What this entailed was a radical epistemological break, whereby art came to be seen not as a reflex of social reality but as an active constituent of that reality. The focus now shifts to the idea of literature as a social practice and to ways of determining the ideological conditions under which the literary work is produced. This shift is powerfully evident in Eagleton’s determination to establish a ‘science of the text’ in *Criticism and Ideology* and its popularizing primer *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Both published in 1976, rather too much attention has been given to the impact of Louis Althusser on Eagleton’s work at this time.
Eagleton, a leading rebel in the critical revolution, sets out to offer a critique of establishment culture and to annihilate assumptions of a monopolistic, fundamentally bourgeois, concept of ‘English Literature’. In this respect, Eagleton is a representative voice of the contemporary critical vogue.

Eagleton is outwardly a bolder, more combative, truculent and outspoken critic than almost any literary academic author of his generation writing in English. But Eagleton’s appeal is not just, at first sight, a matter of style: Eagleton’s mind offers a genuinely dazzling constellation of complementary and conflicting ideologies and ideas. From his popular study of literary theory published in 1983, it is clear that his knowledge of theory, above all, is wide, if not historically far-reaching. Eagleton specializes in the criticism and critical theory of the last hundred years or so. But his knowledge includes criticism written not only by British critics but those in Europe, Russia and America, even though there is little to suggest that he has made contact with foreign critics in any foreign language. Nevertheless Eagleton’s reading in theory compares well with that of the arch-historian of critical ideas, Rene Wellek. But Eagleton himself is not a historian, nor can his treatment be equated to that of the harmless, standard guides to modern literary ideas. Eagleton, to an admirable extent, is personally and passionately engaged as a man on a mission most of his writings.

The enemy for Eagleton (in his view) is the blinkered and covertly partisan establishment of bourgeois literary studies. Of this Eagleton is himself a
product. Eagleton’s criticism finds a modern idiom in which he poses certain questions and attempts to answer them; What is the particular character of literary language? What is the relation of language to meaning? What is literature? What is criticism? What is the relation of literature to society? How is critical thinking formed by the society in which it is shaped, in the past or today? And what is the real worth of values by which we aspire to live?

But though a reader of theory, and an advocate of it, Eagleton himself is only sometimes a theorist. He can therefore appeal to readers whose interest is not theory of literature, theory of criticism (or theory in criticism), but literature itself. Theory is applied, ideas (however foreign) are tested against the English literary works that his student must read. Although increasingly throughout his career, the ideas become more important than the works, and necessarily direct attention outside them. Eagleton’s writing taken as a whole cannot be reduced to a theory. As a critic, Eagleton insists on commitment. But in his practice, Eagleton inevitably over the course of time shifts his ground as all critics must. Consequently Eagleton can reject former friends, as he does at one point Raymond Williams, but then remakes the bond: Eagleton’s Obituary review of Raymond Williams is moving and humane.

As a radical, Eagleton has in any case to change with the times, to keep abreast of the new, to find current debates in which to intervene, to catch the popular drift. Given Eagleton’s interest in theory, his tendency to try to promote
literary ideas as part of a formal programme or theoretical mission, much is predictable in any new Eagleton book.

Almost all Eagleton’s output is either criticism of criticism (and its manifold political and social, particularly Marxist, implications) or is criticism in the sense of comment upon works of creative writers. His earliest publications exhibit a religious (Roman Catholic) emphasis, one where interest in the Church, and Christian commitment, are seen as part of his general allegiance, jointly, to literature and politics of the Left. More recently, Eagleton’s religious commitment seems to have split from his literary studies and as time has gone by, his doctrine of commitment becomes increasingly political artistic, less church based, in terms.

Before 1970, however, Eagleton’s commitment to literature stood within a framework he has since come to reject: that of the humanist. In this he seems to have drawn inspiration from Leavis. At that date, it was possible to be ‘radical’ and ‘humanist’ at the same time. Between then and now, Eagleton’s sense of these terms has diverged. Eagleton’s writing on creative authors began in 1967 with his first book-length study: *Shakespeare and Society*. This is a solid ideologically understated study of eight Shakespearean plays. Eagleton argued, as Samuel Johnson had once argued in the eighteenth century, against the notion that individual identity is everything in Shakespeare. Eagleton claimed that in Shakespeare, as in life, a man exists only in relation to society. It
reflects the combination of literary and social pre-occupations. Here in this book, Eagleton suggests the reciprocal illuminating interplay between reader and text. At the time of *Shakespeare and Society*, Eagleton’s critical principles are perfectly in tune with values of common humanity.

Eagleton, in 1967, is thus able to appeal to values which are nevertheless humanist in kind. He appeals to the same values in his next book, *Exiles and Émigrés*, published three years later. Containing essays on Conrad, Waugh, Orwell, Graham Greene, T.S. Eliot, Auden and Lawrence, its aim is to trace a common thread in twentieth century authors who write from positions spiritually and often geographically, external to the culture they address. A purpose of this book is to attack notions of Englishness in English literary tradition. He says that Conrad was able to transcend those English assumptions, achieving a vantage point beyond them from which they could be probed and illuminated. Eagleton says that the period between the death of Henry James in 1916 and that of Conrad in 1924 was ‘the high point of literary creativity in the twentieth century’.

The relation of literature to society is the theme of Eagleton’s next full length book, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontes* (1975). Eagleton’s impulse is to broaden the field of attention from textual to social. At this date, ‘historical’ criticism for Eagleton is just one of several ‘authentic’ criticisms. Eagleton’s ambitions are pluralist in the sense that he is calling for more
complex critical apprehension; greater breadth of critical view. Against the orthodoxies of practical criticism, Eagleton is proposing a dual vision whereby the critic, in order to ‘read’ the work, must rise to the occasion and break with the mental habits, the critical routines, of everyday self. To this extent, Eagleton’s position may at this date be described as ‘liberal-humanist’, in a sense that is perhaps hard to describe as reactionary because it is a position which even Eagleton then saw not as impeding critical innovation, but encouraging it.

Terry Eagleton is primarily a literary critic whose major contribution to English criticism is his lucid introduction to modern literary theory. His approach is essentially direct and unprejudiced. His writing, therefore, reflects the non-sense half-humorous tone of his thinking. His knowing and engaging style takes the readers into confidence and makes criticism as readable as creative writing. Eagleton also displays a refreshing sense of independence that salvages his criticism from being either submissive or dogmatic. The candidness and joviality with which he undertakes the serious business of literary criticism is what stands out in his writing.

Within Eagleton’s broad fronted challenge to both conservative thought and pseudo-radical dispositions two further kinds of contribution are particularly worth mentioning. The first is exemplified by Eagleton’s *Healthcliff and the Great Irish Hunger*, which marks an attempt to intervene in Irish historiography on the premise that Irish history needs to be inserted into the discourse of cultural
theory, a procedure which is peculiarly and dialectically appropriate given that the realities of class, state, revolution and material production so often glided over in modern cultural theory. The second type of contribution is contained in Eagleton’s persistent endeavour not only to rewrite literary and cultural history from a left-wing perspective, but to encourage such rewriting as a concerted political endeavour by editing texts which treat a broad range of authors and themes.

In conclusion we can say that Terry Eagleton is a major Marxist critic in Britain. His critical career falls roughly into three phases. The first phase, which ends in 1970 shows the influence of his teacher and mentor, Raymond Williams. Works such as Shakespeare and Society belong to this period and show a marked sociological tendency. In the second phase, Eagleton comes directly under the impact of French Marxism and looks at literature as an ideological institution. To this phase belong works like Marxism and Literary Criticism, Criticism and Ideology, Literary Theory : An Introduction, and The Ideology of the Aesthetic. The third phase marks a return to the cultural theory of Williams as well as textual criticism as shown by works like Heathcliff and the Great Hunger and The Idea of Culture. Eagleton’s major contribution as a critic is his lucid introduction of literary theory into English criticism.

Eagleton’s influence and contribution span five broad areas: the establishment of Marxist categories of literary - cultural analysis, a critical
engagement with, and historical contextualization of, other recent critical trends, a persuasive argument for the need for theory: a revaluation of critical tradition and a redefinition of the critic’s function, and the analysis of specific authors from a Marxist standpoint. The subtlety, range and courage of Eagleton’s enterprise may, through increasing recognition, elevate him to that distinction which he himself reserved for Raymond Williams: the single most important critic of postwar Great Britain.