You already know about the growth and expansion of Marxist theory and criticism. You have learnt that in Marxist criticism social class and class relations play an important part in analysis. Marxists theorists believe that the way we think and experience the world is conditioned by the way the economy is organized. In this chapter we will learn about some other key figures of this school.

‘New Left’ Marxism: Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and Fredric Jameson

The resurgence of Marxist criticism in Britain was chiefly due to the 1968 troubles (the country’s conflict with Ireland) and by the constant inflow of continental ideas. The phenomenal popularity of New Left Review journal since 1960, too had an impact on the British intellectuals.

Raymond Williams and Culture

Raymond Williams (1921-88) seminal work is Culture and Society 1780-1950 (1958) in which attempts to theorize culture as a whole way of life. Here he interprets certain key words such as ‘industry’, ‘democracy’, ‘class’, ‘art’, and ‘literature’, and argued how meanings change with the passage of time. Williams also introduced a much-discussed term “structure of feeling” which he means as a combination of sympathetic observation and an attempt at imaginative identification. In other words, he used it to refer to the lived experience of people within a particular cultural context. His perspectives were developed in studies of drama, the novel, television, and more theoretical works (also see Williams’ Key Concepts). His early works are: Reading and Criticism (1950), Drama from Ibsen to Eliot (1952) and Drama in Performance (1954). Williams used his notion of “structure of feeling” to oppose concepts such as “base” and “superstructure” in his essay “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, in Problems in Materialism and Culture (1980).
It was with the publication of *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that he began to characterize his work as Marxist. Williams approached literature from an interdisciplinary Marxist perspective. He examined ways in which class hierarchy was reflected in literature. In *The Long Revolution*, Williams famously distinguishes between Culture (capital C) and culture (lower-case c), where Culture is “high culture”, a sum total of civilization’s greatest moral and aesthetic achievements (as seen in the works of F.R. Leavis and Matthew Arnold). The obvious agenda of having Culture is to maintain the distinction between “high brow” and “low brow,” in other words, to maintain social class. Williams’ agenda was to counterpose this view by proposing a concept of culture (lower-case c) in terms of the social. For Williams, culture is not limited to those ideas or aesthetics, which are supposed to be the high points of civilization. Instead, culture includes all products of human activity, such as language, social, political, and religious ideas and institutions (see his essay “Drama in a Dramatised Society”).

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977) Williams concentrates on historiographical issues, arguing that the cultural analyst must recognize the complex interactions that occur within historical contexts. He gave a definite term to his position, “cultural materialism,” clearly articulated in “Notes on Marxism.”

**Terry Eagleton** (1943- ) expanded the concepts of Althusser and Macherey into his view that a literary text is a special kind of production in which ideological discourse, described as any system of mental representations of lived experience, is reworked into a specifically literary discourse. In recent years Eagleton has been dealing with ideology in literature, of concepts derived from *deconstruction* and from Lacan’s version of Freudian *psychoanalysis*.

Terry Eagleton’s Marxism is more overt than that of his teacher and fellow Briton, Raymond Williams. He started off with a project to reconcile Marxism and Catholicism, and the scholarly debates found a platform in a magazine called *Slant*.

In *Criticism and Ideology*, Eagleton examines a series of novels from George Eliot to D. H. Lawrence and demonstrates the interrelations between ideology and literary forms. His *Rape of Clarissa* (1982) is a rereading of Richardson’s novel through the prisms of socialism and feminism. His essay, “Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism” (in *New Left Review*, 1985) addresses Fredric Jameson’s essay “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” Eagleton is vehement in his argument that postmodernism does not offer a satisfactory critique of contemporary society. Instead of
the postmodernist art devices, Eagleton expresses his admiration for the classic modernist and avant-garde art, derived from his regard for practical socialism and his nostalgia for bourgeois humanism.

In *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger* (1995), Eagleton sets Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* in the context of the Irish famine and the situation of Irish exiles. His *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2002) remains one of the most successful academic book of literary criticism and theory. Taking off in the British New Left critical tradition of Leavis-and-Marx, Eagleton was soon drawn towards the European structuralist and post-structuralist theory, especially the works of Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey. However, Eagleton’s growing disillusionment with the political climate in the Western democracies in the late 1970s caused him to produce works concerned with heterogeneity and cultural politics.

During the last few years, Eagleton has become a strong opponent of liberalism. He particularly attacks Christopher Hitchens, Martin Amis and Richard Dawkins and has polemicized against those who see religious faith to be incompatible with science and reason.

### Eagleton’s major works

- *Shakespeare in Society* (1967)
- *Myths of Power* (1975)
- *Criticism and Ideology* (1976)
- *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976)
- *Against the Grain* (1986)
- *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990)
Fredric Jameson (1934- ) One the most eclectic of Marxist critics, Jameson’s first published book was his doctorate thesis on Jean-Paul Sartre, and suggested his immersion in certain key European and academic traditions. After a sequence of studies: Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Bloch, Lukacs, and Sartre, Jameson presents the outline of a dialectical criticism in his Marxism and Form. However, his analyses are globally attuned, the example of which can be found in his volume The Cultures of Globalization.

Main works

- Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature
- The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act
- Signatures of the Visible
- Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic
- Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism
- The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System
- Brecht and Method
- Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions
- The Modernist Papers
- Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism
Jameson uses a range of theories including structuralism, deconstruction, archetypal criticism, allegorical interpretations, and much more for critical interpretation of a literary text. In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), Jameson conflates seemingly incompatible viewpoints as the medieval theory of fourfold levels of meaning in the *allegorical interpretation* of the Bible, the *archetypal criticism* of Northrop Frye, *structuralist criticism*, Lacan’s reinterpretations of Freud, *semiotics*, and *deconstruction*. These modes of criticism, Jameson asserts, are applicable at various stages of the critical interpretation of a literary work; but Marxist criticism, "subsumes" all the other "interpretive modes," by retaining their positive findings within a "political interpretation of literary texts." Also worth considering is Jameson’s reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* where he points that each of the interpretations applied to the text—impressionistic, Freudian, existential—actually expresses something in the text.

Jameson’s greatest success lies in his debates about the postmodern, where we find his strong epistemological understanding of narrative. For Jameson, postmodernism is not merely a trend or a fashion, but rather a logic in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The vast canvas of the book includes theory, literature, film, art, architecture and the media, along with a much appreciated discussion of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. While referring to Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, Jameson terms it as ‘the shower-curtain syndrome’ as he discusses the film gothic.

In his “Modernism and Imperialism” (1990), Jameson generalizes about imperialism using three quotations from E.M. Foster’s Howard’s End and some comments by Virginia Woolf.

Jameson’s political commitment to Marxism is more or less along the lines of European tradition than American, where he believes that there is little in contemporary American art or culture, which is worth salvaging.
QUIZ

1. Answer the following:

i. What is the central idea in Raymond Williams’ *The Long Revolution*?
ii. What are Terry Eagleton’s views on liberalism?
iii. Briefly explain Williams’s concept of “structure of feeling.”

2. Fill in the blanks:

i. Terry Eagleton’s …………… is a rereading of Richardson’s novel through the prisms of socialism and feminism.
ii. For Jameson, postmodernism is not merely a trend or a fashion, but rather a ……… .
iii. In …………… Williams concentrates on historiographical issues.

Answer key

2. i- *Rape of Clarissa* ii.-logic ; iii.- Marxism and Literature

Suggested readings:


Suggested websites:

- [http://www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/](http://www.raymondwilliams.co.uk/)
- [http://pubpages.unh.edu/~dml3/880williams.htm](http://pubpages.unh.edu/~dml3/880williams.htm)
• http://www.lib.uci.edu/about/publications/wellek/jameson/index.html
• http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/feb/02/academicexperts.highereducation