

**Dialectical Materialism and Literary Hermeneutics: Marx and Eagleton  
Reconsidered**

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines the development and relevance of Marxist literary and cultural theory through the ideas of Karl Marx and Terry Eagleton. It explores how literature and culture function not merely as artistic expressions but as ideological formations shaped by material conditions, class relations, and historical forces. Drawing upon Marx's concepts of historical materialism, class struggle, commodity fetishism, and ideology, the study investigates the relationship between literary production and socio-economic structures. The paper further analyses Eagleton's reinterpretation of Marxist criticism, particularly his emphasis on literature as a cultural practice embedded within political and ideological systems.

The study argues that Eagleton modernizes classical Marxist literary theory by engaging with structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies while retaining Marxism's central concern with power, class, and material inequality. Through a comparative and analytical approach, the paper highlights how Eagleton expands Marxist criticism beyond economic determinism and demonstrates the continuing relevance of Marxist thought in understanding contemporary issues such as globalization, consumer culture, commodification, and cultural hegemony. The research also examines the role of literature in reproducing or resisting dominant ideologies and considers how texts become sites of ideological negotiation and social consciousness.

By revisiting Marx and Eagleton in the context of modern literary and cultural debates, this paper seeks to establish Marxist criticism as an evolving and dynamic theoretical framework rather than an outdated political doctrine. The study concludes that Marxist literary and cultural theory continues to provide significant critical tools for analyzing the intersections of literature, ideology, class, and culture in contemporary society. The paper contributes to current discussions in literary criticism and cultural studies by reaffirming the importance of materialist approaches in interpreting literary texts and cultural practices in the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** Maxism, Literaray Criticism, Cultural Theory, Power and Ideology, Historical Materialism, Cultural Materialism, Aesthetics, and Hegemony.

### **Introduction**

Karl Marx remains one of the most influential thinkers in the fields of philosophy, politics, economics, and literary criticism. His theories on class struggle, historical materialism, ideology, and capitalism transformed the understanding of society and culture by emphasizing the relationship between material conditions and human consciousness. Marx argued that literature and other cultural productions are deeply connected to the socio-economic structures of society and cannot be studied in isolation from history, politics, and class relations. His ideas laid the foundation for Marxist literary criticism, which examines how literary texts reflect, reinforce, or challenge dominant ideological systems.

In the twentieth century, Terry Eagleton emerged as one of the most prominent scholars to reinterpret and expand Marxist literary and cultural theory. Eagleton combined classical Marxist thought with modern critical approaches such as structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies to develop a more comprehensive understanding of literature and ideology. Unlike traditional literary criticism that focused primarily on aesthetics and authorial intention, Eagleton viewed literature as a social and political practice shaped by power structures, institutions, and ideological forces. His works significantly contributed to the revival of Marxist criticism in contemporary literary and cultural debates.

The relationship between literature and ideology occupies a central position in both Marx and Eagleton's theories. Marxist criticism argues that literary texts are products of particular historical and economic conditions and often reflect the interests of dominant social classes. At the same time, literature possesses the potential to resist oppression and expose contradictions within capitalist society. Eagleton extends this argument by emphasizing that culture itself becomes a site of ideological struggle where meanings are produced, contested, and transformed. His theories demonstrate how literary and cultural texts participate in the formation of social consciousness and political identity.

In the contemporary world marked by globalization, consumerism, digital capitalism, and widening economic inequalities, Marxist literary and cultural theory continues to remain relevant. Issues such as commodification, cultural hegemony, alienation, and class exploitation can still be analysed effectively through Marxist perspectives. The growing interest in materialist criticism within literary and cultural studies reflects the

continuing significance of Marx and Eagleton in understanding the complex relationship between literature, society, and ideology.

This paper aims to examine the literary and cultural theories of Karl Marx and Terry Eagleton with special reference to ideology, class, and cultural production. It also seeks to explore how Eagleton modernizes Marxist criticism for contemporary literary discourse while retaining the foundational principles of Marxism. Through a critical and analytical approach, the study highlights the enduring relevance of Marxist literary criticism in interpreting modern cultural and literary practices.

### **Marxist Theory and Historical Materialism**

Karl Marx developed the theory of historical materialism to explain the evolution of human societies through material and economic conditions rather than ideas alone. According to Marx, the economic structure of society, consisting of modes of production and class relations, determines the social, political, and cultural superstructure. Literature, religion, philosophy, and culture are therefore influenced by the dominant economic system of a particular historical period.

Marx viewed history as a continuous struggle between opposing social classes. In capitalist society, this conflict exists primarily between the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, and the proletariat, who sell their labor power. This class conflict shapes social consciousness and influences cultural production. Marxist literary criticism examines how literary texts represent class relations, economic exploitation, and ideological control within society.

One of Marx's most influential concepts is ideology. Marx argued that the ruling class controls not only economic production but also intellectual and cultural production. As a result, dominant ideas in society often reflect the interests of the ruling class. Literature may unconsciously reproduce these ideologies by presenting social inequalities as natural or inevitable. However, literature can also expose social contradictions and become a medium of resistance against oppressive systems.

Another important concept is commodity fetishism, which refers to the process by which social relationships are transformed into relationships between commodities in capitalist society. Human labor and social values become hidden behind market exchange and consumer culture. This idea remains highly relevant in contemporary societies dominated by consumerism, globalization, and media culture.

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**Terry Eagleton and Marxist Literary Criticism**

Terry Eagleton played a major role in revitalizing Marxist literary criticism during the late twentieth century. Influenced by Marx, Louis Althusser, and cultural theorists, Eagleton argued that literature should be studied as a social and ideological practice rather than as an isolated artistic object. His works such as *Marxism and Literary Criticism* and *Literary Theory: An Introduction* became foundational texts in modern literary studies.

Eagleton rejected the idea that literature possesses universal and timeless meanings independent of social conditions. Instead, he emphasized that literary value itself is historically constructed and shaped by institutions, ideology, and cultural power. According to Eagleton, literary criticism cannot remain politically neutral because literature is deeply connected to structures of power and social inequality.

Eagleton expanded Marxist criticism by incorporating insights from structuralism, psychoanalysis, and post-structuralism. He believed that ideology functions not only through economic control but also through language, culture, education, and media institutions. His approach demonstrates how texts produce meanings that reflect broader ideological and political struggles within society.

Unlike simplistic economic determinism, Eagleton's Marxism recognizes the relative autonomy of culture and literature. Literature may simultaneously reinforce dominant ideologies and create spaces for resistance and alternative perspectives. This complexity makes Marxist criticism more flexible and applicable to contemporary literary and cultural analysis.

**Literature, Ideology, and Culture**

The relationship between literature and ideology is central to Marxist literary theory. Literature is not merely a reflection of reality but an active participant in shaping social consciousness. Literary texts often contain hidden ideological assumptions related to class, gender, race, nationalism, and power. Marxist criticism seeks to uncover these ideological structures and analyze how literature contributes to maintaining or challenging social hierarchies.

Culture, according to Marxist theorists, is deeply connected to material production and political power. Cultural practices, institutions, and media systems often support dominant ideologies by shaping public perception and social values. In capitalist societies, culture frequently becomes commodified, turning artistic and intellectual products into market commodities.

Eagleton's contribution to cultural theory lies in his understanding of culture as a site of ideological negotiation. He argues that cultural forms are neither completely determined by economic structures nor entirely independent from them. Instead, culture operates within complex relationships involving power, resistance, and historical conditions.

Marxist cultural criticism also examines how modern media industries promote consumerism and reinforce capitalist ideology. Advertising, popular culture, digital platforms, and entertainment industries frequently transform human experiences into commodities. These developments demonstrate the continuing relevance of Marxist theories in analysing contemporary cultural production.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Marxist Literary Theory**

Despite the rise of postmodernism and post-structuralism, Marxist literary theory remains highly relevant in contemporary academic discourse. Global capitalism, economic inequality, labour exploitation, migration, environmental crises, and digital consumer culture continue to reflect many of Marx's observations about capitalist society.

In literary studies, Marxist criticism provides valuable tools for analysing the representation of class conflict, alienation, social injustice, and ideological domination in literary texts. Contemporary writers frequently address themes related to capitalism, globalization, identity politics, and cultural displacement, making Marxist approaches increasingly significant.

Eagleton's theories remain influential because they bridge classical Marxism with modern theoretical developments. His writings demonstrate that Marxism is not a rigid doctrine but a dynamic critical framework capable of adapting to changing historical and cultural conditions. Through his work, Marxist criticism continues to engage with feminism, postcolonialism, cultural studies, and globalization studies.

The relevance of Marxist literary and cultural theory can also be observed in debates surrounding neoliberalism, media manipulation, and corporate control over cultural production. The concentration of economic and cultural power within global capitalist systems reflects many concerns raised by Marx and later developed by Eagleton.

### **Conclusion**

The literary and cultural theories of Karl Marx and Terry Eagleton continue to occupy a significant position in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Marx's concepts of historical materialism, ideology, class struggle, and commodity fetishism established the foundation for understanding literature and culture within broader socio-economic contexts. Eagleton expanded and modernized these ideas by integrating contemporary critical

approaches while preserving Marxism's central concern with power, inequality, and ideological structures.

Both theorists emphasize that literature and culture are not isolated artistic practices but products of historical, political, and material conditions. Their theories reveal how literary texts participate in ideological production and social transformation. At the same time, they demonstrate literature's potential to challenge dominant systems and create critical awareness about social injustice and inequality.

In the context of globalization, digital capitalism, and cultural commodification, Marxist literary criticism remains an essential analytical framework for understanding the relationship between literature, ideology, and society. The continuing relevance of Marx and Eagleton confirms the enduring importance of materialist approaches in contemporary literary and cultural discourse.

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