

**Introduction to Literary Theory**  
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**Lecture - 23**  
**Marxist Literary Theory (III): Raymond Williams**

Hello friends, this will be our concluding lecture on Marxist Literary Theory. And our primary focus today will be on the theoretical perspective provided by the British academic Raymond Williams. So, to start with let us familiarize ourselves with some of the biographical details of Raymond Williams. Now Williams was born in 1921, in a village that was situated at the border between England and Wales, and he was born to a working class parents. Now this location of his birth and of his childhood would go on to play a very significant role in shaping his ideas as a theorist as well as a literary artist.

Thus, for instance this rural location situated at the gray zone between England and Wales will return again and again as a major thematic concern in his novels. For instance starting with his first novel very aptly titled “Border Country” and we can see this theme engaging Raymond Williams down to his last novel that he wrote and that he titled “People of the Black Mountain”. The physical location of his childhood would also give him an entry point to the study of the key distinction between village and city between country and city.

And I mentioned this as a key distinction because this distinction would have a very significant role in British cultural imagination. In fact, it has had a very significant role in British cultural imagination for centuries now. And this particular aspect of William’s scholarship is most evident in the book the country and the city which I have already mentioned in my previous lecture and which is arguably one of the finest literary cultural criticism produced from within the Anglophone world in the 20th century. Now apart from this physical location of William’s childhood the political and cultural influence that surrounded him in his growing up years; would also have a very profound impact on his scholarship.

So, as I have just mentioned Williams was born and brought up within working class culture. And disconnected him from very early on with the British labor politics and with Marxism; and his association with Marxism would deepen as a student in the University

of Cambridge; where he was a leading member of the popular socialist club. And finally, this engagement with Marxism would flourish in a profusion of important theoretical writings like *Culture and Society*, *The Long Revolution*, *The Country and the City*, which I have already mentioned and *Marxism and Literature*.

And all of this went on to redefine the relevance of Marx's ideas in understanding literature in particular and the field of culture in general. Indeed by the time Williams died in 1988 he had not only transformed the field of Marxist literary theory and literary studies, but also inaugurated the vibrant new field of cultural studies. So, the particular theoretical idea by Williams, that we are going to discuss today; is a concept that he calls the structure of feeling. And this concept he first introduced in his book *Preface to Film* which was published in 1954 and then he went on developing this concept throughout his life and rephrasing it again and again in works like *The Long Revolution* for instance and *Marxism and Literature*.

Now, as this lifelong preoccupation with the idea suggests Williams considered this concept structure of feeling as a key concept which apparently required regular reiteration. But in spite of Williams writing about it in a number of his books structure of feeling remains a rather complex idea a rather difficult idea to grasp and we will therefore, try and approach it step by step. By taking as our starting point the Gramscian idea of hegemony with which we had concluded our last lecture. Now in our previous discussion we have noted that hegemony is a form of dominance is a form of control that the dominant class exercises over the society at large by transforming its own particular ideology into something like a consensus worldview.

So, hegemony operates by convincing most of the society that the dominant ideology presents the most natural way of conceptualizing the world around and one's own individual position within it. So, in other words hegemony is achieved through the naturalization and universalization of a dominant ideology and a dominant culture. Now Williams complicates this understanding of the dominant ideology and how it works by arguing that in any society and at any given point in time the dominant ideology is situated in a state of tension with at least two other forms of ideology and culture. The first he calls residual ideology residual culture and the second he calls the emergent ideology the emergent culture.

So, what is residual ideology or residual culture? Well Williams points out that each dominant ideological formation becomes dominant by replacing an existing set of dominant ideological formation so, for instance the bourgeois ideology. Now the bourgeois ideology of the capitalist mode of production became hegemonic became dominant only after replacing the dominance of another ideology which was associated with the feudal mode of production. Now with the hegemonic ascendancy of the bourgeois ideology most of the parts of the feudal ideology altogether disappeared they were replaced by the new ideology.

But not all of the feudal ideology disappeared so, this is a crucial argument that Williams is making. He is saying that a dominant ideology when it replaces a pre existing dominant ideology, it does not completely make the previous ideological formation disappear rather parts of it continues to live continues to exist within this new ideological formation as well. Take for instance the survival of the monarchy in Britain even in an age when the dominant bourgeois ideology clearly supports a political form of parliamentary democracy. So, clearly there are continuations of the previous ideological formation and previous ideological elements into the new mode of dominant ideology.

And these surviving parts of an older ideology the culture of an older social order is what Williams characterizes as the residual. Now here Williams actually makes a very important distinction between what he terms as a residual and what he calls the archaic. So, he writes that the archaic is that and I quote which is, wholly recognized as an element of the past; to be observed, to be examined, or even an occasion to be consciously revived, in a deliberately specializing way. And this he contrasts with the residual ideology so, Williams writes the residual has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.

Thus, certain experiences meanings and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture or nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue culture as well as social, of some previous social and cultural institutions or formation. Now as far as the residual elements are concerned Williams makes a further distinction which again I think is very important; he argues that some part of the residual elements in a society are absorbed by the dominant ideology and are made part of the dominant culture.

But some parts of the residual ideology still remain outside the purview of the dominant ideology and presents a set of meanings and values that are alternative or oppositional to the dominant ideology. Now for instance organized religion; organized religion is a typical example of the residual ideology within a post enlightenment bourgeois world order. Now an organized religion like Christianity is partly appropriated by the dominant bourgeois culture and indeed as the sociologist Max Weber shows in his classic the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. That at least one version of Christianity has provided the very basis of bourgeois value system of bourgeois moral order.

But then again Christianity also stresses on certain aspects like for instance service to others without reward and such concepts oppose the logic of the marketplace; that underlines the bourgeois ideology. Thus it is possible for instance to use this particular aspect of the residual ideology the aspect of service without reward; to conceive an alternative social order where each of us will provide use value for others according to our own capacity without worrying about its exchange value for instance or without worrying about the possible profit that can be derived from it.

Now, this will immediately put at risk the entire workings of the capitalist system. This shows how parts of the unabsorbed residual ideology can indeed pose a very significant threat to the dominant ideology. So, as I said these different ideologies within a given society are in a state of tension. Now let us come to emergent ideology and let us see how that is related to dominant ideology within any social order. Now emergent ideology is slightly more complex to define than the residual element, but let us try and see how much we can understand I will go very slowly over it so I think you will be able to grasp it all right. Now according to Williams the emergent ideology is a sum total of all the and I quote; new meanings and values new practices new relationships and kinds of relationships, that keeps emerging within a social order and positing itself as an alternative or positing itself in opposition to the dominant ideology.

Now, the reason why this is difficult as an idea is because as William points out that it is exceptionally and this is a quote from Williams “It is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it, emergent in the strict sense rather than merely novel”. Now this difficulty as to whether a particular element that is being observed is just a modification of the dominant ideology or really

substantial alternative or a substantial opposition to the dominant ideology; is compounded by the fact that just like the residual element the emergent element within a particular social order is also situated in a transactional relationship with the dominant ideology and the dominant culture.

Thus for instance parts of the emergent ideology which might initially show potential to pose an alternative or to oppose the dominant culture; may subsequently be appropriated by the dominant ideology and made part of it. Yet in spite of this regular appropriation of the parts of the emergent by the dominant genuinely new meanings genuinely new values, new practices, new social relationships they do emerge in every society. And they are mostly associated with the emergence of a new class. So, for instance if we trace the European history from the late medieval ages to the 17th century we will witness the gradual, but steady emergence of a genuinely new set of meanings practices and social relationships associated with the emergent bourgeois class; which can be regarded in William's words as substantially alternative and oppositional to the then dominant feudal culture feudal ideology.

And of course, by the 18th century the bourgeois ideology and the bourgeois culture would come to occupy the dominant position relegating aspects of the feudal ideology to the residual position. Some of it of course, will vanish entirely, but some of it will continue exercising its effect even within the bourgeois world order as residual ideology. However, Williams also points out that though the emergence of a new class is what is usually most strongly associated with the emergent ideology. There can be other sources of the emergent within a society that is not directly related to the ideology of any particular emergent class.

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So, what is this source of the emergent then; well Williams states that and I quote “no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention”. In other words there are areas of human life which are at any given point in time outside the grip of the dominant ideology which is informed by the dominant mode of production. Now this in itself is a very interesting statement coming from a scholar who is working within the Marxist theoretical tradition. Because what Williams is stating here is the possibility of areas of human life that cannot be reduced down even in its last instant to the dominant mode of production.

Now, this seemingly contradicts the base and superstructure model that we have already discussed where every aspect of human life and human consciousness is seen as being determined at least in the last instance by the base of the mode of production that dominates a particular era. But as we have already seen while discussing Althusser that the base and superstructure model is too crude in its deterministic argument and therefore, needs to be revisited needs to be revised and nuanced further and I think this is one of the things that Williams does very effectively. But in any case Williams identifies these human practices these energies these intentions that are not already claimed or not already exhausted by the dominant ideology as the source for the production of the genuinely emergent ideology; which can bring to the foreground alternative or oppositional meanings and values.

Now, here we need to note something which is that the area of human life which is beyond the clutches of the dominant; is a gray area and it is a gray area because it is the site that holds within itself two things simultaneously:

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William notes that the area of human life which is beyond the clutches of the dominant is a grey area because it is the site that holds within itself two things simultaneously:

- a) the residual ideology and culture that has not been appropriated by the dominant
- b) the emergent meanings and values which can provide genuine alternative or opposition to the dominant ideology.

So, a) it holds the residual ideology and culture that has not been appropriated by the dominant and which we have already discussed. And also b) it holds the emergent meanings and values which can provide genuine alternative or opposition to the dominant ideology. So, why is this important well this is important because this means that just like the transactional relationship that the dominant culture shares individually with the residual and the emergent. The residual and the emergent too share a transactional relationship they are located very close to each other and they interact with each other.

And this therefore, creates a highly intricate network of relationship between various kinds of world views of social and cultural elements within any particular society at any given point in time. And this intricate network cannot be reduced to the deterministic framework provided by a particular mode of production or by the hegemony of its dominant ideology. Now Williams argues that this dynamic network of the residual the dominant and the emergent ideologies translate into a complex lived experience which he describes through the phrase structure of feeling. The actual process of living through a

particular time does not involve experiencing the residual the dominant and the emergent as separate chunks of socio cultural values.

Rather at any given point in time these elements are in a state of solution and are experienced in the form of a totality. For instance look at your own consciousness look at how you view the world around you and how you situate yourself within that world. Now according to Raymond William's analysis even the present moment can be divided into dominant ideology, residual ideology and emergent ideology. And you are caught within this force field within this sort of network of transaction between all these different ideologies. But your consciousness your lived experience of the present cannot be categorized as separate chunks of cultural values or moral values that you can divide, in terms of dominant ideology, in terms of residual ideology or emergent ideology.

Rather they all come together they dissolve together to form a totality of lived experience to form a kind of comprehensive wholeness and this is what Williams refers to as the structure of feeling. So, at any given point in time as I said I will repeat all these elements ideological elements are in a state of solution and are experienced in a form of totality. And it is this experienced form of reality that Williams calls the structure of feeling and that informs any particular work of art including literature that is produced during a particular period; which means that more literary text can be pinned down as a representation of either a purely dominant ideology or a purely residual or a purely emergent ideology. What a piece of literature represents is a complex totality within which a number of ideological elements are in a state of dynamic interaction with each other.



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William writes:

[I]t seems to be true, from the nature of art, that it is from such a totality that the artist draws; it is in art primarily, that the effect of a lived experience is expressed and embodied. To relate a work of art to any part of that whole may, in varying degrees, be useful; but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. It is this, in the first instance, that I mean by the structure of feeling.

In William's own words and I quote "It seems to be true, from the nature of art, that it is from such a totality that the artist draws; it is in art primarily, that the effect of a lived experience is expressed and embodied. To relate a work of art to any part of that whole may, in varying degrees, be useful; but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. It is this, in the first instance that I mean by the structure of feeling.

The work of a Marxist literary critic like Raymond Williams therefore, involves engaging with this structure of feeling and its nuanced interrelationships. And this results of course, in a very different kind of literary analysis than the one produced by a critic who is working from within the strict base and superstructure model; where every aspect of the literary text is sought to be connected with an external counterpart in the dominant mode of production. But however, sadly as with our previous lecture we do not have sufficient time; to discuss how William's theory can actually be put into practice. But if you are interested I would like to refer to you two books.

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- *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*
- *The Country and the City*

One is of course, *The Country and The City*, but there is another book that I would like you to read which from “*Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*”. And in both these books you can see how William’s notion of structure of feeling is used as a tool for literary criticism. So, with this we conclude our discussion on Marxism and Marxist literary theory. In our next lecture we will start exploring the works of Sigmund Freud and we will start our discussion on psychoanalytic literary theory.

Thank you.