

**TERRY EAGLETON'S *THE WHITE, THE GOLD AND THE GANGRENE*:  
A STYLOSTATISTICAL STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

One of the most influential critics of English Literature today and mostly famous for his controversial style, Terry Eagleton is at a stretch a distinguished professor, a Marxist philosopher, and a cultural theorist. This Marxist literary critic has produced more than forty critical works to his credit. Just like every critic loves to be a creative writer, just to understand the agony and frustration of creative writers, Eagleton also tried his hand by producing four plays and a novel. He faced relentless obstruction from all sides. Therefore most of the learners of English do not adequately know Eagleton, the creative writer. Therefore this research paper attempts a stylostatistical analysis of Eagleton's play *The white, the Gold and the Gangrene* to justify the dizgotic bonding between Terry Eagleton, the prolific critic and Terry Eagleton, the prodigious creative dramatist of the Modern European Drama.

Terrence Francis Eagleton (22 February, 1943 -), Britain's most influential living literary critic, has a chequered career with an enviable track record as an alumnus of De La Salle College and Trinity College. Initially a Leavisite and a social Marxist in the mould of Raymond Williams, Eagleton has traversed a long distance as the critics' critic of the contemporary Anglophonic world. With about 34 (thirty four) critical works to his credit, he has been able to carve out, for himself, a niche as a literary theorist, Marxist structuralist, deconstructionist, and Lacanian psycho-analyst. Furthermore, to his credit, he has a commendable output of literary works such as; *The Gatekeeper: A memoir* (2001), a novel: *Saints and Scholars* (1987), four plays: *Saint Oscar, The White, the Gold and the Gangrene, Disappearances, and God's Locusts* (1997), besides hundreds of published essays.

Eagleton has occupied the centrestage in the academic sheepfolds as; "one of the most frequently cited debated figures across the span of literary fields" (Smith, 1), "Britain's most influential living literary critic" (Valley, 2007), "Marxist- empiricist, Marxist-structuralist, and Marxist-Philosophical aesthete" (Wade 219), " a Marxist humanist" (Larrissy 237 ), "a pilgrim of

Hope” ( Goode 294), and “a master of the metaphor”(Dillon, 2007). Put succinctly, despite being debunked, at times, as a spitting cobra and a “careerist” (Deresiewicz, 2004), he has been frequently iconographed as “an original inquisitorial spirit” (Brennan, 1998). But most of the learners of English do not adequately know Terry Eagleton, the creative writer. Owing to the facts stated above, a serious study is necessary to redefine the dizgotic bonding between Terry Eagleton, the prolific critic and Terry Eagleton, the prodigious creative writer.

There is no doubt that among Terry Eagleton’s published creative works of art, his plays such as *i) Saint Oscar* and *ii) The White, the Gold and the Gangrene* make useful and worthwhile reading. However, it is unfortunate that despite of their *agitprop* status and the well known *avant-gardism* of Eagleton, the playwright, no full-fledged sequel to McNeill’s (2005) pioneering critical study of his plays in a paper highlighting Eagleton’s Marxist bias has been attempted. Many critics have dismissed his plays as artificial and intellectual; Seamus Heaney has viewed Eagleton’s play *Saint Oscar* as “a bravura interpretation of Wilde’s English career” (86), while Steven Pole has made disparaging comment on Eagleton’s style. It was perhaps Ian Birchall’s turn;

“Eagleton, (the playwright) writes English extraordinarily badly. His style is often condensed and overladen with an erudition which the readers are assumed to share.....Eagleton is writing like this because he is unsure what audience he is addressing , on what grounds he is fighting the class struggles” (Birchall 117).

Who destroyed the delicate equilibrium of Eagleton’s hope of becoming a creative writer. These negative comments on Eagleton’s style, along with the ones to follow, such as “the question central to this approach is that of style”, (McNeill, 2005) and “the shape of the individual sentences themselves, forming the body, heart, and soul of Eagleton’s plays”, (Jameson xii) etc. have inspired researchers like me to attempt a stylistic study of Eagleton’s play, *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, to refute the critics who have debunked his style on many grounds.

The principal objective of this research paper is to attempt a study of the peculiarities of terry Eagleton as a dramatist through stylostistical analysis of his play *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, to encode and transmit his Marxist Ideology with a hope to establish his identity as a genuine playwright of the modern age.

Coming back to the million dollar question and the much debated term ‘stylistics’, it is generally accepted that stylistic analysis, “the study of patterns forms in the process of linguistic encoding of information is of importance to any major research focusing upon or dependent upon the production of analysis of language” (Sedelow, 1). Stylistic studies, in present days, demand something quantitative in character where the “linguistic objects, the comparison and analysis of quantitative data” (Juhan, 141), are taken into consideration. A quantitatively intense, careful, and rigorous study of style in natural languages has given rise to ‘statistical stylistics’ or ‘stylostistics’ which again helps to “Investigating texts from the standpoint of individual of functional styles and investigating texts with a view of author’s identification particularly in case of disputed or anonymous authorship” (Juhan, 141). It is hoped that by carrying forward McNeill’s stylistic study of Eagleton’s plays with special reference to the playwright’s stylistic inventiveness, one can fathom the inner beauties of Eagleton’s plays and understand the writer’s merit.

Though Terry Eagleton has himself said that “a writer has no people” (*Saint Oscar* 21), *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene* (to be used as *WGG* now onwards) is essentially about the Irish, in general, and James Connolly, one of the heroes of the Irish struggle for liberation, in particular. In *WGG*, Connolly does also proxy James Baldwin, one of the stalwarts with whom Eagleton has been in relation in terms of anxiety of influence. In this play, Connolly is a prisoner waiting to be executed for his part in the Rising. So in him and through him, Eagleton has deconstructed both the tradition of the oppressed and “the demand on revolutionary critics made by Marx” (McNeill 14). That is why, through McDaid and Mather, Eagleton has shown that forces of hegemony can kill neither true heroism nor unvarnished rebellion. So in *WGG*, Connolly is whisked away from the executioner’s chair despite McDaid’s elaborate bravura to do away with him. Again Eagleton has exalted Connolly by making him speak not with the tongue of his executioners but by making him speak of the poetry of the future with the trampoline of “the (M)other tongue” (Garner, 4) to bounce himself beyond the ball, chain, and drag of the damaged and compromised language that qualifies the politics of despair and the tradition of the oppressed. So it can be said that the centre of *WGG* is language. In the section to follow a stylostatistical study of *WGG* is undertaken in terms of word count involving content words and functional signals in general, along with epigram, antithesis, paradox, deviant construction and substantival elements in particular.

To facilitate, in a way of random sampling, the first 50 dialogues among McDaid, Connolly, and Mather, along with the stage directions are scanned to specify the number of Noun/ Noun phase/adjective / Adjectival phase, verb/verbal phase, used in them.

**Table- 1**

Sl.No	no. of parts of speech used
N/NP	160
A/AP	33
V/VP	134

Considering the data presented in the table 1, it can be inferred that the style of Eagleton in *WGG* is phrasal/ nominal but not clausal because the substantival elements such as nouns, noun phrases, adjectives, and adjectival phrases outnumber the verbals.

**Stylostatistical Study of WGG in Terms of Stylistic Markers**

A stylostatistical study of *WGG*, in terms of the stylistic markers such as epigrams, antitheses, paradox, and deviant constructions, is undertaken to find what they reflect about the attitude and personality of the characters of the play.

On the strength of a close scrutiny of the main text of *WGG*, the following table is formed to present the number of stylistic markers such as epigrams, antithesis, paradox, and deviant constructions used in the play.

**Table -2**

SL – NO.	SM	Connolly	McDaid	Mather	Chorus	Total
1	Epigrams	1	8	7	-	16

2	Antithesis	2	4	2	-	8
3	paradox	-	2	6	-	8
4	Deviant constructio n	1	4	7	3	15

As it is evident from the table no. 2, that the vocal texture of *WGG* is laced with 16 epigrams, 8 antithesis, 08 paradoxes, and 15 deviant constructions. What is more striking is that out of the 47 diagnostic features as indicated in Table no. 2, only four are ascribed to Connolly, the deviationist. The other 43 stylistic markers are interspersed in the utterances of Mather, McDaid and Liam. As Liam is a linguistic lamb, he has no arresting expressions in his linguistic kit. Out of the 43 distinguishing features, Mather mouths 22 and McDaid 21. It appears, both have almost equal number of phrases, “exquisitely composed and tunefully rendered” (110) to carp with Connolly.

### **Epigrams in WGG**

Epigrams are witty and pointed statements which indicate the linguistic proficiency of their makers/users. On the strength of the number of epigrams used by Mather (7) and McDaid (8) in *WGG*, it is safely suggested that they are far more linguistically and stylistically equipped to take on Connolly at their legal-judicial-linguistic mercy. So Connolly has to his credit only one epigram in *WGG*. In his opinion, “it’s not dreams of liberated grand children which stir men and women to revolt, but memories of enslaved ancestors” (114). In contrast, McDaid is very sententious. For him “Nature abhors a vacuum” (76) and “histrionics will get you nowhere” (77). Yet by trying to liquidate Connolly, he is trying to create a vacuum, though nature abhors vacuum. Knowing very well that “death is a dodgy launching pad”( 88) and “colonialism is skunks” (89), he does simply concentrate on “the fag end” but not the way the “first puff” of protest (113) that has generated people’s leader like Frizes Clarke , Plukentt, Ceannt , MacBride and Connolly . So in his own words, quite unwittingly though of course, he has proved that he is not “sound in mind” (118). Compared with McDaid , Mather is conscious of the fact that “life is lived backwards “(76) . The epigrammatic terseness with which he has stated his convictions about the “causes constructed from effects” (76) articulates his theories about “dim words of time “(82): In contrast, for McDaid there is no history but only “frozen stone” (87) and “no time but only time warp” (87) .Hence epigrammatically put, if Mather is conscious of both the living past and the “mummifying” (102) future and “the living dead” (113), McDaid is critical of “walking backwards into the future with eyes fixed on the post” (114). Hence with the help of the epigrams used by McDaid and Mather, Eagleton has stylistically distinguished these two foundationalists from each other. It is also concluded that the epigrams used in *WGG* are characterized by brevity, rhythm, alliteration, musicality and rhyme. So the bottom line is that for Eagleton epigram is a supra- phrasal unit and really a stylistic device.

### **Antithesis in WGG**

Semantically defined, antithesis is the vehicle for sharp contrasts and is based on the relative opposition which arises out of the contrast through the expansion of objectively contrasting pairs. So in antithesis, the structural pattern is also important. In *WGG* Eagleton has used only eight antitheses. Out of the eight used in *WGG*, two refer to Connolly and four to McDaid. McDaid claims that he does not think of “the fruits of action” and yet he is sure that that way his action “will bear fruit” (114). On the strength of the antithetical phrases used by McDaid and Mather, it is concluded that the antitheses used by Eagleton have the following basic functions, namely rhythm forming, contrastive, and comparative.

### **Paradox in WGG**

In *WGG*, Eagleton has used eight paradoxes. Out of these eight, two are described by Mather. So Mather claims that’s he himself is a “good ordinary decent” man (105). Again he knows that “nobody can kill a man when he is down” (116). So he wants to blow off Connolly’s brain though he knows that McDaid can’t make “balls – up of that” (117). It is he who itches to give Connolly “a grandstand view” of execution (117). And it is he who thinks that Connolly (after being shot at by McDaid) “might be hiding” (118) “under the chair” (118). With reference to all these nuggets of ideas, it is concluded that Eagleton has used paradox as an stylistic device in *WGG*. That is why, paradox is an instrument for exhibiting the incompatibility (semantic) between two statements, whether phrasal or sentential.

### **Deviant Constructions in WGG**

*WGG* begins with a chorus and in the opening chorus itself there are three deviant constructions, such as “an invite” (70) “loved.... Fiercely” (70) and “if Asquith don’t act last” (70). While maintaining the momentum, Mather has used a string of seven deviant constructions in the whole of the play. So he is a “deviationist” (86) so far as his style of articulation is concerned. That way, he is a foil to Connolly, “the ultra leftist deviationist” (86). Perhaps that is why, Eagleton has made him articulate seven deviant constructions. For him “the James Connolly” (72) is not a queer. That’s why, he repeats this expression twice in quick succession, that too in the face of Connolly himself; hence for him songs of praise do “make Cinderella look scientifically reputable” (96). In other words, for Mather, the arch deviationist, Connolly is just a (male) Cinderella who could be made scientifically reputable by Eagleton, himself an ultra Leftist deviationist. That is why, Eagleton’s use of deviant construction is characterized by “selectional deviance” (Reddy 65).

It is submitted that, apart from the epigrams and deviant constructions, one can find four other epigrams and seven other deviant constructions in the main text of *WGG*. Drawing attention of the whole of the howling epigrams like “the whole of him” (74) “you can blow the future’s brains” (88), “posterity will peer from the microscope of history” (102), and “the non-fear of death runs through the prison” (115), one can “lob a spanner” in the whole of the treasure-trove of epigrams (73). Like the deviant constructions “symbolism of the liver, rhetoric of the lower bowel and allegory of the anus” (87), no stylistician can house them in banana juice because they are not “scarroids” (94).

The research paper, through this stylostatistical study has helped us to understand that Terry Eagleton, the playwright, has been more enigmatic than Terry Eagleton, the critic. So for almost the whole of the knowledge world, Eagleton, the playwright, is a whetstone for sharper

critical/ exegetical exercises. In the process, the plays written by Eagleton have been put under various scanners. Though, at different points of time, critics have lambasted Eagleton, the playwright for his “flashy tics”, extraordinarily bad style, and condensed and over-laden style, no full-fledged stylistic study of Eagleton’s plays has been attempted and actualized. Again, most of extant stylistic studies, barring the style study effected by Dougal McNeill, suffer from evident schismaticalness and truncatedness. Against the above detailed critical backdrop, it has been hypothesized that (1) Terry Eagleton, the workshop playwright, has been prodded by the critic in him to tailor out fitting dress of thought, absolutely compatible to his Marxist ideology and that (2) he has experimented more with the form and verbal texture of his plays than with their thematic matrices to orchestrate his staple theories of protest and progress with better accent.

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