Terry Eagleton (1943 -)

The role of literature in society

Eagleton points to a perspectival shift from literature conferring a "greatness and [...] noble spirit" on the reader (Arnold 1869) to it being a powerful tool of social control of the middle and working classes in the Victorian Era (Eagleton 1983).
Marxist commentator on literary theory:
• Extends concept of ideology to literature
• Asserts that literature does not reflect but **actively produces** ideology
• Thereby, the study of literature is political
The growth of the study of literature coincides with "the failure of religion" in the Victorian Era due to the "twin impacts" of:
• **Scientific discovery:** daguerrotype (1840s), germ theory of disease (1850s), Darwin
• **Social change:** Factory Act, Pubic Health Acts, Education Act, Married Women's Property Act, Matrimonial

The Power of Religion

- Used by the ruling class to control the masses through **ideology**, that is, less by specific rules and more by **ritual and mythology**
- Religion is **affective** (mood, feeling, attitude) and **experiential** (based on one's experiences) → irrational hence hard to break

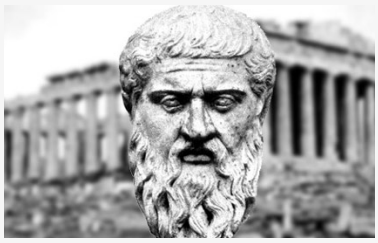
Literature "is an ideology"

Provides "timeless truths" to sweeten the pill of the social situation:
– Pride in nation: language and culture
– Reverence for achievements
– Sense of position within society
– An escape – by virtual experience – into another place or life
This can be seen more explicitly in who it was designed for:
– "working men's colleges"
– women who sought to become school teachers
– army men during the colonial period

Great founding fathers

Socrates → Plato → Aristotle
• No known works of Socrates
• It is assumed that Plato took many ideas from Socrates
• Socrates is a key figure in in Republic/-mouthpiece of Plato
• Plato founded the Academy in 387 BCE, an institution devoted to research and instruction in philosophy and the sciences (mathematics and logic) for the "philosop-her-rulers/philosopher- kings/guardians" of society
• Aristotle was Plato's pupil at the Academy and eventually became a teacher himself

Plato (ca. 427-347 BCE)



Questions of Being: What is the purpose of life, what is the real?
Questions of Society: What is justice, what is a just man?
Questions of Art: What is the use of art, which arts should be allowed?

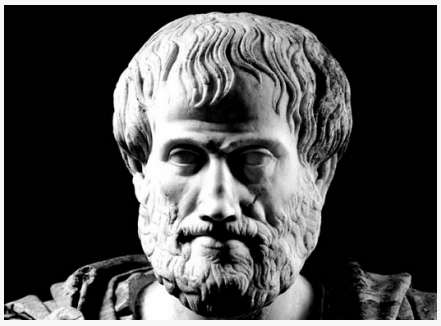
Republic Summary

Philosophy:
Rational – based on higher faculty of the mind: Reason and Law
Communal, Adult, Moral
Permits men to rise above the self and focus attention on the steady, calm, unshakable faculties of the mind
The Arts:
Irrational – based on lower faculty of the mind: Pleasure and Pain
Selfishly Indulgent, Childish, Perverse
Distracts men with emotion, prestige, wealth, political power,
and art itself
User > Knowledge
Maker > Belief
Representer > Neither

Aristotle against Plato

"Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation."
"Also everyone delights in representations [...]. The cause of this is that learning is most pleasant [...] they delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one" (90).

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)



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Poetics (ca. 335 BCE)

Categorization and Logical differentiation:
- Invented the scientific method of analysis
- Codified the divisions of knowledge into disciplines and sub-disciplines: physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, etc.
- Departs from Plato's transcendental philosophy to instead be more pragmatic (less emotional and more logical—and sees the value in emotion)

Poetics:
- Inaugural system of literary criticism and theory: genre, structure, form, etc.
- Six salient points of tragedy: plot, character, reasoning, diction, song, spectacle

The Division of Poetry: Comedy and Tragedy

TRAGEDY	COMEDY
Grand people of fine actions	Ordinary people of inferior actions
Hymns and praise poems	The laughable
Greater and more honorable than epic poetry	Greater and more honorable than lampoon

"When tragedy and comedy appeared, people were attracted to each [kind of] composition according to their own particular natures" (91).

Elements of Tragedy

1. Plot: complete, whole action which has some magnitude
- Beginning, middle, end
- Reversal of position (Peripeteia)
- Recognition of fate (Anagnorisis)

2. Character: reveals decision, of whatever sort
3. Reasoning: being able to say what is possible and appropriate, what is or is not
4. Diction
5. Song
6. Spectacle: enthralling but artless (and unnecessary)

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