

## Brief Study on the History of Eagleton's Aesthetic Thinking: The Relationship between Literature and Ideology

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**Abstract:** Terry Eagleton argued that literature is the special ideology as well as one kind of aesthetic form, which has the certain political color and also can be recognized as one part of economic base. Literature is the production of ideology, which completely is a new way to explain the relationship between literature and ideology. Both literature and ideology are the production of division of labor. Aesthetic forms of literature regarded as one kind of aesthetic code also reflect how literary production fosters texts in the related motions.

### 1. Introduction

Marx's basic attitude towards literature is that literature is one kind of social ideology. Both Marx and Engels much more concentrated on the particularity of literature, which is regarded as one kind of social ideology. Eagleton had argued that the relationship between literature and ideology which Althusser and Marcherey raised has the deep inspiration: the arguments of Althusser and Marcherey are more concrete than two simpler ones at that time. One is philistinism – literature is only ideology with certain arts' forms, i.e. literary works are the representative forms; the other is that real arts always go beyond the ideological boundary at that times and make us know the truth hidden by ideology. But Eagleton did not recognize that Althusser excluded real arts from ideology.

### 2. Literature is the Special Ideology

Literature can be recognized as one kind of aesthetic form. Literature refers to the language acts and works with aesthetic nature, including poems, essays, novels, dramas and so on. This is the narrow literary concept separated and liberated from the broad literary concepts. Literature does not signify cultural phenomena by using languages or words to communicate any more, but only one part with aesthetic nature. Literature becomes special aesthetic form, which is different from politics, philosophy, history, religion, etc. – general cultural forms. From the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the aesthetic nature of poems (nature of fine arts) was gradually recognized. In 1947, Charles Bartow made the great significant differentiation: poems, drawing, music, arts, and rhetoric, etc. are categorized into "fine arts". From then on, both handicrafts and science are not arts any more, but only fine arts (drawing and painting) is the art. Literature is formally confirmed as one subject of arts. And this means aesthetic nature of literature is also formally confirmed, at the same time the narrow one is finally liberated from the broad one (culture). In fact, the establishment of literature concepts of aesthetics has two aspects. One is the experiencing summary of literary activities for long time; another is the influence of theoretical fruits in enlightenment movement and the trend of romanticism thoughts. It can be said that literature is different from general cultural form, and it has special aesthetic nature. This point becomes the common sense today.

Marx and Engles had categorized literary arts within their whole social structural theories; and they clearly pointed out that literary arts are superstructure established on social economic base, and it belongs to one kind of social ideology of superstructure. Both Marx and Engles had adequately noticed the literary specificity as one social ideology, which has the aestheticized nature. Here we can say that literary arts are the production of aesthetic ideology. Regarding literary arts as aesthetic

ideology signifies literary arts is the variant of social ideology, which has both ideological and aesthetic natures. According to Marx and Engels' basic viewpoints of historical materialism, the essay put forward that literature, politics, law, religion and philosophy all are ideological forms and superstructure, which developed from the certain economic base. So the essential characteristics of ideology is that ideology always directly or indirectly reflects certain social economic base and superstructure that economic base determines.

Eagleton talked about the literature on the standpoint of Marxism. He thought that the literature, regarded as the literary form, has the times' and social trails. Hence his main literary viewpoint is that the literature belongs to one part of ideology, which has the certain political color, but at the same time it is one part of economic base. He pointed out that the literature as ideology, no matter whether it is the literary text, form or style all are certain historical production. As we know, in class society ideology exerts the effect of political hegemony. He even asserted that a series of aesthetic history is potentially one part of political and ideological history. So Eagleton had analyzed the relationship between aesthetics and ideology from the perspective of political criticism. He laid out that the literature and the whole aesthetic activities are all affected and determined by political ideology. No matter whether the literature emerges, develops or exists, it accepts and reflects certain political ideology.

Literary creation, literary criticism and literary theories have the closed relations with the society and ideological value of politics at the same time. Eagleton thought that literary theories are closely connected with political belief and ideological value. We can say that political or ideological nature of literature is inherent. Any kind of literature, literary phenomena and literary theories are rooted in deep structure of belief. These evaluations themselves have closed relations with social ideology. The political elements in literature are even more stable than other literary elements. Literature has not direct relation with society, but is rooted in deep structure of ideology belief that the reality produces. Literature does not directly reflect ideology, but the relationship between literature and ideology are produced by culture. Literature is the production of ideology, especially the production of aesthetic ideology.

### **3. Literature is the Production of Ideology**

Literature is the production of ideology, which is completely a new way to explain the relationship between literature and ideology. Based on this theory, Eagleton had examined literature in two levels: one is internal and the other is external. This new method contributes a lot to Marxism aesthetics and literary critical theories. In the external level, literary production concerns five types of factors, such as general mode of production, literary mode of production, general ideology, authorial ideology, and aesthetic ideology, which associated, inter-graded and conflicted with one another at the same time. Therefore, one literary text is the production of the above factors, but within the text, the relationships among them are complex, so are the relationships among these factors and the text itself. On the one hand, ideology determined a text; on the other hand, a text constructed ideology. Authors at different eras or the same author at different times created different texts, because both ideology and text determined each other in the course of literary creation.

That Economic base determines superstructure is the premise of Marxism critical theories. Eagleton also insisted on this law. But Eagleton thought that this premise did not act enough as the starting point of theoretical analysis from the strict theoretical significance. And he proposed the more convincing premise is "human social existence determines human consciousness". Hence, he deeply and delicately discussed the premise that economic base determines superstructure.

At first Eagleton concretely discussed the relationship between economic base and superstructure. For a long time, people had regarded superstructure as the whole field in which all cultural and ideological activities took place. But we can see the constant limit and rectification on superstructure concept and relationship between superstructure and economic base according to the late letters exchanged between Marx and Engels as well as Marxism development later on. This embodies in three aspects: first, because one kind of simplified reflective theory exists – regarding superstructure as mechanical reproduction or passive reflection, Marx and Engels, etc. gave certain

limit on the relationship between economic base and superstructure, and pointed out that there are non-synchronicity, complexity and indirection between economic base and superstructure. Second, limit and rectification to economic base and superstructure are involved with per se concrete text of the relations of both economic base and superstructure, so the intermediary theories replace reflective ones. However, opposite to the passiveness of reflective theory, intermediary theories signify one active process. Among them opposite factors or different sides coordinate, communicate and interact one another: superstructure indirectly responds to economic base. Third, one theory does not confirm the reaction or reproduction, and direct and obvious comparability between economic base and superstructure, but there are basic homology and corresponding relations within structures between economic base and superstructure. According to these, Eagleton pointed out that economic base is an inescapable concept while understanding the process of literary criticism and re-explained superstructure.

Both literature and ideology are the production of division of labor. Marx had debated that the big difference between consciousness and ideology lies in: originally speaking, consciousness cannot independently exist; and the text that consciousness expresses directly is related with material productive activities of human being and responds to being. However, ideology has the figure of independent nature. Ideology emerged while the division of material labor and spiritual labor appeared in dominant class. Because society develops to certain phase, and both material labor and spiritual labor are divided, a group of artists and intellectuals comparatively are broken from material productive means. From here we know “arts are production of division of labor”. In the level of this meaning, literature and ideology have the same origin.

Literature is the dualism production: material production and spiritual production. First, literature is regarded as the material production. Affected by Benjamin, Brecht and Macherey, Eagleton pointed out: “literature may be one manual product, one social ideological product and one world view; but it also is manufacturing.” Here Eagleton thought that literature is regarded as one manufacturing (process of material production), because “books are not only significant structure, but also the commodity. Dramas are not only the integration of literary script, but also are one capitalism commerce, producing the commodities by which people can consumer and make money.” Literature is the social production closely related with economic base. It is the practice of economic side and commercial production, therefore literature is one part of economic base. In Eagleton’s opinion, literature can be regarded as social activity, one society co-existing and connecting with other forms and the form of economic production. Based on this significance, literary production is one production of economic level: material production based on narrow productive concept.

Second, literature is regarded as the spiritual production. Eagleton argued that the creation of Marxism literary criticism does not lie in the historical discuss towards literature, but the revolutionary understanding about history. In the book of *German Ideology* that Marx wrote: originally the production of thoughts, concepts and ideology is directly interwoven with human material activity, communication and the language of real life. Human imagination, thinking and spiritual communication here also are the direct production of human material action. Here Eagleton used the ideas of thoughts, concepts and ideological production and also used the idea of spiritual production. What are the differences between these two ideas? If we borrow Hegelian terms to express, we can see that thought, concept and ideology belong to the span of subjective spirit – people’s subjective cognition towards the surrounding world. But spirit actually refers to objective spirit – politics, law, morality, religion and metaphysics, etc.

#### **4. Text and Ideological Production**

The literary text is the product of a specific over-determined conjuncture of the elements or formations set out schematically by general ideology (GI), aesthetic ideology (AI), authorial ideology (AuI), general mode production (GMP) and literary mode production (LMP). It is not, however, a merely passive product. The text is so constituted by this conjuncture as to actively determine its own determinants – an activity which is most apparent in its relations to ideology. From the angle of reflection theory, traditional Marxists thought that the forms only are some fixed

skills, and purely regarded the forms as the reflection of ideological text. They had segregated the forms from ideology. Eagleton put forward that aesthetic forms are also ideology because the forms self are imbedded in ideology. Of course, the relationship between ideology and literary forms seem more secret. Eagleton pointed out that both literary forms and ideology are not simple corresponding relations. Literary forms have the nature of high autonomy with corresponding independence and dynamic function. Literary forms partially develop according to their internal requirements, and are not subjected to every change of ideology. Eagleton thought that they surpass discourse structure of ideology and foster their special discourse structure while aesthetic forms often reflect certain ideology in the arts production. This is the reconstruction of ideology and produces a new ideological meaning. Here Eagleton deeply demonstrated the relationship between arts form structure of literary works and ideology and emphasized the principle of one kind of form conflict.

Eagleton paid attention to text, and tried to establish science of text. He proposed that “If literary ideology is not expression of authorial ideology, therefore literary text is also not the expression of general ideology, but the production of one ideology.” The literary text is not the expression of ideology, nor is ideology the expression of social class. The text, rather, is a certain production of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some ways appropriate. A dramatic production does not express, reflect or reproduce the dramatic text on which it is based; it produces the text, transforming it into a unique and irreducible entity. A dramatic production is not to be judged by its fidelity to the text in the sense that a mirror-image can be judged faithfully to reflect its object; text and production are not commensurable formation measured as one measures the distance between two physical objects. Text and production are incommensurate because they inhabit distinct tier and theoretical spaces. Nor is the dramatic production to be conceived of as interpenetration of these two spaces, textual and theatrical, or as a realization or concretization of the text. The relation between text and production is not imaginable as that of an essence to an existence, soul to body: it is not simply a question of the production bringing the text alive, revitalizing and de-reifying it, releasing it from its suspended animation so that the imprisoned life it contains becomes fluid and mobile. The production is not in this sense the soul of the text’s corpse; nor is the converse relation true, that the text is the informing essence of the production. The text is not contained in potential and dramatic life: the life of the text is one of literary significations, not a typographical ghosting of the flesh of production. The text is not the production in rest, nor is the production the text in action; the relation between them cannot be grasped as a simple binary opposition.

The authors of literary text produce in the certain structure of ideology and text always provides the certain framework of ideology. At the same time the literary production is the production of aesthetic ideology. Authors always use some aesthetic forms to process ideology. The double combination of literary text and ideology is the warranty of readers-can-read. In the reading activities, text, on the one hand, that expresses self is the commodity that ideology produces; on the other hand it makes the ideology that it self carries have influence. The value of a text, then, is determined by its double mode of insertion into an ideological formation and into the available lineages of literary discourse. It is in this way that the text enters into values, interests, needs, powers and capacities which surround it: not that it expresses or reproduces such things, but that it constructs itself in relation to the ideological signs which encode them. This is not to say, however, that the valuable text is always the bearer of progressive values and capacities, or that it is the mere reflex of a progressive class-subject. Because the literary production is one kind of production of aesthetic ideology, literary value in nature is also ideology.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study on the relationship between literature as ideology and literature as production are Eagleton’s creative point about the history of Eagleton’s aesthetic thinking. Eagleton had tried to establish the new theory system of Marxism aesthetics by his arts production theory, and importantly had studied the productive law of literary ideological discourse.

All in all, literature at first is one kind of general ideology, and has all characteristics of general ideology. But literature is the special ideology: aesthetic ideology. Aesthetic ideology makes literature possess itself special discourse structure and aesthetic composition. Especially aesthetic forms of literature are even one kind of ideology and embody authorial ideology. Aesthetic forms of literature that is regarded as one kind of aesthetic code also reflect how literary production fosters text in the relation motions above. Text is the products that various factors above produce and texts are one kind of ideology. Text is produced by the literary production of mode on the basis of general production of mode.

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