

The Counter-Ideological Tendency in Western Theory

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Abstract

These days, one continually hears about the role of ideology in discussions about literary theory in the West. Today, most people believe that literature is like the love of aesthetics: intended to serve ideology rather than progress. Since the time of Plato, literature has been used to achieve ideological aims; this is common in literary theory and nothing new. However, theory also gives rise to opposing views which have also existed since the time of Plato: the belief that literature has the innate characteristic of subverting ideology. The first view that literature has ideological intentions is really the argument that contemporary ideology theorists want to prove, that literature is an enclosed world, aiding repression; while the second view holds that literature undermines ideology, ideology is related to repression and literature is an emancipating power. We can trace this first viewpoint back to the historical belief that literature is an imitation, no matter if it is an imitation of the actual state of the world or an ideal world, viewed through the eyes of those taking the definition of literature for granted. The second historical viewpoint, from Plato's attack on the subversive capacity of literature to the glorification of anti-systematic nature of the sublime ideal, a concept which comes from Longinus and can be traced through the debates of Burke, to the nineteenth century debates, and to similar discussions today, help remind us of the power of the counter-ideological tendency in literature. The New Criticism found its core when it attempted to liberate this power. Some critics of

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Deconstruction employed a very different way of expanding this method so that it could be applied to all texts. Recently, the widespread influence of Bakhtin's "dialogism" and the renewed appearance of the sublime ideal in Lyotard's works, makes us think of the current strong resistance to the attempts to expand and strengthen the ideological tendency in literary criticism. Moreover, we should remember that counter-ideological theory still represents a kind of ideological theory (a kind of universal way of speaking) and is also dangerous.■