

# ENG 38001 - CRITICAL THEORY AND READING

## Week Three Notes

*A Highly Condensed (and Thus Over-simplified) Overview of Critical Theory and Reading*

### A Little Bit More on Classical Thought (5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E.— 5<sup>th</sup> Century C.E.: aprox. 1,000 years)

#### Classical Roman Era Thought

- **General Classical Roman Thought**

- The concept of a five act play was Roman (the Greeks worked with three act plays).
- In Roman times, poetry becomes a “chapter” of rhetoric.
- Alexandrian Poets
  - Poets of the Alexandrian Age (between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. And the foundation of the Roman Empire), of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E., located in Alexandria, the literary center of the Mediterranean world
  - didn't look upon the past for guidance or rules of writing
  - writers of riddles
  - originality is the goal
  - claimed that they went into a trance to compose original poetry that didn't require revision
  - saw themselves as craftsmen
- Antiquarian Poets which was the literary center of the Mediterranean world
  - poetry is to be revised and refined
  - followed rules of poetry of the past
  - imitation is a good thing (*imitatio*)

- **Horace** (Quintus Horatius Flaccus, 65-8 B.C.E.)

OBJECT	MEDIUM	MANNER
<i>Poesis</i>	<i>Poema</i>	<i>Poetas</i>
Study of the subject matter of literature	Study of verbal style and genre	Study of the skill—training in technique

- famous Roman lyric poet
- not very original, but holds a lot of concepts together
- tried to find a “happy medium” between the Alexandrian and Antiquarian poets
- Six Ideas of Middle Ground

#### 1100 B.C.E.

Homer lived (c. 1100-700)

#### 700

509 Roman Republic founded

#### 500

470 Socrates born

#### 450

428 Plato born

399 Socrates dies

384 Aristotle born

356 Alexander the Great born

#### 350

348 Plato dies

323 Alexander the Great dies

322 Aristotle dies

#### 300

#### 250

#### 200

#### 150

100 Julius Caesar born

65 Horace born

63 Augustus (Octavius) Caesar born

#### 50

44 Julius Caesar dies

27 Roman Republic dissolved

27 Roman Empire founded

8 Horace dies

#### 1 B.C.E.

#### 0

#### 1 C.E.

Longinus lives (1<sup>st</sup> Cent.)

*\*In the Neoclassical Period (below), these ideas become rules.*

1. Roman concept of *imitatio*—imitating someone else's writing; young poet imitates classical (Greek) genre and critic compares the achievement
  2. *decorum*—a fitting of things together (old people think in old ways; children think silly thoughts; comedy is never tragic); everything must be a certain way; there must be unity; furthermore, a lesser poet shouldn't try to write a great piece (an epic or a tragedy); a lesser poet should stick with lesser genres (such as comedy)
  3. *skill*—Horace admits that there is some inspiration (originality), but maintains that, primarily, a poem is carefully worked over, thought out.
  4. *language*—must be beautiful, must have plot, must be life-like; language must be *appropriately used*
  5. *teach*—knowledge (Aristotle's philosophy that poetry should teach) Antiquarians
  6. *delight*—pleasure (Aristotle's philosophy that poetry should delight) Alexandrians
- **Longinus** (1<sup>st</sup> Century, C.E.)
    - Greek Rehtorician
    - focused upon ways to take “emotional gush” and turn it into logical and rational language
    - GUSH + Aristotle's Critique = Longinus's *theory of sublimity*
    - composition + style = sublimity
    - Aristotle used rules and definitions (critique), while Longinus uses symptoms (compares/contrasts)
    - for Longinus: a good metaphor is one that you do not notice (sublime)
    - the more sublime the concept, the more figurative the language
    - if the idea is strong enough, it will carry the (figurative) language
    - *imitatio*—his concept of this is different from Horace's: we shouldn't try to be like the great writers, but we should be inspired by them (closer to Plato's belief)
    - he doesn't mention the concepts of
      - *teach and delight* (Horace, via Aristotle)
      - *knowledge and pleasure* (Plato)
    - What is NOT sublime:
      - figurative and other elevated language combined with petty content
      - heavy concepts combined with dull language
      - too much passion or other emotion; too much sentimentality
    - Symptom's of the Sublime (not definitive; you have to know through intuition)
      - there is an afterthought (stays in your mind)
      - strong image (great imagination)

14	Augustus Caesar dies
<b>100</b>	
204	Plotinus born
270	Plotinus dies
354	Augustine born
430	Augustine dies
1453	Roman Empire dissolved
<hr/>	
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- intensity (bang-bang-bang action/feeling)
- He argues that each text has its own effect, affects people in unique ways, and you can't generalize as Aristotle does
- His thinking is the opposite of Horace's

HORACE	LONGINUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dry</li> <li>• careful</li> <li>• correct</li> <li>• schooled</li> <li>• academia</li> <li>• petty faults bring the art down</li> <li>• sublimity can bring the art down, too</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exciting</li> <li>• dramatic</li> <li>• expressive</li> <li>• unschooled</li> <li>• petty faults do not bring art down</li> <li>• doesn't believe that one can critique (criticize) the sublime</li> </ul>

- **Plotinus** (204-270 C.E.)
  - Greek-speaking philosopher: born in Lycopolis; died in Campania, Italy
  - wasn't Christian
  - Neoplatonist in that he is more mystical (like Plato), not as prescriptive (as Aristotle is)
  - His thinking is the source of the idea of the Great Chain of Being.
  - He was concerned with the relationship between soul and matter, with the emanation of the soul into matter and then the return of the soul [to non-matter].
  - *intuition*—instinctively knowing, rooted in the soul
  - *reason*—laboring it out ( $a=x$ ,  $x>y$ ,  $y+x=z$ , . . .) (Plato's "Block C")
  - *instinct*—noted in body or matter; to know without effort
  - reasoning is cold and calculated; intuition is whole, complete
  - reason is to making machines as intuition is to making art
  - argues that real art is based on intuition: an artist isn't imitating nature (matter, *res*)
  - the artist is imitating the soul (*eide*)
  - While Plato argues that the artist paints an image of reality that is much more inferior to reality, Plotinus agrees but argues that it is a moot point:
    - the artist struggles in a battle between intuition and the reluctance of matter (to be copied), and therefore *the artist always fails, which is not the issue*;
    - *the issue is how much the artist fails* at creating what he intuitively perceives

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## 1 C.E.

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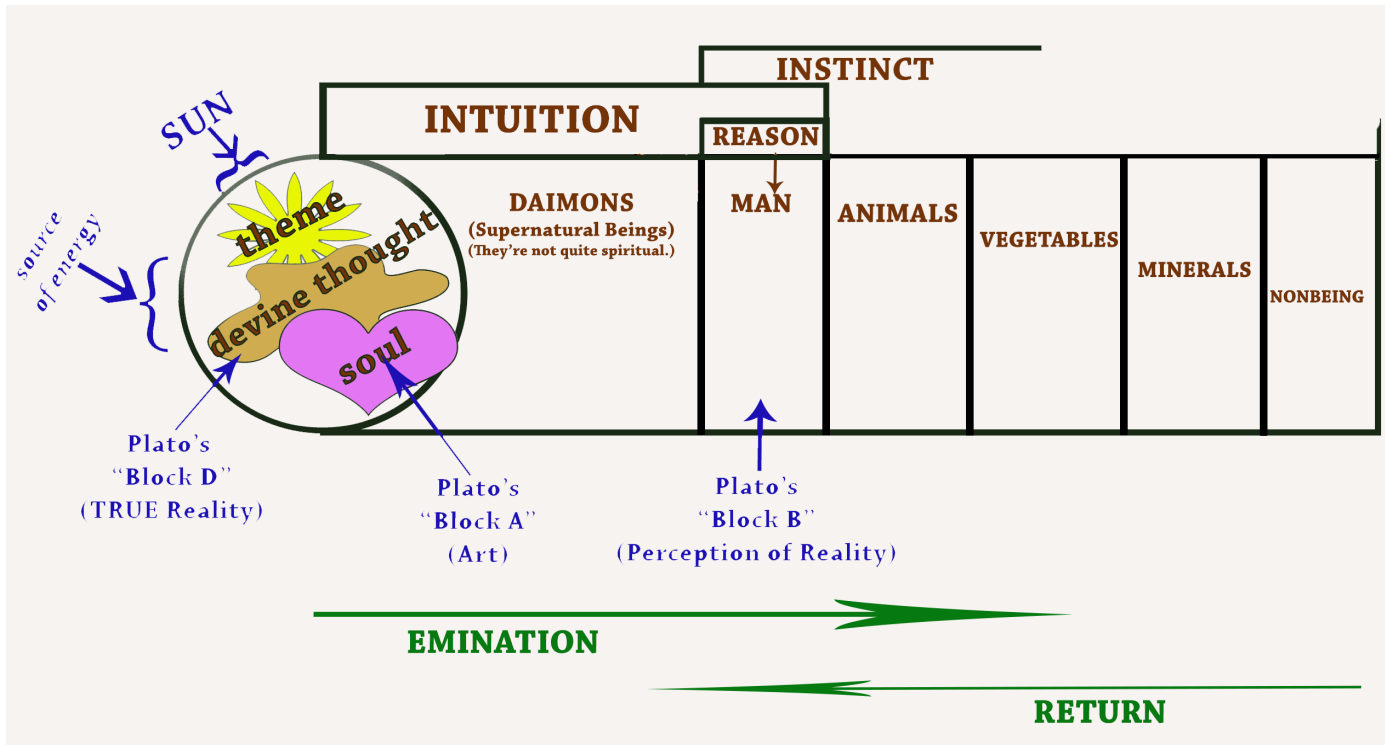
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- the viewer/consumer examines the work of art and, through its inspiration/imitation, sees the soul that it is trying to represent
- This is an elitist system of thought
  - the everyday “clod” (lowest human [in the Great Chain of Being]) cannot appreciate art/literature
  - neoplatonic in that it argues that the true inward essence, the idea that is conveyed through the work of art (or literature) is what is important
  - different from Plato in that he is not really concerned with details (parts), more concerned with the essence (the whole), even if the work is unfinished



- **Augustine** (a.k.a. St. Augustine, Saint Augustine of Hippo, Aurelius Agustinus; 354-430, C.E.)
  - from northern Africa (now known as Ahras, Algeria)
  - converted to Christianity in 386
  - one of the Latin Fathers of the Church
  - adapted classical thought to work with Christian thought; layed the foundation for much medieval and modern Christian thought

- 50**
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- drew heavily from both platonist and neoplatonist traditions
  - helps begin the movement to read Classical thought/literature with “divine interpretation”
- reflections on art and literature
  - either use it or enjoy it
  - appreciating God is intrinsic
  - appreciating art for art's sake is evil, but to use it to obtain the work of God (which is intrinsic) is good
  - believed in a heirachy of beauty, based upon how much form (how much less of a void, how much more content) the work possessed or lacked
    - God is the ultimate beauty, since he is perfect
    - the earth is the lowest form of beauty
  - the main elements of beauty
    - unity: everything exists as an individual and whole unity (thus having unity); something must exist (be a unified whole) before it can have the potential for beauty
    - equality: a unit (thing) must be comparable to others in terms of equality or inequality
    - number: begins from unity, the base of rhythm, which is based on numerical counting
    - proportion: symmetry gives pleasure, preserving the unity and making it wholly beautiful
    - order: everything (proportionate or not, rhythmical or not, equal or not, unified or not) belongs to an order, a hierarchy, of beauty

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**Divine Power** | **Divine Knowledge** | **Inner Word** **Outer Word** (thoughts) **Outer-outer Word** (spoken)

## Medieval Thought (8<sup>th</sup> Century—14<sup>th</sup> Century: aprox. 600 years)

- **General Concepts**
  - Greatly influenced by Augustine (built upon the ideas of Plato and Aristotle)
  - Art (music, literature, architecture,...) is intended to bring one closer to God
  - The Importance of Proportion
    - important for architecture (such as for cathedrals)
    - balance and harmony were important for beauty
    - some cathedrals are shaped in the form of a cross (from an arial view), which attains balance
    - paintings and literature had to be balanced in order to be beautiful
    - music had to be harmonious (balanced) in order to be beautiful

- all art
- The Importance of Light and Color
  - how it affects what we see, especially color
  - light and color affect certain characteristics of beauty, such as radiance and clarity
  - light and color are God; God is light and color
  - the light of the sun represents (Plato's "Block B" —perceived reality) divine light (Plato's "Block D" —TRUE reality)
  - light illuminates color
  - color causes beauty
  - the more radiant the color, the more beautiful
- The Importance of Symbolism
  - creation of things (art, literature,...) revealed God
  - symbolic meaning communicates through art
    - symbolism is employed (by writers, artists,...) to give meaning
    - symbolism is used (by readers, viewers,...) to discover deeper meaning
  - art should be symbolic of God and his work: neoplatonic in that it plays on the idea art (Plato's "Block A") can only represent (symbolize) our perception of reality (Plato's "Block B"); it is not neoplatonic in that medievalists felt this was good (as opposed to Plato who saw it as evil): art is a means of coming closer to God's perfection and beauty, but it does not attain God's perfection and beauty
- **Scholasticism**
  - the medieval university approach (began around 1100)
  - began as a departure from monastic schools
  - a method of learning (not really a philosophy)
    - strong emphasis on dialectical reasoning
      - not debate, but a reasoning that opposes different points of view about a "truth" through reasoned arguments (no emotional, subjective appeal)
      - intended to resolve contradictions via extended knowledge and inference
    - attempts to reconcile Classical thinking with Christian thinking, to find harmony between the two
    - promotes discovery and learning through imitation/replication
  - a method of teaching
    - *lectio*—lecture, the reading of an authoritative text (no questions or discussion)
    - *meditatio*—students reflect upon the lecture and text
    - *quaestio*—students ask questions developed during their reflection, often addressing contradictions in the authoritative texts

- *questiones*—questions that beyond the lecture and text
- *disputationes*—intended to resolve controversial questions
- **Thomas Aquinas** (a.k.a. St. Thomas Aquinas, Tommaso d'Aquino, Thomas of Aquino; 1225-1274)
  - Italian Dominican friar who promoted Scholasticism
  - greatly influenced by Aristotelian logic/thinking
  - General Attitude toward Beauty
    - if God is perfect, then one may reason out perfect beauty from his creations
    - Properties of Perfect Beauty
      - wholeness, unity
      - due proportion and harmony
      - *claritas* (a brilliance—it grabs you; a kind of perfection shining forth that gets your full attention)
    - different from neoplatonism in that there is no idea of the soul in a tree (“Block D” is limited to people)
    - all beautiful objects are about the perfect beauty of God
  - Method of Dealing with Biblical Texts: words => things => significance
    - words refer to literal or historical facts
      - historical, literal meaning
      - etiological meaning (the cause of happening)
      - analogical meaning (no two passages can contradict each other)
    - literal significance of the spiritual (*hermeneutics*—the theory and method of interpretation, especially of wisdom literature, philosophical texts, and religious texts)
      - allegorical (a relationship between events of the Old and New Testaments)
      - moral (signifies lessons to us)
      - anagogical (relates to eternal life, a method of mystical interpretation)
    - teach and delight
  - had to justify writing in Italian (rather than in Latin); argued that every country should have a kind of “pure” version of its various languages, a literary language

## **Renaissance Thought (14<sup>th</sup> Century — 17<sup>th</sup> Century: aprox. 300 years)**

- **Humanism**
  - Humanists re-awakened interest in Classical philosophies (particularly of the writings of Plato and Aristotle) in writing translations that were easier to understand; it wasn't that such texts didn't exist during the medieval period; it was that they were ignored and/or misunderstood.

- Humanists promoted the accurate study of ancient texts in their original languages.
- Humanists (especially in the 15<sup>th</sup> century) tended to condemn university education, saw Scholastic logic as nonsensical
- Humanists worked to replace Scholasticism with Humanist learning inspired by Classical thinking:
  - language is a vehicle for communication and debate
  - arguments should be evaluated for their effectiveness and usefulness

TO BE CONTINUED . . .