According to Eagleton, texts can become literature simply because people treat it like that. Eagleton is a Marxist critic. In this essay he writes from a committed and identified position. He is not a taster of ‘isms’, wavering from one round for a few moments and then passing on to the next one. It is interesting to notice that in a book on literary theory, he begins by asking ‘What is literature?’ rather than ‘What is literary theory?’ The overall argument in his book is vigorous but taxing: the answer to the question What is literature?’ is that literature ‘does not exist in the sense that insects do’… For Eagleton, theory’s insect -like purpose seems to be to act as a kind of super-bug, attacking literature from within, with the aim of bringing about its death (though if literature doesn’t exist, how can it die?). At the end of his book, he expresses with the following allegory:

“I shall end with an allegory. We know that the lion is stronger than the lion-tamer, and so does the lion-tamer. The problem is that the lion does not know it. It is not out of the question that the death of literature may help the lion to awaken.”

Presumably, the lion here is the ‘reading-public’ and the lion-tamer is literature. In a way, we can presume that Eagleton is in favour of the fact that the job of theory is to oppose literature and deprive it of its power to subdue and pacify the masses. Like a state apparatus, literature controls us. And it has a ‘whip’ on its hand for this. This whip is the ideology.( “By 'ideology' I mean, roughly, the ways in which what we say and believe connects with **the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in**.”)

Well, I would like to advise you to read this essay by Eagleton (‘What is literature?’) with such an understanding about the book: ‘Literary Theory: An Introduction’. I think and hope, the essay might ‘please’ you fully only when you read the entire book also.

\*As I have told you earlier, in his ‘What is **Literature**?’, Eagleton strives to define **literature** by introducing a multitude of definitions to readers, while also refuting each definition and claiming that essentially, **literature** is too broad and subjective to define in concrete terms.

\*The first definition that comes to mind when one tends to think about literature according to Eagleton‟s, is the question of fact vs. fiction. Some tend to believe that literature is “imaginative” writing; putting therefore literature in opposition to factual and/or historical writing. Yet this distinction has some flaws, and one of the best examples is the one provided by Terry Eagleton when he says that “Superman comics” are fiction but not regarded as literature. We can therefore understand that the claim that literature refers to “imaginative writing” isn’t going to take us that far.

\*The formalists only regarded literature as a „particular organization of language‟. Formalism according to Eagleton was only „the application of linguistics to the study of literature‟. Content was therefore secondary, not to say unnecessary, to the formalists. This view of literature is criticized by literary theorist Terry Eagleton.

\*Eagleton continues in his discussion and adds that any piece of writing can be read „non- pragmatically‟, as any text can be read „poetically‟. Therefore, literature cannot be judged as being simply a discourse that must be read “non-pragmatically”.

\*Eagleton claims that there is absolutely no objective definition of ‘literature’and that there is no such writing that is immutably literary. Literature has a lot to do with value-judgements, and since values refers to whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, value judgements are unstable staff. According to him, rather- literature itself is an ‘unstable affair’ that can never be scrutinized in an objective manner! Eagleton says how Homer was understood in the Middle Ages is probably different to how we interpret his work today. According to Eagleton that is the reason why the definition of literature is so unstable .

\*Eagleton thinks that the decision of a piece of writing being literature is made by value-judgements in the society. The individual is influenced by the value-judgement of the whole society and hence there are not many individual values. How much we are influenced by the value-judgements of society shows an experiment by the Cambridge critic I.A. Richards. He gave his students poems to evaluate without revealing the author or the title of the poems and some of the most celebrated poets were criticised while not so well-known poets were highly praised. This shows how much our perception changes when we know that we are going to read a poem by a famous poet, we will not criticise it as easily as we would criticise an unknown poet. But what is even more interesting to Eagleton is that Richards students all evaluated the poems in the same manner with the same prejudices and the same perceptions.

\*‘Ideology’ has a lot to do with what we tend to view as ‘literature’. Put more crudely, one can say that the social groups in power wants us to consider certain piece of writings as ‘literature’ and others as not. ‘literature’ has thus come to be the slave of the social groups in power..

\*Eventually, Terry Eagleton draws the conclusion that the social groups that are in the leading positions will define the value-judgements of each generation and therefore nothing about literature is objective. It is dependent on the beliefs of society.