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**LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM**

Life unexamined is not worth living.

-Socrates

A common understanding about criticism is based on the following observations of the scholars.

1. Criticism is an act or process of evaluating the merit of a text.

2. It is an investigation of the origin and accuracy of texts.

3. Judgement of present questions and for freshening the mode of thought of the time.

The evaluation of the principles whereby evaluation should be carried out or that writers should note to have their work judged favorably. It is also known for the investigation of the origin and accuracy of texts, the use of the best thought to be found in literary (and other) works as criteria for judgement of present questions and for freshening the mode of thought of the time. It is also associated with the close reading, analysis, or explication of the meaning of a literary work, all commentaries on and uses of a text other than presumptive reconstruction of the author’s intended meaning. Criticism carries the sense of judging and evaluating.

Simply put, literary theory is an attempt to state the principles of literature, and it is: 1. More frequently, the attempt to state the principles by which criticism and / or interpretation of literary works should proceed. 2. The attempt to ground the interpretation and/ or criticism of literature in a more basic discipline such as philosophy, psychology, or linguistics. 3. Theoretical arguments that theories of literature are self-invalidating. 4. In a special sense that is associated with the ‘critical theory’ may refer to analysis of literature or other aspects of culture from the point of view of social / political theories that oppose the existing culture as the product of monopoly criticism.

For your general understanding, a brief overview of the rise and development of literary theory and criticism, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries is given. One of the most significant changes that have occurred in the field of literary theory and criticism is where to locate the locus of meaning in a text. In the discipline of literary criticism, it was originally assumed that meaning resides with the author. Thus, the purpose of interpretation then was to discern the author's intention which would unlock the textual meaning of the work. However, with time, critics began to focus more concertedly on the text itself; hence meaning came to be seen as residing with the reader. By subjecting a work of art to a particular theoretical construct, you can acquire a deeper understanding of the work and a better appreciation of its richness. Prior to the 20th century, the investigation of the nature and value of literature had had a long and distinguished history, beginning with Plato and Aristotle and continuing into modern times with such figures as Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold. But their investigations focused primarily on evaluation, not interpretation. They explored what literature is and praised or condemned works that failed to meet whichever standards they deemed essential. In *The Republic,* to cite one extreme example, Plato condemned *all* literature because it stirs up the passions—lust, desire, pain, anger—rather than nurtures the intellect.

The history of literature is the history of literary criticism. The latter as an ally of the former makes creative writing more complementary and helps to conceptualise the pedagogical import of texts of literature into ideological standpoints. Over the ages, literary theories have been the weapons for the realisation of this crucial obligation of literary criticism. For Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory* (1996), the emergence of theory was a ‘way of emancipating literary works from the stranglehold of a 'civilised sensibility’ and throwing them open to a kind of analysis in which, in principle at least, anyone could participate.’ Modern literary theory gradually emerged in Europe during the 19th century and gained momentum in the 20th century. Eagleton argues that theory is the body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. For him, theories reveal what literature can mean. It is a description of the underlying principles by which we attempt to understand literature. That is to say, all literary interpretation draws on a basis in theory since it is literary theory that formulates the relationship between author and work.

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERARY THEORY LITERARY CRITICISM**

Even though modern literary theorising and criticism emerged during the nineteenth century, both attained greater heights in the 20th Century. In fact, the 20th Century could be appropriately termed the age of criticism. The richness and the complexity of literary theory can be seen in the many critical movements that sprang up and in the enthusiasm with which many critics practised the art. The impact of the new psychologies was deeply felt in criticism. Marxism, structuralism, formalism, semiology, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and post-colonial critical studies are among the many theories that dominated the century. Among the notable critics of the century include: I.A. Richards, P.R Leavis, T. S Eliot, T. E Hulme, William Empson, Christopher Caudwell, John Crowe, Allen Tate, Robert Perm Warren, Ezra Pound, Wayne Booth, and Henry James etc.

In the preface to *A History of Literary Criticism* (1991), A. N. Jeffares gives no room for any doubt about the kinship of literature, literary criticism, and literary theories. He says:

The study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. Also, a knowledge of the kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay; the forces acted upon them as they wrote, the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background also become significant.

All of these are antecedents to the birth of a particular literary production. The argument of Jeffers (1983) is that for literature to be on course, it becomes expedient that a structure is put in place to reveal its meaning beyond the literal level. Broadly, texts of literature would possess two levels of meaning - the literal and the super-literal. The super-literal meaning of texts of literature is the ideological implication of the same, which criticism attempts to resolve. The task of resolving the crisis engendered in literary texts is possible through the formulation of some principles, parameters and paradigms which are technically termed theories. Theories are meant to interpret and evaluate works of literature with the mind of revealing the in-depth implications of such works.

According to Terry Eagleton (2005) “… there are some students who complain that literary theory is impossibly esoteric, who suspect it as an arcane, elitist enclave somewhat akin to nuclear physics. It is true that a 'literary education' does not exactly encourage analytical thought, but literary theory is in fact no more difficult than many theoretical enquiries and a good deal easier than some”.

Critics also protest that literary theory 'gets in between the reader and the work'. The simple response to this is that without some kind of theory, however unreflective and implicit, we would not know what a 'literary work' was in the first place, or how we were to read it. Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and oblivion of one's own.

Tyson Lois (2006), in an attempt to justify the study of literary theory, raises some interesting questions, why should we bother to learn about literary or critical theories? Is it really worth the trouble? Will all those abstract concepts not interfere with one’s natural and personal interpretations of literature? These questions, or ones like them, are probably the questions most frequently asked by new students of critical theory, regardless of their age or educational status. Literary theory and criticism offer us new ways of thinking about literature and about what are involved in reading critically.

Literary theory and criticism are unavoidable parts of studying literature. But theory – especially when it takes the form of ‘isms’ – can often be intimidating or else, frankly, boring. Literary theory and criticism aim to explain, entertain, stimulate, and challenge the student of literature. Literary theory and criticism make literature refreshing, informative and stimulating in many ways. Literary theory and criticism help us to achieve a better understanding of literature. A better understanding of the world in which we live, automatically, comes along when we study literature, and the study of critical theory makes that enterprise even more productive. Literary theory and criticism can, not only show us our world and ourselves through new and valuable lenses, but also strengthen our ability to think logically, creatively, and with a good deal of insight in analysing works of literature.

Most importantly, there is in fact no 'literary theory,' in the sense of a body of theory which springs from, or is applicable to, literature alone. All the theoretical approaches emerged from other areas of the humanities and have implications well beyond literature itself.

It was argued that by subjecting a work of art to a particular theoretical construct, you can acquire a deeper understanding of the work and a better appreciation of its richness. The point was also made that the richness and the complexity of literary theory can be seen in the many critical movements that sprang up and in the enthusiasm with which many critics practised the art.

We stated that literary theory and criticism is an unavoidable part of studying literature. Literary theory and criticism aim to explain, entertain, stimulate, and challenge the student of literature. Literary theory and criticism make literature refreshing, informative and stimulating in many ways. Literary theory and criticism help us to achieve a better understanding of literature.

Before 20th century, there was little systematic attempt to interpret works of literature, to probe their meanings. Before then there was a widespread "assumption that great literature was essentially self-interpreting and needed no elaborate interpretation." But as knowledge increases, there was a shift in attitude to the methods of literary theorising. In fact, by the end of the 19th century, universities began to include courses in modern literature, and teachers and writers began to give serious attention to interpreting literature.

In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1999), Jonathan Culler defines literary theory generally as "the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods for analysing it." Culler further says that ‘One of the most dismaying features of theory today is that it is endless. It is not something that you could learn so as to 'know theory.' It is an unbounded corpus of writings which is always being augmented as the young and the restless, in critiques of the guiding conceptions of their elders, promote the contributions to theory of new thinkers and rediscover the work of older, neglected ones.

In his book, *An Essay on Criticism* (1966), Graham Hough distinguishes two categories of literary theories. The first category he calls the extrinsic theories and is concerned with the moral nature of literature. Theories in this category primarily emphasise the total essence of literature. The second category is what he describes as the intrinsic theories, which talk about the formal nature of literature and more specifically what it is.

The intrinsically inclined criticism is a ‘heterodiegetic’ judgment of literature. This kind of literary theory isolates a work of literature from its external reality. The adherents of this classification see a text of literature as having no relationship intended or implied with its external world. That such a work is in its own ‘world’. The critical theorists in this category are the Formalists, Structuralists and Post-structuralists or the Deconstructionists.

On the other hand, the extrinsically inspired literary theories tend to associate a literary piece with its external world. Here, there is a departure from the isolationist philosophy propounded by the ideologues of the intrinsically inclined criticism. Rather, the extrinsic criticism is homodiegetic meaning that a work of literature is essentially (i) a representation of the spirit of the age and (ii) a reflection of the ‘world’ in which it operates. It goes further to see a text of literature as a product of the producer’s (poets, novelists, playwrights, and essayists) imagination, vision and sensibility in his/her external world. Also, in this kind of criticism, the artist does not only focus on his external reality, but he/she is inside the literary production and creates a principal character and other characters to carry out his mission. The focus in this respect is for criticism to holistically investigate a piece of literature with the mind of having a more practical judgment of the same. Modern literary theories in this category are Psychological or Psychoanalytical, Marxist, Feminist and Post-colonialist criticism.

Generally, a theory is a body of rules or principles used to appraise works of literature. And on the other hand, literary theory (critical theory), tries to explain the assumptions and values upon which various forms of literary criticism rest.

**DISTINCTION BETWEEN LITERARY THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM**

All literary theories are lenses through which we can see texts, they were developed to understand the various ways people read literary texts. The proponents of each theory believe their theory is *the* theory, but most of us interpret texts according to the "rules" of several different theories at a time. There is nothing to say that one is better than another or that you should read according to any of them, but it is sometimes fun to "decide" to read a text with one in mind because you often end up with a whole new perspective on your reading. To study literary theory is to seek to understand exactly how readers (critics) interpret (criticise) texts, especially literary ones. Most scholars today would agree that there is no single meaning waiting to be simply *found* in any text. Meaning is, rather, *produced*, that is, it is a function of the different interpretative strategies which various readers bring to bear upon a text. Thus, a cardinal rule of modern literary criticism could be summed up as follows: *the ‘answers’ you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of ‘questions’ you put to it*. Strictly speaking, when we interpret a literary text, we are doing literary criticism, but when we examine the criteria upon which our interpretation rests, we are applying literary theory. In other words, literary criticism is the application of critical theory to a literary text, whether or not a given critic is aware of the theoretical assumptions informing his or her interpretation. In fact, the widespread recognition that literary criticism cannot be separated from the theoretical assumptions on which it is based is one reason why the word *criticism* is often used as if it includes the word *theory****.***

Literary history, on its part, is the academic discipline which defines how literature was taught and studied from the 1890s onwards. As a discipline, it grounds its scientific and social legitimacy in the positivist history of the late 19th century. As a historical genre concerned with the method of establishing facts, it extends the application of the reliable tools of classical and medieval philology to modern literature. Literary history relates literature to the social, political, moral, and intellectual life of a nation, personality, or period. Literary history is not expected to reduce works of literature to archival documents, but to generate a proper evaluative discourse and explain why certain works, which we call classics, still affect us, and become, so to speak, immortal, while others do not survive their own times, etc.

Literary theory and literary criticism are ‘interpretive tools’ that help us think more deeply and insightfully about the literature that we read. Literary theory, specifically, refers to the set of principles evolved for the evaluation of works of literature. Over time, different schools of literary criticism have developed, each with its own approaches to the act of reading. It is important that students study literary theory and criticism because both offer different ways of interpreting works of literature. Each theory offers itself as the most (or the only) accurate means of understanding human experience. In many instances, advocates of the most popular theories of the day usually receive the acclamation and respect. However, even within the ranks of any given critical theory there are countless disagreements among practitioners that result in the emergence of different schools of thought within a single theory. In fact, the history of every literary theory is, in effect, the history of an ongoing debate among its own advocates as well as an ongoing debate with the advocates of other theories. Thus, literary theory and criticism will help us in “thinking theoretically,” that is, to seeing the assumptions, whether stated or not, that underlie every viewpoint.

The terms *critic* and *literary criticism* do not necessarily imply finding fault with literary works. Literary criticism, by and large, tries to explain the literary work to us, its production, its meaning, its design, and its beauty. Critics tend to find flaws in one another’s interpretations more than in literary works. Unlike movie critics and book reviewers, who tell us whether or not we should watch the films or read the books they review, literary critics spend much more time explaining than evaluating, even when their official purpose, like that of the Formalist (or New Critics) is to assess the aesthetic quality of the literary work. Of course, when we apply critical theories that involve a desire to change the world for the better—such as feminism, Marxism, lesbian/gay/queer criticism, and postcolonial criticism—we will sometimes find a literary work flawed in terms of its deliberate or inadvertent promotion of, for example, sexist, classist, racist, heterosexist, or colonialist values. But even in these cases, the flawed work has value because we can use it to understand how these repressive ideologies operate.

Since the era of Plato and Aristotle, philosophers, scholars, and writers have tried to create a more precise and disciplined ways of analysing literature. Literary criticism flourished in Europe and America with such literary giants like I. A. Richards and F. R. Levis as the fore-runners. Even in contemporary criticism, both men are still very much recognised and respected. In fact, Richards and Leavis were the theoreticians of literature for several decades. They were the doyens of critical thought in Europe and America.

According to the *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2006), ‘to criticise’, etymologically, means ‘to analyse’ and later, ‘to judge’. Critical theory in itself can be distinguished from criticism since it concerns itself with the formulation of concepts. It is a philosophical activity which should underlie criticism but, again, should not be regarded as part of it. Literary theory refers to a set of principles evolved for the evaluation of works of literature. There is no single approach to the criticism of literature. Criticism is a formal discourse, and there are so many approaches to it, yet these approaches are not exhaustive but represent the most widely used contemporary approaches.

Though literary criticism refers to the analysis and judgment of works of literature, it tries to interpret specific works of literature and helps us to identify and understand different ways of examining and interpreting them. The study of literary criticism contributes to maintenance of high standards of literature. In our day-to-day life, the study of criticism of literary works enables us to become aware of the present and past works of literature. Criticism also enables writers to understand the factors that affect the quality and character of literary works and in this way improve their ability to produce better works. Literary criticism allows us to see things from different perspectives. It allows us to gain a far wider insight into a work of literature than from our own perspective. That way, we gain a greater understanding of the world in which we live. In addition, literary criticism helps readers develop critical thinking skills. Literary criticism is not an abstract intellectual exercise. It is a natural human response to literature. The discipline of literary criticism is nothing more than discourse-spoken or written-about literature. It is a by-product of the reading process.

**FUNCTIONS OF LITERARY CRITICISM**

Literary criticism begins the very moment you close the book and begins to reflect on what has been read. Thus, criticism includes the process of reflecting on, organising, and articulating your response to a given literary work. Criticism presupposes that a piece of literature contains relationships and patterns of meaning that the critic can discern and share after reading a text. It also presupposes that the critic has the ability to translate his experience of the wok into intellectual terms that can be communicated to and understood by others. Again, literary criticism presupposes that the critic’s experience of the work once organised and articulated, will be compatible with the experience of other readers. This means that to be valid and valuable, the critic’s reading of a work must accord, at least in some ways, with what other intelligent readers, over a reasonable period of time are willing to agree on and accept.

I.A. Richards notes that “the critical reading of poetry (prose and drama) is an ardours discipline. The lesson of all criticism is that we have nothing to rely upon in making our choices, but ourselves.”

To study literary criticism is to seek to understand exactly how readers (critics) interpret (criticise) texts, especially literary ones. Most scholars today would agree that there is no single meaning waiting to be simply *found* in any text. Meaning is, rather, *produced*; that is, it is a function of the different interpretative strategies which various readers bring to bear upon a text. A cardinal rule of modern literary criticism may be summed up as follows: *the ‘answers’ you get from a text depend entirely upon the kind of ‘questions’ you put to it*. The upshot of all this is that the same text legitimately means different things to different people. As a result, for example, a Marxist critic would necessarily come up with a different interpretation from that of a Psychoanalytic critic of the same text, each of which is equally valid (provided that there is textual evidence to support the interpretation in question). The primary necessity for literary criticism lies in the fact that “new strategies of interpretation of literature are constantly being developed to cope with the complexities of change in literary traditions”.

The importance of literary criticism therefore resides in its secondary but invaluable role of interpretation. Also, criticism deals with analysing, classifying, expounding, and evaluating a work of art in order to form one’s opinion. Serious literary criticism is both evaluative and analytical, thereby helping us to better a literary work. Writing on the role of literary criticism,

In conclusion, as a student of literary criticism, some of the questions to ask yourself include:

Am I reading a literary text in order to measure how accurate its representation of reality is?

Am I reading a literary text for insights into the life and mind of its writer?

As the reader, is my role passive or active?

Is meaning simply ‘found’ in a literary text or is it ‘constructed’ or ‘produced’ by the reader?

questions to ask yourself and try to recall them after putting your course material aside.

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LITERARY CRITIC AND THE WRITER**

Literary criticism takes the reader to a higher level of cognitive thought by evaluating what the critic says, and then applying it to the piece of literature in ways that the reader may not have originally thought.

The literary critic is concerned with what the writer has tried to say in his work and how successful he has been able to express it. For instance, the formalist critic is interested in *how* an author expresses an idea, while the Marxist critic is interested in *what* an author is trying to express. To a certain degree, a literary critic should be conversant with literary history to be able to make a genuine judgement upon a work of literature. He should be aware of what others have said and must be grounded in literary theory. It is important to note that literary critics have borrowed from other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, linguistics, psychology, and philosophy to analyse works of literature more perceptively.

The literary critic gives life to a literary text by bringing out the hidden meanings embedded in the work. Most often, it is through the eyes of the cautious critical reader that we evaluate the success or otherwise of a text. The critic analyses and evaluates what a writer has written. He comments on, and evaluates the quality of both the author’s literary composition and his vision of, or insight into human experience. It should be noted that a critic does not prescribe which realities are valid, but identifies the nature of the individual experience and the aesthetic means used to express that experience. The underlying implication is that it is not the task of the critic to set up or frame prescriptions which writers must conform to. A literary critic approaches a work according to established codes, doctrines or aesthetic principles. He is a mediator between the work and the reading public. He can arouse enthusiasm in the reader and can as well kill that enthusiasm.

Generally, despite their tendency to interpret, rather than to evaluate literature, literary critics have an enormous effect on the literary marketplace, not in terms of what they say about particular works but in terms of which works they choose to interpret, and which works they ignore. And of course, critics tend to interpret works that lend themselves readily to the critical theory they employ. Thus, whenever a single critical theory dominates literary studies, those works that lend themselves well to that theory will be considered “great works” and will be taught in the college classroom, while other works will be ignored. The following are some theories of literary criticism. We will discuss one by one. You need to begin reading these theories slowly till the messages / pieces of information in them are understood; this activity requires a lot of patience.

**THEORIES OF LITERARY CRITICISM**

Mimetic Theory of Arts

Formalist Theory and Criticism

New Criticism

Structuralist Criticism

Semiotics

Post Structuralism

Deconstruction

The mimetic theory of arts was among the first to be defined. It originated from Aristotle’s (384 BC-322BC) conception that art imitates, reproduces, or recreates great and low actions. Here, great actions refer to tragedy, and low actions refer to comedy. The mimetic theory is also known as ‘Art as Imitation’. Mimesis, the Greek word for imitation, has been a central term in aesthetic and literary theory since Plato. It is the earlier way to judge any work of art in relation to reality, whether the representation is accurate or not. Though this mode starts from Plato, it runs through many great theorists of Renaissance up to some modern theorists as well. M. H. Abrams defines imitation as a relational term- signifying two items and correspondence between them. Mimesis is the idea that art imitates reality, an idea that traces back to Aristotle who argued that the universal can be found in the concrete. Mimesis is developed and applied through mimetic theories of literature, theatre and the visual arts during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment periods. Philosophers and writers including Aristotle, Plato, Moliere, Shakespeare, Racine, Diderot, and Rousseau applied the mimetic theory of literary criticism to their work and lives. The mimetic theory is the universal foundation of literature and of schools of literary criticism. The concern for the moral effects of art is often drawn from mimetic theory. The goal of mimetic criticism is to determine how well a work of literature connects with the real world. Mimetic criticism also argues that art conveys universal truths instead of just temporal and individual truths.

**MIMETIC THEORY OF LITERATURE**

The Greek mimetic school of criticism is based upon the ideas expressed by Plato and Aristotle. Plato regards the artist as an imitator of imitations; the painter’s work is thrice removed from the “essential nature” of a thing: the artist imitates the physical object, which is a faint copy of ideas of the thing. Plato claims that ordinary art effects badly on the audience because it represents imagination rather than truth and nourishes their feeling rather than reason. Plato opines that artists lack creative power. Art is essentially mimicry of nature. Paintings are supposed to look “just like the real thing” etc. Arguably, it is the oldest and most widely held view on the nature of art. Plato believed that art is essentially an imitation of nature.

Therefore, according to Plato, art is at best:

(1) Useless; and

(2) Potentially dangerous.

Plato is convinced that “the arts” form a natural grouping and that they all share a common form: “That which all and only Arts have in common by virtue of which we recognise each to be an art and by virtue of which each is an art.” For him, art was useless because it serves no useful purpose in society. As an "Imitation of Nature", it adds no knowledge (no *intellectual* value).

Aristotle, on the other hand, treats imitation as a basic human faculty, which expresses itself in a wide range of arts. For him, to imitate is not to produce a copy or mirror reflection of some things but involves a complex mediation of reality. For example, in tragedy the writer imitates people’s actions rather than their characters. For him, this world is real but incomplete so poet endeavours to complete it through the imitation. Thus, poets are both imitators and creator.

**CENTRAL TENETS OF THE MIMETIC THEORY OF LITERATURE**

Aristotle, the proponent of the mimetic theory of art, holds that art imitates the reality existing in us and in the concrete objects around us. However, it should be noted that art does not merely imitate the flux and confusion that confront man; rather it imitates the necessary or probable consequences of given persons in given situations-even of imaginary persons and situations.

Drama for instance, imitates men in action. According to Aristotle, mimesis is men in action, their characters, deeds, passions, and experiences while poetic imitation is an imitation of the human inner action. Indeed, the main thrust of mimesis is that certain poems simply tell what happens and others (drama) actually imitate what happens. The artist, that is, imitates reality by suppressing accidental irrelevances and by heightening the essential which is otherwise only imperfectly realised in concrete objects.

Mimetic critics ask how well the work of literature accords with the real world. They analyse the accuracy of a literary work and its morality. They consider whether or not it shows how people really act, and whether or not it is correct. The mimetic critic assesses a literary work through the prism of his or her own time, judging the text according to his own value system.

Aristotle’s *Poetics*, also known as “On the Art of Imitation”, is an important text on the study of art as imitation. Mimesis is concerned primarily with the object imitated or reproduced and also the medium of imitation.

**A CRITIQUE OF THE MIMETIC THEORY OF ART**

One of the major criticisms levelled against the mimetic theory of art is that it fails to recognise the importance of imagination in literary creativity. Also, the negative side of mimetic criticism occurs when the critic's subjective bias leads to dogmatic condemnation and censorship. Many works otherwise labelled aesthetically great have been blacklisted, banned, or burned throughout the history of humankind by moral critics.

For Plato, Art was potentially dangerous for several reasons:

A). Art is essentially deceptive: the whole aim of art was to deceive. Success was achieved when the spectator mistook an imitation for reality. Furthermore, artists were unconcerned with facts/truth. It made no difference to artists or to the success of their works whether the images or stories they depict were real or their messages true or good.

B) Art is psychologically de-stabilising: human existence is, in great part, a struggle to master the emotions and sensual urges by using reason and intellect according to Plato. Therefore, art was dangerous and counterproductive to this end (i.e., rational self-mastery) since it appeals not to reason and intellect, but to the psychological forces which constantly try to overthrow reason, namely passion and emotion. For him, "Poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind is ever to increase in happiness and virtue"

C) Art leads to immorality. Art is unconcerned with morality, sometimes even teaching immoral lessons. Morality, it would seem, has nothing to do with a work’s success as art. Plato worries that such art would encourage immorality in the citizens of the state. People might uncritically accept and admire immoral, vicious traits when they are attractively packaged by skilled artists (distinction between truth and illusion/ physicians and cooks/ heath and cosmetics/ beauty and glamour). Like a skilled chef, artists are only interested in pleasing the palate, even if it poisons the dinner. Since mimetic art is institutionally divorced from truth, goodness, or any concern with 'real' beauty, it creates an environment of superficial "flavours" where all sorts of atrocities can be made to seem a tempting confection.

D) Art was politically dangerous, a threat to the common good. Similar to the point made earlier, Plato worried that strong art which appeals to emotions stirs up negative emotions which society tries to control. But this is more than just a problem for the individual. For a people with a history of "mania," strong, emotion-stirring art is rightly seen as a threat to the good of state/community. It was, therefore, correctly the concern of government. For Plato, violence and sex in the media is capable of causing us to be more violent, or entrench sexually obsessed culture. This affects not just the people who consume the violent images, but the entire community of which they are a part.

However, Aristotle, who was Plato's most famous student and greatest critic, had a dissenting view. Disagreeing with much else that Plato said, Aristotle agreed that art was essentially a Mimesis. But, he maintained, (good) art was neither useless nor dangerous, but rather natural and beneficial. It is natural because it is natural for human beings to imitate. Any human society which is healthy will be a society where there is imitative art. Nothing is more natural than for children to pretend. Art production and training is a necessary part of any education since it uses and encourages the imaginative manipulation of ideas. Nothing is more natural than for human beings to create using their imagination.

Furthermore, Aristotle holds that art is not deceptive because artists must accurately portray reality to be successful. Drama, for instance, must accurately portray psychological reality in order for characters to be believable and their actions understandable. Again, art teaches effectively, and it teaches the truth. Convincing and powerful drama is convincing and powerful because it reveals some truth of human nature. Aristotle agreed that art did stir up negative emotions but, he claims it then purged these in a harm harmless, healthy way through what he calls the doctrine of “Catharsis".

Mimetic theory comes from the Greek word "mimesis," which means imitation and representation, and it states that people are influenced by each other and the world around them, when creating, in many ways. Since Plato applied the mimetic theory on literature and separated it from narrative, mimesis has been given a very clear literary meaning. Plato sees the artist as an imitator of the physical world around him, which, according to him, is already an imitation of the idea people have of this world. So basically, he claims that a writer imitates the imitations and represents imagination and emotion much more than reason and reality. For this reason, according to Plato, mimesis affects the readers negatively by misleading them.

Aristotle disagrees with Plato in the sense that for him to imitate the physical world is not just to copy it but rather to adapt it. According to Aristotle's reception of the mimetic theory, imitation is needed to complete this incomplete physical world people live in. But imitation, as he sees it, is rather a complex creation, a skill that needs to go hand-in-hand with talent and imaginative power.

The mimetic theory of arts was the first to be defined. It originated from Aristotle’s conception that art imitates, reproduces, or recreates great and low actions. Here, great actions refer to tragedy and low actions refer to comedy. The mimetic theory is also known as ‘Art as Imitation’.