THEORY OF MIMEISIS

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Introduction

Mimesis governed the idea of creation of the artistic work in Ancient Greece.

- For both Plato and Aristotle mimesis meant the representation of Nature - of the physical world.
- Physical world was the model for beauty.
- In Lit. Crit., the word imitation has two frequent but diverse applications -
  1. To define the nature of lit-lit. as imitation
  2. To indicate the relation of one literary work to another that served as its model.
Plato’s idea on Imitation

- Plato was an **idealist**.
- **Idea** is the only **truth** - the real
- The physical world is the representation of that reality.
- Art/Poetry imitates the physical word, the appearance /imitation of the real/ideal
- So, art/poetry is twice removed from the reality, shadow of shadows.
- Thus, poetry stands dangerous rival to morality.
Plato considered Philosophy to be superior to poetry as -

- Philosophy deals with the ideas which are real/true whereas poetry deals with the illusory.
- Poetry does not inspire virtue and morality whereas philosophy does.
- In “Ion”, Plato states that poetry is the art of divine madness as the poet is subject to this divine madness.
- The poet does not speak the truth as he does not possess the “knowledge (techne)” of the subject.
Plato

- Culture in Plato’s time not only consisted of solitary reading of books but included-
  - Dramatic performances
  - Recitals of orators and poets
- Plato maintained that theatre was not sufficient in conveying the truth
- Actors and orators were able to persuade an audience by rhetoric rather than by telling the truth.
- In Book II of “The Republic” while referring to Socrates, Plato says that we who listen to poetry should be on our guard against its seductions.
Plato contrasted Mimesis with Diegesis. Mimesis shows rather than tells by means of directly represented actions. Diegesis is the telling of a story by a narrator. It is an indirect narration of the emotions of the characters. The narrator may speak as a particular character or may be the “all knowing” narrator commenting from above on the actions of the characters. Drama as a mimetic art is even more harmful to Plato as they imitate the baser instinct in men—their love for the sensational and the melodramatic.
Plato...

To sum up-
Plato wanted to restore health in both the Individual and the State during his degenerative time and so he attacked mimetic art on the following grounds-

- **Moral:** Poetry and Drama was not conducive to social morality as they appeal to the baser instincts in man for popular patronage. They tell lies about God which they young minds can not discern if prescribed in schools.
Emotional: Emotion is an inherent component in poetry which makes it unsuitable for fostering right and balanced judgement.

Intellectual: Poets have no knowledge of the truth as they imitate appearance

Utilitarian: poetry is the product of futile ignorance and lacks useful purpose.
LIKE Plato, Aristotle too considered Mimesis as representation of nature but gave a fresh new perspective to it.

“Poetics "is often referred to as the counterpart to the Platonic idea of poetry.

Aristotle did not consider art to be servile copying but regards as an at of imaginative creation. The poet draws his material from the phenomenal world but creates something new out of it.

the poet not only imitates but uses mathematical ideas and symmetry in the search for the perfect, the timeless
ARISTOTLE

- Imitation – common basis of all fine arts and differentiates it from useful arts.
- Principle of Imitation unites poetry with other arts but all of them differ in three respects:
  - Their medium
  - The object and
  - The manner and mode of imitation
- Plato equates poetry with painting. Aristotle equates poetry with music.
- It no longer becomes a mere copying of the appearance of things but becomes a representation of the passions and emotions of men.
ARISTOTLE

Imitation- permanent disposition of the mind.

Objects of poetic imitation are “men in action” these actions can be either external and internal-the passing and transient emotions are all actions and so object for poetic imitation.

The poet imitates one of the three objects-

- Things as they were/are.
- Things as they are said/thought to be.
- Things as they ought to be.

The object is imitated may be either better or worse than the reality. Thus creating an ideal reality.
ARISTOTLE

- History tells what actually happened and thus deals with the particular.
- Poetry tells what may happen and so express the ideal or universal.
- Poet is free from the tyranny of facts-
- He studies the particular and derive principles for general application and thus transcends the limits of real life without violating the essential laws of human nature.
- Therefore, all great poetry has a universal element and so has a universal appeal.
The mind of the poet is not tied to reality- “it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what may happen-according to the laws of probability or necessity.”

The poet thus-

- Takes a larger or generalized view of things.
- Represents the universal through the particular
- Shares the philosopher’s quest for the ultimate truth/ideal.
- Poetic truth is the poet’s conception of the ideal and is therefore higher than the historic truth and better and more conducive to understand than the philosophic truth.
ARISTOTLE

• The poet selects ands orders his material—the purely irrational or accidental is eliminated and the attention is focused on the permanent and the significant.

• The poet not only imitates but uses mathematical ideas and symmetry in the search for the perfect, the timeless. It thus represents the “ideal reality”.

• Nature is full of change, decay and cycles but Art can search for what is everlasting.
THANK YOU