

Lecture Series on Contemporary Theories: Introduction Lecture 1

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What is Theory?

- Theory is Literature upon Literature
- It can be understood as “Metaliterature”
- It is the way in which we approach a literary text in order to eke out its nuances, understand its concerns, and its subtext.

How it all Began?

- If we were to trace the history of Theory in the Western canon, we would go back to two Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle.
- Plato was the first philosopher to mention Literature, although, he did so to shun it.
- Plato envisaged a perfect commonwealth in his *The Republic*, but women and slaves had no entry in that republic. Even the poets were banished from his ideal Republic.

How it all Began?

- Plato disapproved of poetry, calling it immoral.
- According to him, poetry is based in falsehood.
- Plato believed that philosophy was better than poetry because philosophy dealt with ideas while poetry dealt with illusions.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

- Aristotle was a disciple of Plato
- However, later he were to refute Plato's ideas.
- Aristotle wrote a treatise on poetry, *Poetics*, in which he acknowledged that poetry is mimetic in nature, i.e., it imitates life.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

- Aristotle differentiated between drama and epic poetry.
- He talked at length about tragedy.
- According to Aristotle, the purpose of tragedy was to evoke pity and fear, leading to a catharsis (purgation) of emotions.
- Aristotle also talked about unity of action, and unity of time.
- Unity of place is also attributed to him, although Aristotle did not explicitly write about it.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

- Aristotle is today hailed as the “Father of Literary Criticism,” for he gave poetry its proper place, something that was denied by Plato.

- (Some of the content has been taken from open sources on Internet)