

HISTORY OF LITERARY THEORY: FROM CLASSICISM TO NEO-CLASSICISM

	Mimetic (The relationship between the work and the world) (Literature qua the representation or description or imitation of what is)	Pragmatic (The relationship between the work and the audience) (Literature qua the moralist prescription of what ought to be; qua the effect on the reader; qua what the reader does to a work)	Objective (The relationship between the various elements which comprise the work) (Literature qua the form / structure / technique of the work)	Expressive (The relationship between the work and the author) (Literature qua form of self-expression)	Historicist (The relationship between an author, the socio-historical context in which s/he lives, and the chronological succession of authors which comprises the literary tradition in question, e.g. Shakespeare, Renaissance England, and English literature)
Plato <u>Republic</u> Book X (5 th Century BCE)	✓ (poetry is at a 3 rd remove from the true reality which it ought to but does not reflect; it merely reflects the things of this world)	✓ (poetry has a bad impact on the reader in that it appeals to the emotions)	✓ (in Book II, briefly discusses the difference between mimesis and diegesis)	—	—
Aristotle <u>Poetics</u> (5 th Century BCE)	✓ (poetry reflects humans and their actions)	✓ (catharsis is the effect produced by an effective tragedy)	✓ (focuses on those elements of the plot-structure which make for a good tragedy)	—	✓ (briefly mentions several Athenian playwrights whose works he witnessed)
Aquinas & Dante <u>The Banquet</u> (1304-1308) / "Letter to Can Grande della Scala" (1318)	✓ (poetry has several levels of meaning: at the literal level, it represents the natural world which represents in turn, the anagogic level, the world beyond)	✓ (briefly mentions that there is a moral level of meaning)	—	—	—
Sidney <u>An Apology for Poetry</u> (1595)	✓ (poetry does not claim to tell the truth in that it depicts an ideal world)	✓ (poetry is more effective than history or philosophy in improving the characters of men)	—	✓ (mentions the names of several authors)	✓ (by listing the names of several authors, he posits the existence of an English literary tradition)
Pope <u>An Essay on Criticism</u> (1711)	✓ (poetry holds a mirror up to 'nature')	✓ (gives advice to the aspiring critic on how to be an objective 'judge' of poetry)	✓ (lists the various elements, not least figurative language and metre, which comprise a good poem)	✓ (mentions classical writers, e.g. Homer, who are worthy of imitation)	✓ (believes that to emulate great predecessors is to imitate nature)
Johnson "On Fiction" (1750); Preface to <u>Shakespeare</u> (1759); <u>The History of Rasselas</u> (1765)	✓ (literature imitates a universal human nature)	✓ (literature has a moral impact; hence, his concern with censoring what is depicted)	—	✓ (devotes detailed studies [<u>Lives of the Poets</u>] to particular poets, e.g. Shakespeare)	✓ (is one of the first historians of English literature)

Key:

- ✓ strong emphasis
- ✓ less of an emphasis
- no or very little emphasis