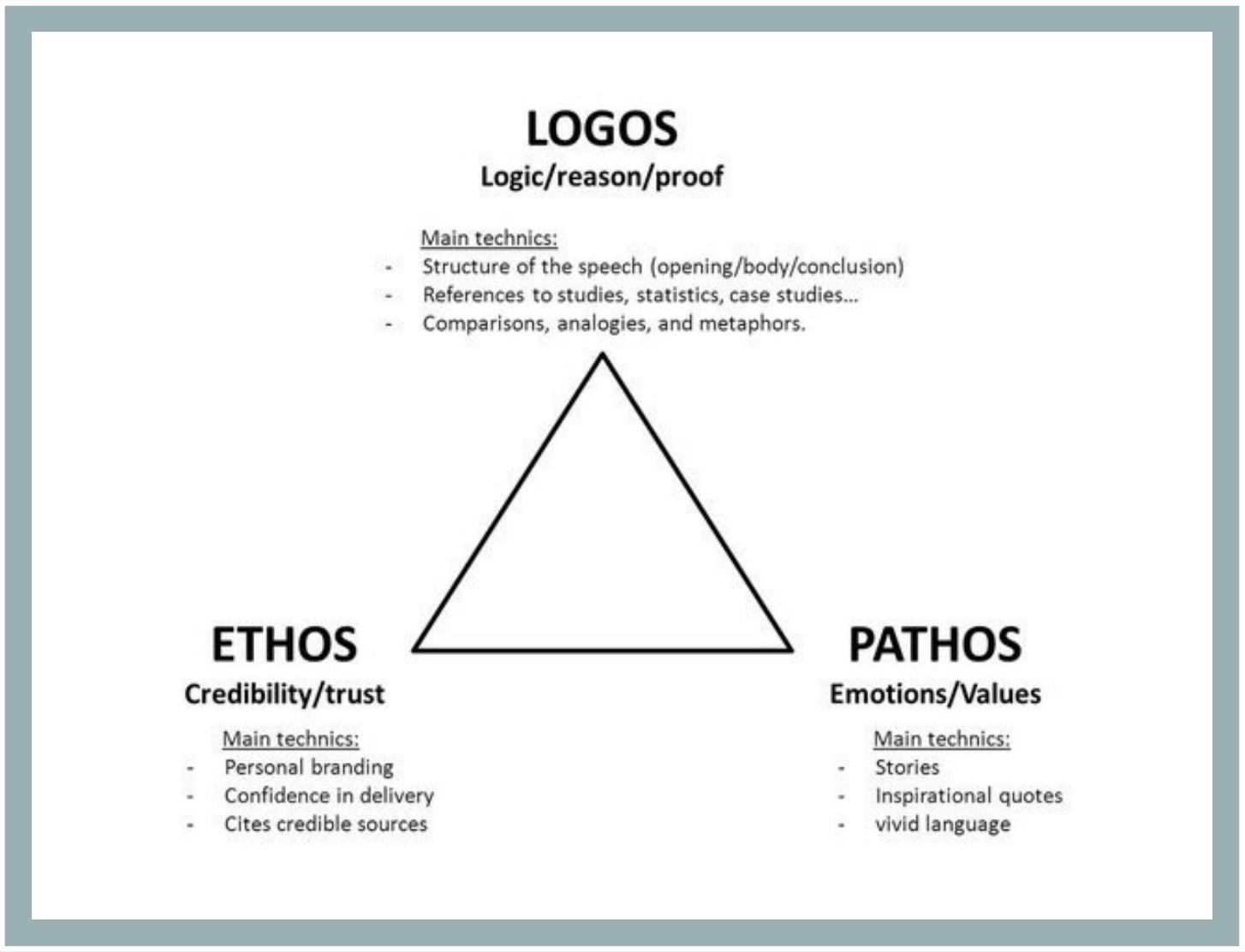
THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT THE ARTS

What are some possibilities for responding when we come upon something unexpected in literature or the visual arts? How can we appreciate new works or enhance our enjoyment of familiar ones? We will look at approaches from Aristotle to the modern age: general ideas with concrete examples. We'll also look at how people valued and discussed the arts from the renaissance and enlightenment to the romantic and modern eras.

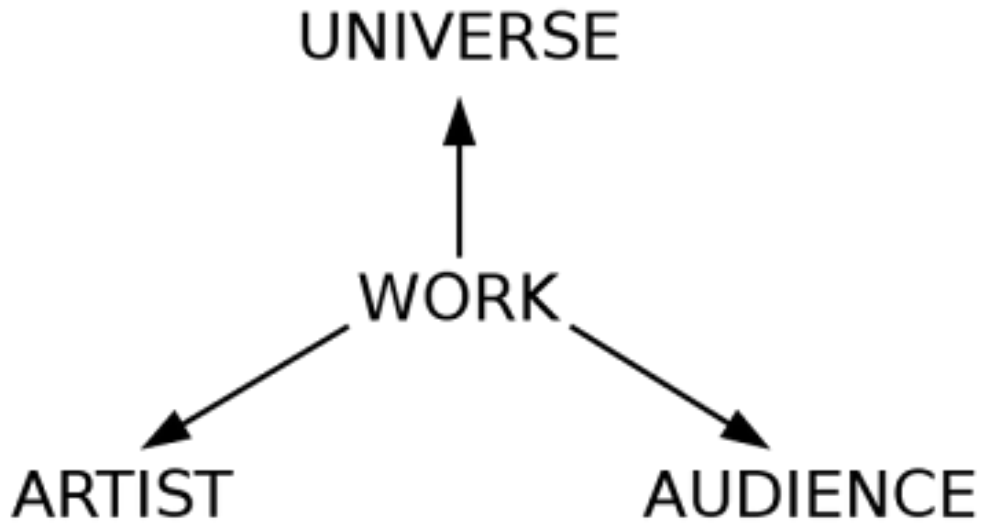
ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC*

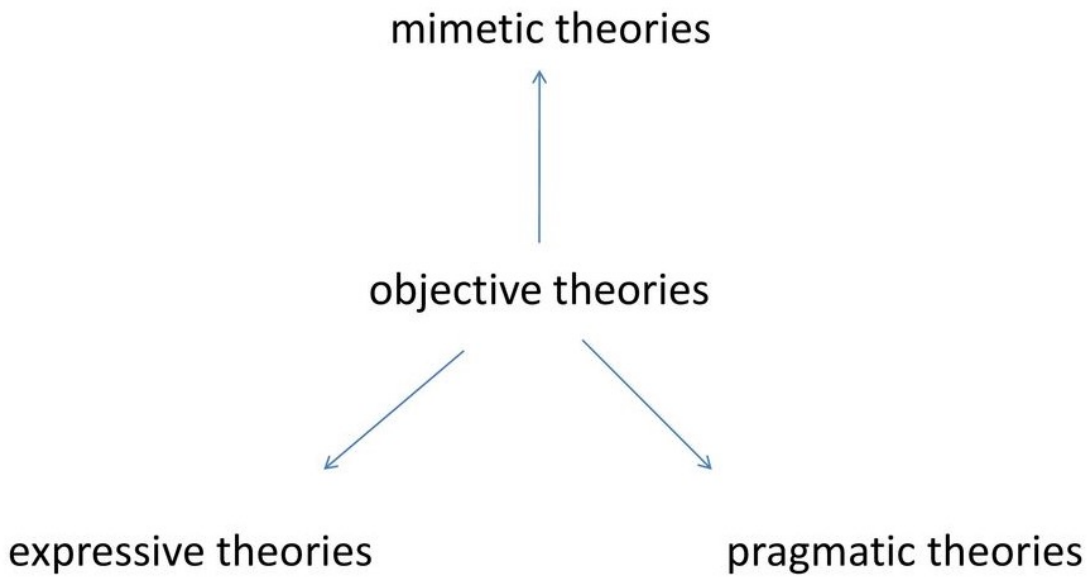
ARTISTIC PROOFS



M. H. ABRAMS

ORIENTATION OF CRITICAL THEORIES





Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (c. 1580)

Poesy… [is] a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight.
The final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.

No learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue; and…none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry.

The philosopher therefore and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example; but both not having both, do both halt… Now doth the peerless poet perform both.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1591)
ASTROPHEL AND STELLA, SONNET 71

Who will in fairest book of nature know
How virtue may best lodg'd in beauty be,
Let him but learn of love to read in thee,
Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly;
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
And, not content to be perfection's heir
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.
So while thy beauty draws thy heart to love,
As fast thy virtue bends that love to good:
But "Ah," Desire still cries, "Give me some food!"

Samuel Johnson
"The Preface to Shakespeare" (1765)

Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.

SAMUEL JOHNSON (1749)
THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES
THE TENTH SATIRE OF JUVENAL, IMITATED

Let observation with extensive view,
Survey mankind, from China to Peru;
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,
O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,
Where wav'ring man, betray'd by vent'rous pride
To tread the dreary paths without a guide,
As treach'rous phantoms in the mist delude,
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good…

In full-blown dignity, see Wolsey stand,
Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand:
To him the church, the realm, their pow'rs consign,
Thro' him the rays of regal bounty shine,
Still to new heights his restless wishes tow'r,
Claim leads to claim, and pow'r advances pow'r;
Till conquest unresisted ceas'd to please,
And rights submitted, left him none to seize.
At length his sov'reign frowns — the train of state
Mark the keen glance, and watch the sign to hate.
Where-e'er he turns he meets a stranger's eye,
His suppliants scorn him, and his followers fly;
At once is lost the pride of aweful state,
The golden canopy, the glitt'ring plate,
The regal palace, the luxurious board,
The liv'ried army, and the menial lord.
With age, with cares, with maladies oppress'd,
He seeks the refuge of monastic rest.
Grief aids disease, remember'd folly stings,
And his last sighs reproach the faith of kings.
Speak thou, whose thoughts at humble peace repine,
Shall Wolsey's wealth, with Wolsey's end be thine?
Or liv'st thou now, with safer pride content,
The wisest justice on the banks of Trent?
For why did Wolsey near the steeps of fate,
On weak foundations raise th' enormous weight?
Why but to sink beneath Misfortune's blow,
With louder ruin to the gulphs below?

William Wordsworth
"Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" (1798)

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings…. Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man, who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply.

[Poetry] takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.

What is a Poet? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1807)
IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquility;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly.
Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

Aristotle *Poetics*

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious…through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet.

A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end. A beginning is that which is not a necessary consequent of anything else but after which something else exists or happens as a natural result. An end on the contrary is that which is inevitably or, as a rule, the natural result of something else but from which nothing else follows; a middle follows something else and something follows from it. Well constructed plots must not therefore begin and end at random, but must embody the formulae we have stated.

John Crowe Ransom, “Criticism as Pure Speculation” (1941)

A poem is a logical *structure* having a local *texture*.

Northrop Frye, “The Archetypes of Literature” (1951)

The criticism of literature is much more hampered by the **representational fallacy** than even the criticism of painting. That is why we are apt to think of narrative as a sequential representation of events in an outside “life,” and of meaning as a reflection of some external “idea.” Properly used as critical terms, an author’s narrative is his linear movement; his meaning is the integrity of his completed form.

W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. *The Verbal Icon* (1954)

The **Intentional Fallacy** is a confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological *causes* of the poem and ends in biography and relativism. The **Affective Fallacy** is a confusion between a poem and its *results* (what it *is* and what it *does*), a special case of epistemological skepticism…. It begins by trying to derive the standard of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. The outcome of either Fallacy, the Intentional of the Affective, is that the poem itself, as an object of specifically critical judgment, tends to disappear.

If it be granted that the "subject matter" of poetry is in a broad sense the moral realm,…the complexity and unity of the poem is also its maturity or sophistication or richness or depth, and hence its value. Complexity of form is sophistication of content.

Archibald MacLeish
"Ars Poetica" (1926)

A poem should be equal to:
Not true…

A poem should not mean
But be.

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH
Five Poems from the 1920s
Imagery

The tremulously mirrored clouds lie deep,
Enchanted towers bosomed in the stream,
And blossomed coronals of white-thorn gleam
Within the water where the willows sleep—
Still-imaged willow-leaves whose shadows steep
The far-reflected sky in dark of dream;
And glimpsed therein the sun-winged swallows seem
As fleeting memories to those who weep.

So mirrored in thy heart are all desires,
Eternal longings, Youth's inheritance,
All hopes that token immortality,
All griefs whereto immortal grief aspires.
Aweary of the world's reality,
I dream above the imaged pool, Romance.

Mimetic
Canaletto 1832
TheArsenal, Water Entrance

Expressive
Vincent Van Gogh 1889
Cornfield with Cypresses near Arles

Formalist
Paul Cézanne 1902-04
Mont Ste. Victoire
seen from Les Lauves

Affective
Thomas Cole 1826
Falls of the Kaaterskill

Mimetic
Lucien Freud 1990
Leigh Bowery (Seated)

Affective
Francois Boucher 1752
Blond Odalisque, Portrait of Louise O'Murphy

Formalist
Pablo Picasso 1908
Seated Male Nude

Expressive
Willem DeKooning 1950-52
Woman I

Can We Apply these Ideas Elsewhere

Art
- Dadaism
- Socialist realism
- Abstract expressionism

Architecture
- Gothic, Rococo, Bauhaus

Music
- Greek modes
- Military marches
- Fugue, Sonata form, Serialism
- Tone poems
- Ravel's *Bolero*
- Jazz, r&b, rock n' roll
  - "Rock with Me, Henry"

Film
- German expressionism
- Eisenstein's montage
- Italian neo-realism

THINKING AND TALKING ABOUT THE ARTS

Thank

You