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Diagnosing Fiction. From Plato to Borges.

By any standard, Aristotle's *Poetics* is the foundational text for both the theory and the practice of fiction as developed in Western tradition. From ca. 1500 the *Poetics* became a seminal document that dominated Western thought on art and literature in the subsequent centuries. The influence exerted by the *Poetics* has made the ancient Greek theory of fiction an integral part of the contemporary discourse on literature. This does not mean, however, that the *Poetics* should a priori be regarded as relevant to any literary text created in any tradition or indeed to any text that we would see as literary today. The reason is simple: although it is often approached as a context-free document which articulates a set of universally applied principles of artistic production, the *Poetics* firmly belongs in the time and place of its composition, namely, in Athens of the fourth-century B.C.E. Furthermore, it cannot be taken separately from the literary theory that preceded it, above all the literary theory of Plato. In this paper, I will try, first, to outline the idea of fiction as crystallized in ancient Greek literary theory, first and foremost in Plato and Aristotle, and, second, to examine whether it should be considered universally applicable. I will also try to spot several common misapprehensions concerning this idea.