Reep · Pamdi Lepcha

POETICS

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ARISTOTLE

Poetics

Edited by

Amlan Das Gupta

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE AND TIMES

Aristotle was born in Stagira (now Stavros) in 384 BC. As a result he is sometimes referred to as the 'Stagirite'. His birthplace is in the peninsula of Chalcidice, on the northern side of the Aegean Sea, about forty kilometers from the modern city of Salonike. His father, Nicomachus, was a member of the medical guild of the Asclepidae, and was himself the physician of Amyntas II, the king of neighbouring Macedonia. Consequently, Aristotle may have spent part of his childhood in the court of Pella. His father's profession undoubtedly moulded his future interest in biology. The connection with the court of Macedon was also important in his later career.

Chalcidice was going through a difficult time when Aristotle was born. The region boasted of a federal polity, in which the different cities had common citizenship and a common code of law. In the early fourth century, however, it came into conflict with Macedonia and then Sparta: around the middle of the century it had fallen to Philip II of Macedonia. Traditionally, however, Chalcidice had ties with Athens and her allies. At the age of seventeen, Aristotle entered the school of Plato in Athens where he remained till Plato's death in 348 or 347 BC. Subsequently, he lived at various places. For a few years he was at Assos and Mytilene, where he pursued his philosophical and scientific interests. In 343 or 342 BC he was appointed house tutor to the son of Philip II of Macedonia, none other than the great Alexander. He remained in this position for a couple of years, leaving it when Alexander became regent in

340 BC. He is known to have trained his princely ward in politics and literature, and to have written books for this purpose. He appears, however, to have remained on good terms with Alexander till much later, with his former pupil having given him a generous grant to start his own school in 335 BC.

Aristotle's school—the Lyceum—was undoubtedly one of the greatest institutions of the classical world. The building included a covered court (*peripatos*) from which the school and its teachings derived the label 'Peripatetic'. Aristotle built a library and museum, instituted a system of common meals and a monthly symposium, and directed a phenomenal programme of research, assisted, amongst others, by his students Theophrastus and Aristoxenus. All the known branches of learning were covered in the Lyceum, and Aristotle is known to have written about most of them. A substantial number of Aristotle's works have survived and have formed the basis of a very large and varied body of learning through the centuries. These are, however, a relatively small fragment of what Aristotle *actually* wrote. Early in his career he wrote a number of works in dialogic form, probably in the style of his master Plato. None of these have survived; neither have any of the collections of material and notes that he amassed for the purpose of research. Some believe that the surviving works are 'acroamatic' or 'esoteric', that is to say the substance of lecture courses for students of the school (as opposed to 'exoteric' or published works). Others point to the full and detailed nature of some of the surviving works, and feel that they may have been written for the use of students.

In 323 BC, an outbreak of anti-Macedonian feeling occurred in Athens—Alexander died in this year—and charges of impiety were brought against Aristotle. He chose to leave Athens, relinquishing the charge of his school to Theophrastus, reportedly because he did not want the people of Athens to 'sin twice against philosophy'—a reference to the execution of the great Socrates. He retired to Chalcis, where he died of a stomach ailment in 322 BC. He was

married twice, first to Hermias, the niece of an early patron, and then to Herpylis, by whom he had a son named Nicomachus. It is to his son that the famous *Nicomachean Ethics* is addressed.

Aristotle on Poetry

Aristotle's writings on poetry occupy a very small place in his writings that have survived. The *Poetics* cannot be called one of his central works, that is to say, one of the fundamental works that we need to study to understand Aristotle's philosophical contribution. The brief, even fragmentary, state of the surviving text may be contrasted to the detailed character of his work on rhetoric. Nevertheless, it would not be an exaggeration to term the *Poetics* the most challenging critical text on the subject of literature to survive from ancient times. We are unfortunate in not having the other works that Aristotle is known to have composed on this subject: the records of dramatic performances in Athens (the *Didaskaliai*); the *Aporemata Homerica*, or studies of Homer's epics; nor do we have the work that he wrote called *On the Poets*. Most scholars feel that the *Poetics* was originally written in two parts, of which only the first has survived.

Little is known about the influence of the *Poetics* in its own time, or in succeeding centuries. It is likely that ideas of the *Poetics* were influential in the two centuries after Aristotle's death: New Comedy, associated with Menander, may have incorporated ideas about plot and structure drawn from Aristotle's teachings. Menander was himself a student of the Lyceum, and a pupil of Theophrastus. There is little direct evidence to prove that Aristotle's views were known to the Romans, but that does not that does not necessarily mean that Aristotle's *Poetics* was not influential in the succeeding centuries. Above all, as Gerald Else points out, no commentary on the *Poetics* was written in the Roman period or in late antiquity,

which means that we are deprived of knowing how Aristotle's views were traditionally received.[1] Some concepts that seem Aristotelian to us were already in circulation, and are viewed in Horace's writings on poetry, in Cicero and Plutarch, and even as late as St. Augustine. It is fruitless to speculate on the exact fate of the *Poetics* until its re-emergence in the European critical tradition some 1800 years after it was written.

The earliest surviving manuscript of Aristotle's *Poetics* dates from the tenth or eleventh century, where it appears in a collection of miscellaneous rhetorical treatises (*Codex Parisinus Graecus* 1741), not as part of the corpus of Aristotle's works. Its influence in the western world appears to have been negligible till the fifteenth century, whatever knowledge of the text existed seems to have been based on a summary made by the great Arabic scholar Ibn Sina, and translated into Latin by Hermanus Alemannus towards the end of the Middle Ages. The first Latin translation of the text of the *Poetics* was made in 1498 by Giorgio Valla, and the Greek text was published by Aldo Manuzio in Venice in 1508. In the sixteenth century, the text of the *Poetics* came to be studied intensely, and this reading, partial and flawed as it was, lies at the basis of the development of neo-classical poetics, which can justly be called the first great school of modern literary criticism.

A great deal of critical labour has gone into the study of the text of the *Poetics* in the subsequent centuries: other manuscript traditions have emerged and modern scholars have been able to see the text with greater certainty than before. Nevertheless, the *Poetics* has not lost its peculiarly elliptic and fragmentary nature: each edition, translation or critical reading seeks to *supplement* the text as we have it; each is necessarily an interpretive act. Perhaps, that is why translating the *Poetics* is such an important activity, with more translations existing of it than any other critical text—ancient or modern.

The Critical Background: Plato

The fact that we know so little about the larger context ofAristotle's literary views means that there are really two important bodies of writing that we have to take into account while reading the *Poetics*. One is the background of literary opinion in Greece, which we can reconstruct from a study of Greek literature and philosophy. Obviously, most important in this class are the views of Aristotle's teacher Plato; the *Poetics* is often thought to be an 'answer' to Plato, a final rebuttal of his views. We shall try to examine briefly Plato's views on poetry, for this is essential to a proper understanding of Aristotle. But we also need to keep in mind that there are vital links between Aristotle's other surviving writings and the *Poetics*; with his writings on rhetoric, politics and ethics, as well as with his scientific writings. Some aspects of these connections will emerge in this discussion.

Plato and Aristotle hold radically differing views about poetry, but they both strongly advance the view that poetry—for better or worse—is an imitation of reality. The imitative (mimetic) view is the most important theory of literature to come down from classical times, and it held sway in Western aesthetic thought certainly till the middle of the eighteenth century. It should be said at once that though no single view of what constitutes 'reality' exists and so even when theorists advance the imitative view, they may be saying very different things. But before we can discuss classical theories of imitation, it should be remembered that the earliest-known view of the origin of poetry in the Greek world was that poetry comes from inspiration from the gods, or some other supernatural source. This is the view that is contained, for instance, in the epic poems of Homer, and in Hesiod, and in the works of early philosophers. After stating the subject of the *Odyssey* in the opening lines of the poem, Homer sings: 'This is the tale I pray the divine Muse to unfold to us. Begin it, goddess, at whatever point you will.' The material of ancient

myths and legends, the deeds of heroes and gods—to tell their tales, was a task beyond mere men, and the poet claimed both divine sanction and divine power in doing so.

If the view that poetry was born out of inspiration is something that is present in the earliest works of Greek poetry, there is evidence that the poet was thought of as a teacher as well, writing to educate other human beings. In the late fifth-century comedy, the *Frogs*, the poet Aristophanes recapitulates the myths of poets who were the earliest civilizers and teachers of mankind: Orpheus, who taught divinity to men, Musaeus and Hesiod, who taught about diseases and agriculture, the incomparable Homer, who taught about war and the rules of warfare. The poet, we are told, is valued because of his technical skill, but also because he is a teacher, he helps 'make men into better citizens'. Only the scantiest traces of early Greek aesthetic doctrine have survived, but they indicate the presence of an extensive and cultured literary milieu, where debates about the origins and functions of poetry were as important as opinions of individual writers and forms of literature.

It is well known that Plato did not like poetry, and his influential pronouncements about it were mostly negative and critical. Plato himself knew Homer and the other poets fluently, and often quoted from them. Even though he is, as far as we can say, the inventor of the theory of poetic imitation, he shows himself to be engaging with other views about poetry mentioned above. One of the problems that one faces while trying to assess Plato's views on poetry is that he does not have any single work entirely devoted to the discussion of poetry: it is even doubtful whether a distinct view of poetry can be formulated apart from his treatment of the great philosophical problems of knowledge, truth and reality.

One might start by briefly considering an early dialogue, *Ion*. Here, Plato's principal spokesman, his teacher Socrates, has a discussion with a rhapsode named Ion, who has just returned after winning a great competition. Rhapsodes were professional reciters

of poetry, a class of highly skilled and respected individuals. Ion himself is a master at reciting Homer. Socrates plays with him with gentle but unmistakable irony, showing him that neither he, nor his master Homer can claim to have knowledge of what they are talking about. Homer says a great many things about the gods and generals, artisans and doctors, chariot-drivers and ship-pilots. How does he do so? Can the poet claim to have knowledge in the proper sense of the word about all these things? What, then, about the rhapsode? Does he too have knowledge about the art of the chariot-driver when he recites one of Homer's detailed descriptions? Plato clearly thinks that that is impossible, and Socrates gently persuades Ion to accept that whatever the poet says is a result of divine inspiration. In one of the most striking—and funny—passages of the dialogue, Socrates imagines the muse as a magnet, from whom various individuals, the poet, the rhapsode, the dramatic producer, the dancer are all suspended.

The masterful irony notwithstanding, *Ion* reveals an uneasiness about poetic utterance. Plato is clearly focusing on the problem of truth-value in poetry: when a wounded hero in Homer's *Iliad* is given wine, cheese and an onion to cure him, is Homer claiming to speak as a doctor might? If he is, he must be doing so through inspiration, for nobody can humanly know so many things: if not, he is lying. Plato's ironic tone seems to favour the latter conclusion. Nevertheless, the recourse to the venerable theory of inspiration may signal uncertainty in Plato's mind. In the *Phaedrus*—a far weightier work—poetry is described as arising out of divine possession and inspired madness. 'Third is the possession and madness of the Muses. Gripping the delicate and untouched mind, it rouses it to frenzy in songs and other poems, and by adornment of innumerable deeds of the ancients, it educates posterity' (245a). There is no irony here: Plato seems to accord the highest respect to poetic inspiration. One feels, when considering Plato's views on poetry, that he consistently has a problem in accommodating it within the range of human activities: it is either something false,

lying and contemptible, or it is something divine and beyond the ken of reason. The two views are opposed yet essentially related in their inability to assign poetry a place in human life.

The *Republic* contains the most substantial treatment of poetry among all of Plato's dialogues. There are many points to be noted here and we can barely try to enumerate them. The professed intention of the work is to examine the nature of the ideal state: early in the dialogue Socrates offers a definition of the term 'justice', clearly a crucial issue in the political community. We learn that justice is achieved in the community when all individuals follow the trades or professions that they are suited to, by birth or training. Shoemakers make shoes, armourers make arms, the soldiers fight, the governors rule: as long as nobody interferes in the others' activities, justice may be said to exist in the state. Our earlier discussion may make us sense the problem of poets and other artists in such a community. A large part of the work is taken up with the question of the education of the *phulakes*, the guardians or governors of the community. In book two, Socrates suggests that the strictest rules be applied to the control of the kind of education that is given to the guardians from early childhood. The myths of gods and heroes are, in many cases, inadmissible because they show gods as being cruel, unjust or succumbing to desire. Poetry must conform to the needs of inculcating the right kinds of moral values in the hearers here: the chief source of instruction being literature, much of it is clearly inadmissible in the ideal state. After discussing the content of education (*logoi*) Plato goes on to examine forms of expression (*lexis*). This incidentally is the first use of the idea of mimesis or imitation in literary discussion but its use is in a severely restricted sense. There are three forms of expression in poetry, that which is purely narrative, that which is 'imitative', and that which combines the two. In lyric or dithyrambic poetry, the speaker continuously speaks in his own person and never departs from it; in drama the poet continually imitates the voices of others—it is Oedipus or Jocasta or the Chorus who speak. In the epic we

have a combination of the two; for there are some parts which are narrated by the poet, and some parts where the epic characters like Odysseus or Achilles speak. The imitative poet, continuously mimicking the voices of others, a veritable Proteus, is someone that the ideal state cannot afford to include. So,

> [s]uppose then there arrived in our city a man who could make himself into anything by his own skill, and could imitate everything. Suppose he brought his poems and wanted to give a display. We should salute him as divine, wonderful, a pleasure-giver: but we should then say that there is no one of his sort in our city and it is not allowed that there should be. We should therefore pour ointment on his head, give him a garland of wool, and send him off elsewhere. Meanwhile we should employ the more austere and unpleasing poet and tale-teller, for use not pleasure: he would imitate the expression of the good man and tell his tales within the patterns which we legislated at the beginning, when we were trying to educate the soldiers.[2]

In the tenth and final book of the *Republic*, Plato fully develops the notion of poetry's falsity by linking it to a theory of 'forms' or 'ideas'. Earlier in the work (book six) he speaks of the true source of knowledge (*episteme*) which is identified as the *good*. This is the realm of the real, for knowledge can only be of those things that are true. Material objects, being subject to change and decay, can only be a source of *doxa* or belief. For Plato, *reality* is constituted by ideal and unchangeable forms that can be apprehended by reason and intelligence: they are different thus from the objects in the sensible realm. The greatest of activities is therefore philosophical contemplation. Of all human beings, philosophers are unique in searching for knowledge for itself. In the tenth book, the example that Plato uses is that of making a bed, itself something that recalls a poetic source, the celebrated description of the making of Odysseus' marriage bed in the *Odyssey*. The bedmaker makes a bed, in accordance with the skill that he possesses, but there is also the idea of the bed which exists in the realm of the good, and its creator is god. All the different beds of the world conform to the single idea

of the bed: the idea reduces the multiplicity of material objects to ideal unity. The imitative artist, poet or painter copies the material object, and is thus presenting us with an imitation of an imitation, a bed which is twice removed from the truth. The philosopher, on the contrary, knows about the idea of the 'bed', and thus possesses true and substantial knowledge.

The final attack has to do with the psychological effects of poetry. It expands some of the points made in connection with the education of the guardians: poetry nourishes and waters the emotions and feelings that virtue seeks to control and extirpate. It plunges us into a world of shadows and illusions, and encourages sorrow and lamentation. If the discussion in book two focuses principally on the content of education, here the point at issue is more the emotional *affect* of poetry. One should note, before going on to examine Aristotle's response, the manner in which Plato uses the term imitation. Initially it is used to describe a style of writing, in which authors use characters and personae, but poetry is also imitative in the sense that poets imitate things in the sensible world. Both turn out to be philosophically, and hence morally, reprehensible.

Aristotle's 'response' to Plato in the *Poetics* is distinctive in many ways. Firstly, for the most part, it is unconnected with what we find in Plato's surviving texts. The argument is independently formulated, and not guided by a need to rebut an existing critique. Many of the critical views that Aristotle directly refers to and answers are highly technical and specific. Again, they refer us to a background of erudite and cultured literary discussion that we know little about. Yet Plato is important in many ways in understanding Aristotle: at various points in the discussion we feel that Aristotle is remembering his master, often critically; but there are neutral points of contact as well. In the third chapter of the *Poetics*, for instance, Aristotle says that there are three ways in which poets imitate action. The first is the Homeric mode, partly narrative and partly by imitating the voices of others; the second is speaking in one's own person throughout; the third

through all the actors involved in imitation. Clearly this draws upon the tripartite division of the *Republic*, and elsewhere too in the *Poetics* we sense that Aristotle sees the usefulness of this classification. What changes, fundamentally, is the valuation of the imitative function of art.

APPROACHING THE *POETICS*

The *Poetics* exists for us in an imperfect state. As we have said, it probably had a second part, which is now entirely lost; even the part that we have is by no means a continuous and seamless text. Unlike most of the other surviving works, it retains the character of jottings or lecture notes. Some parts are written out in some detail, others are compressed and elliptic. Occasionally, one section seems to disagree with another. Many points of interpretation thus remain speculative, and at best tentative suggestions may be put forward. The text, in spite of centuries of scholarly attention, remains obscure at many points. Translations often give the impression of continuity, whereas the Greek text, even in its most comprehensive modern edition is written in a clipped and abrupt manner. We should, at the outset, try to get an idea of what the work contains. Traditionally, the work is divided into sections or chapters: there are twenty-six of them in all. The chapter divisions are not particularly significant, and many modern translators have tried to recast the text according to other plans. The chapter numbers, as they are widely used, are still important for the purpose of reference and citation. However, more important from this point of view are the marginal numbers which are universally used by scholars to refer to Aristotle's works. They derive from the edition made in 1830 by Immanuel Bekker for the Berlin Academy. In this edition the *Poetics* occupies pages 1447 to 1462: the text is printed in two columns and the left hand and right hand columns are

designated *a* and *b* respectively. So, *1450a* (often abbreviated as *50a*) refers to the text originally contained in Bekker's edition on page 1450 in the left hand column.

Many editors and translators prefer to divide the work according to the topics dealt with, and in keeping with this practice the present translation is additionally arranged into sections and subsections. The section numbers (e.g., 2, 2.1, 2.2) with titles are given at the top of every section and subsection; the traditional chapter and abbreviated page numbers are given in small italics in the margin of the text. In the introduction, references to the text are given by citing both the traditional chapter number and the section and subsection number. Thus, 'chapter 14' is to be located by the marginal number; the section and subsection number follow in brackets.

Imitation

The *Poetics*, as we all know, deals principally with tragedy. The work starts, however, with a discussion of general principles. Aristotle begins in the manner of a scientific enquiry, establishing first the general class or category that the different arts belong to. Poetry, music, dancing, painting and sculpture are all varieties of *imitation* or *mimesis*. The arts differ from each other in respect of the *medium* of imitation, the *objects* of imitation and the *manner* of imitation. It becomes clear soon that Aristotle is not interested in constructing an exhaustive taxonomy of the class of *mimesis* or imitations: he is distinguishing a distinctive type which uses speech, music and rhythm as its media; whereas some forms of poetry (like dithyrambic and nomic poetry) use them all at the same time, that is to say that the verbal delivery is accompanied by music and dance (or perhaps the use of metrical rhythm), tragedy and comedy use these three in different parts of the performance. Some parts are recited, others sung to the

accompaniment of dance. The first chapter affords a good example of the problems of dealing with the *Poetics*. The style is hurried and the most interesting and difficult points are made in a throw-away manner. For instance, he observes that there is no general name for those kinds of composition which use prose or verse as their media. One of the implications of this statement being that the term 'poetry' as we use it is not available as yet. Aristotle observes that the term *poet* ('maker', from the Greek verb *poiein*, to make) is applied to one who specializes in a particular metrical form. Thus, people speak of *elegiac-making* (Gk., *elegeipoieia*) and *epic-making* (*epopoieia*). This, according to him, is wrong; for a poet is one who 'makes' imitations. Merely writing in a particular metrical form does not make one a poet, nor does the fact that somebody using several metrical forms in the same poem necessarily make that person any less a poet. One wishes that Aristotle would have explained these things in greater detail, but that, alas, is not the case. We are forced to reconstruct complex arguments from the most elliptic of hints.

Indeed, one is faced with the same problem when trying to make sense of the term imitation itself. In Plato, it is used to underscore the false and delusive character of poetry in general. When we come across it in Aristotle, it is evidently a fully developed aesthetic term. Much energy has been expended on trying to define what Aristotle means by imitation, and to show that he has departed entirely from the idea of mimicry that Plato presents. The point, however, seems not to be to show the exclusivity of the Aristotelian usage, or stress its inherent subtlety, but to establish the fact that in the *Poetics* the term is used in its widest connotation. Aristotle, like Plato, is approaching literary mimesis from the point of view of the philosopher. As the term is capable of suggesting the most basic kinds of copying and mimicry (consider, for instance, the reference to 'images' [*eikonas*] of animals and corpses that we enjoy seeing, whereas we dislike seeing them in real life, chapter 4, [3.1]), it is also capable of subtle and philosophical applications. Tragedy and comedy, says Aristotle, imitate

human beings in a state of action. Human beings are either good or bad, or somewhere in between, and consequently these are the only ways that literary forms can represent them. What we think of as differences of character are, in the end, ethical differences. The specific domain of literary imitation, thus, is far more subtly characterized, and involves us in ethical considerations.

The Forms of Poetry

Aristotle's ethical approach to human life is richly suggestive. The possibilities of literary representation extend on both sides of what he calls 'being like us', presumably human life as we commonly know it: poetry is capable of representing human beings as being better or worse than that. He seems, thus, to be considering the possibilities of idealization (better), naturalism (like us) and satiric representation (worse). He appeals to the example of painting, and gives examples of three possible kinds. Later, he says that tragedy and epic show people as being better than us, while comedy shows them as being worse. How are we to understand this observation? One hint is found in his comment that the earliest forms of poetry were divided into those which dealt with the deeds of noble men, and those which imitated those of 'lower' (Gk. *phaulos*, lit, wretched, ignoble) kinds of people: one consisting of hymns and encomia, the other lampoons or skits. The first kind naturally led to the invention of the epic and subsequently, tragedy. The poets who were naturally inclined towards serious and noble subjects turned from the epic to tragedy: this may suggest that the development of epic and tragedy are in Aristotle's eyes successive. The fact that these forms deal with the tales of gods and heroes may help us to understand the simplest implication of 'better'. Aristotle's discussion of the origins of poetry has been much studied by historians of Greek literature, for it offers tantalizing glimpses

into the way that the history of the major forms of literature was regarded in Aristotle's time. The origins of tragedy and comedy, according to him, were improvisational, one from the songs of the 'leaders of the dithyramb', the other from those of the 'leaders of the phallic songs'. Little is known about the origins of the dithyramb, though the connection with tragedy has been much discussed, and in the main, accepted. It seems to have been originally a choral song in praise of the god Dionysus. It attracted the attention of great poets like Simonides and Pindar, and was composed in regular choric form. Later, it seems to have widened its range, and continued to be practiced late into the Hellenistic period.

Both the forms of tragedy and comedy, according to Aristotle, started with choral songs, a point which helps us to understand the primacy of the chorus in Greek tragedy, better. Aristotle's account suggests that the 'leader' of the dithyramb improvised some songs during the choral performance, thus providing the basis for the division between *actor* and *chorus*: gradually the number of actors increased, the element of speech predominated over song, the seriousness of subject matter was emphasized, new and more appropriate metrical forms were introduced, and the number of episodes was increased. Aristotle's account of the origins of tragedy is highly compressed and fragmentary, but it is the only substantial account of its kind that we have. One should note that there are actually three points of origin, the dithyramb and the epic being two of them. He also mentions that tragedy evolved out of the satyr-play: 'the magnitude increased from short plots; and in the place of comic diction, as a consequence of a change of the satyric style, tragedy acquired dignity at a late stage' (Chapter 4, 3.3). Was the form as it developed out of the dithyramb trivial and unserious, and did it gain seriousness in its contact with the epic? We have no way of answering this question satisfactorily.

The form of comedy is dealt with even more sketchily. Aristotle promises to deal with epic and comedy 'later': perhaps he later forgot about comedy, or perhaps he dealt with it in the (now) non-existent

second part of the *Poetics*. We might mention here the curious document usually called the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, a document uniquely preserved in a tenth century manuscript containing what appears to be an 'Aristotelian' theory of comedy. The terms used and the treatment of the subject alike suggest an Aristotelian connection, or at any rate, one with his Academy; much of it however survives in a garbled form, which has given rise to the interesting speculation that it constitutes the lecture-notes of some incompetent student! The brief comments on comedy in the *Poetics* are however of great interest to any student of the form. A basic connection with the 'ridiculous' (*to geloion*) is established and maintained: Homer first adumbrated the form of the ridiculous in his *Margites* (a skit or lampoon traditionally but probably falsely attributed to Homer; now lost). Those with a natural bent towards lampoon turned to comedy: the origins of comedy are in dances performed at Dionysiac festivals, probably related to fertility rituals; gradually they came to acquire regular plots. Aristotle's view of comedy is entirely as a satiric form, which may explain his emphasis on the ridiculous. In another compressed and obscure passage he speaks about the way in which comedy deals with people who are 'worse' than us: as a form of satire it emphasizes and exaggerates human imperfections, and presents human beings as 'ugly': not painfully so, but through a kind of distortion that arouses laughter by appealing to our sense of the ridiculous, something that we might understand by our experience of cartoons. The early history of comedy is unknown to him, because he confesses, it was not taken seriously, and no records have been preserved. Even though Aristotle does not seem to give comedy much importance here, he is insistent on our recognizing it as formally being akin to tragedy: it is dramatic and presents generalized plots. Aristotle reserves his the detailed comments on the epic till later, but points out that an epic resembles tragedy in imitating the better sort of people, but they differ in their mode of presentation; tragedy uses dramatic and epic, narrative means. The other points about the epic are best understood in connection with the comparison of the epic and tragedy, at the end of the *Poetics*.

Understanding and Pleasure

We return to the discussion of imitation. In the fourth chapter of the *Poetics* (3.1), Aristotle introduces us to one of the central notions of his aesthetic theory, and what we might justly term his most substantial reply to Plato's criticism of poetry. Why do human beings write poetry? One reason, says Aristotle, is that human beings are inherently given to imitation; indeed we take our first steps in education through it. All human beings enjoy seeing or reading or hearing imitations, for through imitations we learn something. When we see a picture of a person, we wonder who it might be: when we realize that it is 'X' or 'Y', we feel pleasure. Aristotle, thus, outlines a theory of perception and knowledge. When we perceive, we experience the desire to know, and when that desire is fulfilled, we experience pleasure. The desire to know is an appetite, like hunger or thirst: as hunger is slaked by food, the desire for knowledge is alleviated by understanding: 'the man in the picture is so-and-so'. He thus powerfully allies *mimesis*, imitation and *mathesis*, understanding. This is then the source of our pleasure in art: the example, cited earlier, of animals and corpses is used here. We may not care to see wild animals or dead bodies in real life, but the artistic representation of these incites the desire for understanding, and is therefore pleasurable. At a different level, we might say that the events described in *King Oedipus* are painful in themselves, but the representation in art, gives us a more powerful comprehension of these events, which is the source of satisfaction. Aristotle is clearly responding to his teacher's strictures on poetry when he says that not only philosophers, but all human beings, desire to know.

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle restates and amplifies his argument. The point about understanding is joined to wondering, both of which appear to be sources of pleasure.

Again, generally speaking, understanding and wondering give pleasure, as wondering involves a desire to understand, so that a thing that rouses

wonder is a thing with which we feel desire, while understanding implies a restoration to a natural state.

The emotion that we experience when we perceive something thus is the state of wondering (*thaumazein*), and the restoration to the natural state occurs when understanding is complete.

. . .since both understanding and wondering give pleasure, the things that rouse them must also give pleasure, an example of mimesis, for instance, as painting and statuary and poetry do, and in general any instance of successful mimesis, even if its object does not give pleasure. For the pleasure is not just pleasure in the object; instead there is the inference 'this is that', so that the result is our coming to understand something.

But Aristotle is also willing to accept wonder as being pleasant—and artistically appropriate—in itself.

The same is true of sudden changes of fortune and hairbreadth escapes from danger, as all such things rouse wonder.[3]

Thus, if Aristotle sees the value of poetry in pointing out *similarity* in the complex web of human existence ('this is that'), he also allows for the pleasure of *difference*, of surprise and wonder. In other respects too, as we shall see, his aesthetic theory works on this basic philosophical antithesis.

The Definition of Tragedy

Tragedy, as Aristotle sees it, imitates actions: unlike comedy, the actions are serious, and unlike epic, they are rendered in dramatic form. The famous definition of tragedy in chapter six (4.1) is often discussed out of context, and that is clearly a hindrance in understanding it. Francis Fergusson bases his famous analysis of the *Poetics* on this definition, seeing it as guiding the subsequent discussion of the form of tragedy.[4]

The definition is clearly constructed on logical lines, working from the general to the particular, or as the logician would put it, *per genus et differentiam*, establishing the specific features which differentiate tragedy from other members of the class of literary imitations. Here is the definition itself:

Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.

Aristotle discusses in varying degrees of detail most of the issues raised by the definition, and in general it is a good guide to the structure of the work. The point about 'purification' (*katharsis*) however is not taken up again. At least, it is not in the text of the *Poetics* as we have it: in the *Politics* he discusses *katharsis* in the context of music and refers us to the discussion that he intends to take up in the *Poetics*. As we know , the term *katharsis* is generally considered to be one of the most significant terms in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, and has perhaps attracted a disproportionate amount of attention. Most of this discussion is highly speculative: Aristotle himself does not explain what he means by *katharsis*, nor does he explain how he thinks it is achieved through the experience of reading or watching tragedy. Yet, in an important sense it is part of his defence of poetry against Plato's charge that it is emotionally harmful. We shall defer the discussion of *katharsis* to the end of our own survey of the *Poetics*, in order to be able to base our discussion on a complete reading of the work.

Tragedy is the imitation of an action. The term *action* is again something that requires the utmost care in elucidation. We have already marked that Aristotle sees men in action (*prattonton*) as the only object of poetic imitation. This point has resonances in his ethical writings. The end and purpose of life, he writes in the *Poetics*, is a kind of action: doing something, not being a certain kind of person. Happiness in life comes from action: the Greek word used here is *eudaimonia*, the central concern in Greek ethical thought. It might be said that,

for Aristotle, the judgement of whether human beings are happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, good or bad depends on how we assess their actions: there is no judgement of character without reference to action. When people act well we call them good; when they are successful in attaining their ends, we call them happy. It is this world of action that tragedy, like other forms of literature, lays claim to. A fuller analysis of tragic mimesis in chapter six (4.1) clarifies that tragedy imitates actions; these actions are performed by human beings, in accordance with their moral or ethical predispositions, and therefore tragedy imitates character; these characters express certain general truths or maxims, and consequently tragedy imitates thought as well. This gives us a triple formula of imitation: tragedy imitates action, character and thought—*praxis*, *ethos* and *dianoia*. It is the analysis of action that principally engages Aristotle's attention. We should note here that Aristotle derives six basic elements of tragedy from his definition: plot (*muthos*), character (*ethos*), verbal expression (*lexis*), thought or reasoning (*dianoia*), spectacle (*opsis*) and song-writing (*melos*). The media of tragic mimesis are two (verbal expression and song-writing), the mode is single (dramatic) and the objects are three (action, character and intellect). 'There are no others', says Aristotle, having proved his case beyond all doubt.

Action and Plot

Aristotle uses the term action both in a restricted and an extensive way. Human beings are continually engaged in actions, but tragedy represents these actions as a continuous and distinctive sequence; this is the singular, unique action of tragedy. Aristotle describes the 'action' of tragedy as 'the ordering of (particular) actions' (*sunthesis ton pragmaton*). We may take a cue from the eighth chapter (5.3) to try and explain what Aristotle is saying here. Human beings, we might

say, are engaged in a host of different actions at the same time. Somebody might be drinking tea and listening to music and thinking about going to watch a film at the same time. These three activities may be thought to be part of three temporal sequences: one involving boiling the water, brewing the tea, pouring it into a cup, throwing away the tea leaves and so on. The second might involve turning the radio on, adjusting the knob until the right station is got, getting tired of it and finding a new station, feeling satisfied and sitting down to listen in peace. All this time the person in question might be mulling over the possibility of leaving the house and going to watch a film, the possibility that she might not get a ticket, the fact that it seems like rain, the fact that the film itself might not be very interesting.

From Aristotle's point of view, each of the three sequences that we have described is an *action*, each an arrangement of particular 'acts', both physical and mental. Writing about the same person, he says, does not ensure that the action is single and unique. Tragedy therefore fashions a single action out of the multitude of acts that individuals may perform and represents that as the *plot* (*muthos*) of the play. For Aristotle, it must be understood, representing or imitating the action is not a passive observation of something that exists as a natural or biographical fact. Plot-making is a kind of activity, something that justifies the term 'poet' or 'maker'. As bed-makers make beds, poets make plots. In a magnificently perceptive passage (chapter 9 [5.5]), he says that the fact that the actions represented may have actually taken place, does not make the tragic poet any less a maker: poetry and history are fundamentally different kinds of activities. The historian is always tied to the recording of particular facts, whereas the poet invests the plot with a kind of *generality*, telling us what an individual would have done in a particular set of circumstances: the fact that proper names such as Oedipus and Thyestes are used, and that the material is often taken from traditional stories does not, in any way, detract from the generality of the plot.

What Aristotle says, with remarkable concision here, requires a few words of explanation on our part. First of all, we know that tragic poets almost always took their material from the mythic cycles and heroic legends that were a basic part of Greek culture. The Greeks apparently did not differentiate between myth and history: the story of Oedipus was as 'historical' as, say, that of Pericles. Anybody who has read collections of Greek myth will know that, in most cases, many exploits were credited to the heroes: there also seems to have been many versions of myths. Our own knowledge of them is fragmentary, being limited only to textual records: even if we account for a thriving culture of oral myth-telling, we need to keep in mind that mythic material was present to the Greek writer as a body of facts and deeds, not as a set of coherent and distinct tales. The tragic poet, as Aristotle sees him, takes material from myth and fashions it into a sequence of actions that are distinguished by internal connections. Oedipus, the wise king of Thebes, listens to the plea of his countrymen and resolves to find the cause of the plague in the country. The sequence of the two actions—listening to the plea and deciding to do something about it—manifests the essential characteristics of plot-making. They are related in probable and necessary sequence: some kind of action is necessitated by the plea, and given the kind of person that Oedipus is, it is probable that he will not be unsympathetic or apathetic, but will try to do something about it. The sequence would make sense even if the name Oedipus was not used, and we were to use an imaginary name or an algebraic symbol instead. The value of tragic imitation, thus, lies in the poet fashioning out of the native anarchy of historical fact a form that is coherent, consistent and aesthetically pleasing, in other words, an ideal form. Thus it makes no real difference whether plots are based on traditional material or invented by the poet (as we find in the plots of classical comedy); the value of the plot lies in its ability to present a sequence that is justified by its unbroken chain of probable and necessary connections. It is because the poet is a maker of plots that his activity is more important than that of the annalist, and more akin to that of the philosopher

who, too, searches for general truths in the confused mass of human experience.

Size and Order

Aristotle makes a number of important points about the plot—for him the 'soul' (Heath) or 'principle of life' (Hubbard) of tragedy. Most of these are valid for other kinds of writing as well, and he may well be considered to be the first and greatest theorist of fiction. Aesthetic beauty, he says famously, is a matter of size and order, a statement that may be taken as the basis of his theory of art. In chapter 7 (5.1), he observes that the action of tragedy must be whole, that is to say, a complete action. Thus, the action must have a beginning, a middle and an end. In life, actions may seem to merge and blur, but art allows us to view the action in its entirety. A beginning is that which is not necessarily consequent to something else, but from which something necessarily follows. A middle is something which is both dependent on something and leads on to something: an end is dependent on something but does not necessarily lead on to something else. The highly abstract definitions given by the great logician actually are quite easy to understand. To take the example of *King Oedipus* again, the beginning is when the plague occurs and Oedipus resolves to find its cause, the middle consists of his enquiry into the sad events surrounding the death of Laius, which as the Oracle reveals is the root of the trouble. The end is when Oedipus finds the cause of the plague: none other than himself. Well-organized plots, says Aristotle, do not start and end anywhere, but show this kind of order.

If wholeness is one of the basic characteristics of the poetic plot, size is another. The very small is not pleasing to us, and neither is the very large. We do not find an animal that is so small as to be indistinct beautiful, neither is our sense of beauty activated by an animal 'a thousand miles long'. What Aristotle seems to be saying here is that

for us to feel something is beautiful, we must be able to view it both in its wholeness (thus something which cannot be viewed as a whole is not beautiful) and in terms of the relation of the parts to the whole (thus something which appears as a speck without revealing its internal differentiation, is not beautiful). We must be able, at the same time, to see something as a whole, and as a sum of its parts. What is the ideal length of a tragedy? The text of the *Poetics* is unfortunately corrupt at this point, but there seems to be a point being made about our ability to see things 'well at a single view' (*eusunopton*). He however clarifies his observation here saying that the artist should aim at as great an amplitude as possible, keeping in mind the need for clarity. In practical terms, this means that the plot must have sufficient amplitude to present in unbroken sequence, in a probable and necessary manner a change from good fortune to bad or from bad to good. The point about tragedy dealing with a change of fortune will concern us later. We have been, however, able to note the basic requirements of the plot in the *Poetics*. There must a single plot: this plot must be a whole plot, having a beginning, a middle and an end: it must have a proper size, marked by probable and necessary connections which give it coherence and consistency. Aristotle terms the 'episodic' plot the worst, because it fails to show internal connections: bad poets make such plots because they can't do better, but good poets do because they want to impress the judges at contests or (the manuscripts are uncertain about this point) because of the rivalry among actors.

Surprise and the Marvellous

The basic criteria of plot-making discussed here are fairly general, and hold good for most of the major forms of poetry that Aristotle knew, namely the tragedy, the comedy and the epic. However, the tragic plot is also serious (*spoudaios*) and uses pity (*eleos*) and fear (*phobos*)

to reach its end. This differentiates tragedy from comedy, as the dramatic requirements stated in the definition of tragedy distinguish it from epic. At the end of chapter 9 (6.1), Aristotle introduces a new consideration. Because tragedy seeks to arouse pity and fear, it makes use of the element of surprise (to *thaumaston*). Events that happen probably and necessarily nevertheless seem marvellous and surprising, when they happen unexpectedly. Conversely, events that are actually not related are effectively presented as if there is a connection between them. The example he uses is of a man who has murdered another, and later the murdered man's statue falls on the murderer and kills him. The event may be accidental, but there seems to us to be a pattern in it and this is satisfying. The mention of surprise is brief, but this introduces the next section of the *Poetics*. If events in the plot need to be rigorously ordered in terms of probability and necessity, how are we to account for the powerful effect of tragedy, the way it moves and perplexes us?

Simple and Complex Plots

One answer to the aforesaid question is in Aristotle's preference for the complex (*peplegmenos*) plot over the simple (*haplos*). The difference lies not in the use of different plot-lines (something which is an anathema to Aristotle), but in the use of reversal and recognition in the complex plot. The technical terms that Aristotle uses, *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*, are well-known. *Peripeteia* occurs when the plot takes a turn which is the opposite of what the events would have normally led us (or the characters in the plot) to expect. Thus, the shepherd in King Oedipus comes bearing news that is intended to exculpate Oedipus, but it ends up revealing his guilt. *Anagnorisis*, on the other hand, is a change from ignorance to knowledge. This new acquisition of knowledge alters the relationship of the characters of the play,

changing friends into enemies and vice versa. The ultimate good and bad fortune of characters is thus determined. Aristotle suggests that *King Oedipus* offers the paradigm of the complex plot, for the moment of reversal and that of recognition are one. Later, in a different context, Aristotle mentions the end of Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, where Orestes is about to be killed by his sister Iphigeneia, but they recognize each other at the last moment, thus leading to a happy end. Recognitions, as he says later too, can be of different kinds. It might come from the recognition of tokens and signs, out of reasoning and supposition: the best kind is when it is comes out of the plot itself, from the reversal of the plot.

Aristotle's preference for the complex plot comes out of his need to integrate the elements of similarity and difference in a comprehensive artistic vision. Tragedy deals with change, usually of a violent and disruptive kind. To be able to see the hard logic which ties the calamitous events together is the virtue and prerogative of the tragic poet. In a profoundly elliptic passage in chapter 15 (8.1), Aristotle lays down that the plot itself should not be irrational (*alogon*), and irrationality, if required at all, should be kept outside the plot. It may be difficult to believe that Oedipus lived in Thebes long enough to have had children by the widowed queen without knowing what happened to the late king, Laius: but this improbability does not in any way affect the coherence of Sophocles' plot. More generally, we may feel that tragedy lays claim to the most intractable and obscure actions of human life. The success of the form in doing so comes for Aristotle in the ability of the tragic poet to capture these moments of irrationality, these profoundly frightening irruptions into the rational basis of life, within structures that are themselves rational. Yet, the manner in which it is done must preserve the power of the unexpected in human affairs, for that is conducive to the production of the tragic emotions, pity and fear. Apart from reversal and recognition, tragic plots also involve pathos or suffering. A 'pathos', in Aristotle's technical vocabulary, is a scene which involves destruction or pain: deaths, injuries and physical suffering.

Parts of Tragedy

The eleventh chapter concludes a major section of Aristotle's examination of the tragic plot. A new section ensues with chapter 13. Chapter 12 (6.6) is often regarded with suspicion by scholars as an interpolation, the work of a lesser mind. Gerald Else removes it from the body of the text and prints it in the appendix to his edition of the *Poetics*.[5] It deals with the formal parts of tragedy, and is fairly non-committal, but all the available manuscripts include it. There is little point in dislodging it from its present place, one feels, even if it does not seem particularly inspired to us. It also serves a utilitarian purpose in giving us a summary of the formal divisions of tragedy, and is worth a brief examination. The parts of tragedy are as follows:

1) Prologue (*prologos*)
2) Episodes (*epeisodia*)
3) Choral parts
4) Exode (*exodos*)

The prologue is the section that precedes the entrance of the chorus: the exode is the section that is not followed by a choral section. The episode is the section that lies between two complete choral sections. Choral parts include the *parodos*, the first complete utterance of the chorus and *stasima* (singular, *stasimon*) are sections that are delivered in metres other than the anapaest and the trochee (which suggest that the metre appropriate to the *stasimon* is a slow and stately one). These choral parts are found in all tragedies. Some have songs and a shared lament between actors and chorus called the *kommos*.

Excellence in Tragedy: Two Views

Aristotle's interest in action has often led to the belief that he is not interested in the notion of character as we think of it. It is true that

when he speaks about character (*ethos*) in chapter 6 (4.2) and again in chapter 15 (8.1), he uses the term in a restricted way. He says, for instance, that tragedy can do without character, but not without action; if one had a series of brilliant speeches, each evocative of a particular disposition or trait of character, it still would not have been a tragedy. There is evidence that Aristotle is thinking of 'character' in an ethical sense, for it is things that one does and says that determine the kind of person one is. Inasmuch as literature cannot, for Aristotle, deal with *being* in itself, but only with *doing*, it is the action of the play which becomes the vehicle of character. We are aware of a background of debate about tragic character through Aristotle's rather acrid comment that modern playwrights are deficient in the art of character-portrayal. Aristotle's analysis of plot, in fact, contains important reflections on the questions of motivation and agency, issues that figure largely in our discussion of literary character. In chapters 13 and 14, Aristotle is still thinking of plot, but now he is pursuing a new line of enquiry: how are we to determine success in tragedy? What kinds of plots are the best? This part of Aristotle's discussion has evoked a large body of critical response. It should be noted however that Aristotle's answer is by no means clear. He appears to be saying radically different things in chapters 13 and 14: the fact that the text of chapter 14 is by no means perfect does not ease matters, and there does not really seem to be any way of reconciling these contrary judgements. Undoubtedly, when Aristotle lectured on this subject, he presented a coherent case. We, however, can only speculate as to what he might have said.

This edition includes an essay on Aristotle's treatment of chapters 13 and 14, so we shall be content here with noting the most obvious points. Since pity and fear are the emotions that tragedy seeks to excite, the best tragedy is that which is most successful in doing so. There is a compressed definition of what pity and fear mean here. Pity is aroused by the fact that the tragic agent does not deserve the fate which befalls him or her, and fear by the identification of the agent with ourselves. Aristotle seems to be indicating here that pity is aroused by the tragic predicament of the agent, and fear by the agent's

implication in the condition of humanity. The human referent is important in this discussion because the discussion has a strongly ethical bias. Briefly, Aristotle takes up his earlier point about (dramatic) plots being about the change of condition, from good to bad fortune, or the other way around. He starts by considering two variables: the moral nature of the agent, and the direction of the change. Good agents may move from bad to good fortune, or from good to bad: the same is true of bad agents. He actually discussed only three of these possibilities, that of the good agent passing from bad to good fortune being omitted altogether presumably because of its patently 'untragic' character. The other possibilities, in fact, do not get him very far. The spectacle of good agents passing from good to bad fortune, and its opposite, bad agents from bad to good, are rejected outright as one is morally outrageous (*miaron*) and the second, revolting to our sense of humanity (to *philanthropon*). The third, that of the bad agent passing from good fortune to bad, is morally satisfying, but like the earlier two, there is no appeal to pity or fear.

Aristotle suddenly jettisons the whole argument here and starts out afresh: but the text appears to treat this as an extension of the earlier attempt at classification. The tragic hero, therefore, is an individual who stands between (*ho metaxu*) the extremes of goodness and badness 'the one in between is therefore left'. This individual is characterized neither by absolute goodness (or justness; the Greek word is *dikaiosune*), nor by viciousness (*mochtheria*), but meets an unhappy end because of some error or mistake (*hamartia*). This tentative conclusion seems to satisfy Aristotle for the moment. He summarizes his findings: the best tragedy has a single line of development, it moves from good fortune to bad, the change is caused not by wickedness but by some great error (*megale hamartia*). In fact, the person should be better rather than worse. The second formulation is, one notes, slightly stronger than the earlier one. The neutral characterization of 'one in between' is qualified both by the ascription of some great error to such an individual, as well as the emphasis on the person's relatively high moral standing. We note the strong ethical orientation

of this argument. Human beings are classified as being good or bad according to the things that they do: clearly tragic characters do disastrous things, like murder, impiety, patricide and incest. How then is moral virtue to be established? We cannot call the tragic heroes good in an unqualified sense, because they really perform these terrible act; at the same time, we cannot call them bad either, for they do what they do out of ignorance, madness, passion or the dark promptings of gods. The term used, *hamartia*, is carefully chosen: the act of the protagonist is not merely an accident, which would weaken our sense of tragic motivation. At the same time it is not a fully considered and rational act either, which would make the protagonist's responsibility for the act total and irredeemable. 'In between', as Aristotle would say, lies the range of tragic *hamartia*, where the deeds are both owned and disowned, both the result of a process of thought and judgement, but escaping the full, debilitating responsibility for the act. Such examples are, as Aristotle knew, difficult to find. That is why so many tragedies turn to the same traditional stories of Oedipus, Thyestes, Orestes and other heroes whose fate it was to perform such terrible acts.

Before going on to the next chapter, one might point out that the nature of the tragic act appears to have been much misunderstood. *Hamartia* should not be thought of as a 'flaw' in character: indeed our discussion indicates that Aristotle would not have understood such an idea. If somebody has a deep-seated deficiency in character that makes the person commit violent crimes, the person is clearly morally reprehensible. In an attempt to attack this traditional misunderstanding of *hamartia*, the Oxford translator, Margaret Hubbard, translates the term as 'ignorance'. The fact that the Greek New Testament uses the word '*hamartia*' for 'sin' in the Christian sense may be partly responsible for the misunderstanding. It should also be noted that Aristotle makes no concessions to the comfortable idea that the suffering of the tragic protagonist is 'out of proportion' to their acts. To their responsibility for such acts, certainly: but if Oedipus suffers greatly, he himself recognizes that he has committed acts that put him outside the pale of

human society. The greatness of tragedy lies in its presenting to us the deed being both proximate and remote, owned and disowned. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the old hero repeatedly asserts his moral innocence with respect to the terrible deeds that he has committed.This awareness might also help us to make sense of the rather surprising commendation of Euripides as the 'most tragic' (*tragikotatos*) of playwrights: in Euripides, the distinction between responsibility and non-responsibility is arguably the finest in Greek tragedy. Medea kills her children in full knowledge of the enormity of her act, but in the end it is her passion, her *thumos*, that makes her act in this way.

In chapter 14 (7.3-4), Aristotle enquires more closely into the kinds of actions that arouse pity and fear. The best plots do so by the arrangement of events, not by external means. The plot, even when heard, arouses a shudder. To use spectacular aids to achieve the arousal of pity and fear is inartistic and inappropriate, for tragedy seeks to give its own unique kind of pleasure, not just any kind. Thus, one finds that certain kinds of relationships are more effective in tragedy. It is when people come into conflict with those to whom they are closely related—parents with children, friends with friends, brothers with brothers—that the tragic effect is fully aroused. Even though one cannot alter traditional stories, one can interpret relationships more artistically. One can, for instance, show people acting out of ignorance or out of knowledge. He again adopts a classificatory approach: tragic plots must show either people acting or not acting, and they either know what they are doing or they do not. It is here that Aristotle, appears to turn around radically. If, earlier, he had demanded that the hero performs or suffers 'fearful' (*deina*) acts, he now seems to suggest that the best kind of tragedy is the one where the fearful act is avoided because of recognition. Three examples are given here: two can be recognized as being from Euripides. There is no doubt—in spite of the breaks in the text—that Aristotle is commending a kind of tragedy where disaster is averted at the end: what we might call tragicomedy rather than tragedy. One should note that many Greek tragedies did have such endings. Apart from

Euripides, who seems to have specialized in them, the great examples of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes* come to mind. It may be that Aristotle is trying to account for a different, but well-established type of tragedy, but there is no avoiding the fact that the recommendations of the two chapters that we have just looked at are quite different.

Tragic Characters

Aristotle deals very briefly with two other kinds of mimesis—that of character and that of thought. In chapter 15 (8.1), he gives a list of requirements for tragic characters. They should be predominantly good; they should be suitable (*harmotton*), that is to say, their characteristics should be appropriate to their roles. It is here that he makes his notorious comment that women should not be shown as being brave or clever in the same way as men. They should be life-like; and, finally, they should be consistent. None of this requires much comment, apart from Aristotle's recurrent attempt to speak about the goodness of tragic characters. Early in the work (chapter 3 [2.3]) he says that both epic and tragedy make their characters good. We have looked at the way his attempt to discuss the goodness of tragic characters in chapter 13 (7.2) has to be qualified. Here, he seems to suggest that this kind of goodness is not so much a moral issue as an attempt to present the character in a kind of ideal form: good painters, even while making their figures life-like, make them more beautiful than they really are. Thus, Homer's Achilles is both good and 'very harsh' (*sklerotetos*). Perhaps, Aristotle has departed here from the subtle attempts to ethically delineate the tragic character. The treatment of the imitation of intellect (at the beginning of chapter 19 [9.1]) is even more abbreviated. Aristotle refers us to the discussion of different kinds of speech-forms in the *Rhetoric*, briefly noting that the issue covers 'all the effects' produced by speech,

including proof and disproof, the arousing of emotions, and showing that things are important or unimportant. This statement clearly expands the opinion expressed in chapter 6 (4.2) that imitation of intellect involves demonstrations of arguments and general maxims.

Tragedy: Miscellaneous Aspects

In chapters 16 to 18 (8.2–9), Aristotle deals with a number of topics in a rather unconnected way. These are, like the recommendations on tragic character in chapter 15, more in the nature of practical suggestions to practising dramatists. He speaks of varieties of recognition, discusses the problems of visualizing the action of the plot and introducing episodes, and then introduces a new way of looking at the plot. Plots, he observes, are made up of tying and untying, complication and resolution. Some of the points, on the other hand, seem difficult to account for. Tragedies are divided into four categories: reversal, pathos, character and spectacle. The best tragedy is one which has all the elements, but he gives examples of each kind as well. It is difficult, as many critics have felt, to square this classification with the lengthy discussion of plot-making. Another brief contrast with the epic is made, and the element of surprise is referred to. Finally, there is a brief section on the chorus. The discussion is brief and at times particularly obscure, and evidently not all the points are equally clear to us. Some of them, however, demand a closer look.

Visualization

Of particular interest is the section (chapter 17 [8.3]) on poetic imagination. Aristotle emphasizes the need of the poet to be able to

visualize the entire action beforehand. The advice here is strictly practical. One might, he suggests, construct a plot that seems good when one hears it, but appears ridiculous when one sees it enacted. The following comment is less clear: '[o]ne should also, as far as possible, work plots out using gestures'. Others translate the operative term 'using gestures' (*tois schemasin*) as 'appropriate figures'. Aristotle appears to be saying that the great artist should be able to actually approximate the emotional states of his characters. Evidently, the person best able to express anger is the person who is actually angry: of two poets having the same skills, the one who is able to better express emotion is the one who can experience it himself. The artist, therefore, has the ability to *imagine* emotion, to experience the anger, fear, pain, sorrow and joy of his characters intensely. This evidently makes the great poet a very special kind of individual: a genius. The Greek text has 'naturally gifted or mad', the next sentence seems to favour the genius-theory rather than the madman-theory, and Hubbard may be right in translating the phrase as being contrastive ('the work of a genius *rather than* that of a madman', italics mine). There is nothing anywhere in the text of the *Poetics* to suggest that Aristotle has any sympathy with the idea of poetry as inspired madness. On the contrary, he sees it as being the work of a supremely rational intellect. He also gives suggestions as to the composition of plays, advising poets to first work out the whole plot in the most general terms and, then, to introduce the individual episodes. Dramatic episodes are brief whereas the epic uses more of them. He points, however, to the fact that the *Odyssey* has the briefest of plots, but has a great many episodes.

Complication and Resolution

The description of the plot in terms of *desis* and *lusis*, complication and resolution, belongs more to the formal analysis of the earlier

chapters, but gives it a new dimension. Instead of the division into beginning, middle and end, Aristotle now proposes a bipartite division. All that leads up to the change of fortune is complication; the part from the change to the end is the resolution. The brief, almost casual treatment of *desis* and *lusis* should not detract from our appreciation of the brilliance of the idea: the terms are very homely and concrete, drawn from the world of everyday experience, but open up a whole new world of plot-analysis. Care should be taken to distinguish the 'change' mentioned here from the 'reversal' discussed in chapter 11 (6.3); as we have seen *all* plots are about change of fortune, but only the 'complex' kind involve reversal in the technical sense.

Surprise and Pleasure

Surprise, too, is a feature of both simple and complex plots; it is described as being both tragic and 'agreeable'. The Greek is stronger: the word is *philanthropon*, the term used to indicate, in chapter 13 (7.2), our human feeling that is outraged when we witness the unmerited fall of a good man. The examples given here are indicative of how Aristotle thinks surprise can be pleasant. One is of a clever but wicked man who is deceived; the other is of a brave but unjust man who is defeated. In the normal course—unfortunately—we cannot expect such things to happen, but when they do we feel satisfied. The brief mention of the chorus at the end of the chapter makes the point that the chorus should be treated as a character, involved in the action of the play, rather than a source of songs and interludes unconnected with the plot. The practice of Sophocles is seen as being exemplary in this regard. Here, as elsewhere, Aristotle's insistence on the unity of the plot and the avoidance of inessentials is evident.

DICTION

The next important section remains somewhat hazy to the average reader. It deals with diction in tragedy, and Aristotle closely examines some linguistic issues in a general way and with reference to the tragedies themselves. The scope of the enquiry is carefully restricted. He relegates, as we have seen earlier, the discussion of thought or reasoning (*dianoia*) to rhetoric; similarly, he disassociates the treatment that he has in mind from what Bywater calls the 'elocutionary' aspect of diction, that which deals with various kinds of utterances, such as commands, wishes, threats and so on. These, he feels, have very little to do with literary art, and so he concentrates more on vocabulary and accidence, and partly on syntax. It may seem surprising that having refused to discuss *dianoia*, which is one of the three things that tragedy imitates, he should instead discuss something that appears to fall largely to the province of grammar. Aristotle starts off with making a wide-ranging set of distinctions, but he does not discuss all of them. Chapter 20 (9.2) deals with the parts of diction, the list is much broader than what we usually think of as parts of speech. It includes:

1. The parts into which words can be divided (e.g., phoneme [*stoicheion*], syllable [*sullabe*]).
2. Words themselves (e.g., noun [*onoma*], verb [*rhema*], connective [*sundesmos*], conjunction [*arthros*]).
3. Inflection [*ptosis*].
4. Utterance [*logos*].

Many interesting questions are raised by this classification, but they do not really have much bearing on our present discussion. The theory of utterance is particularly interesting, for Aristotle recognizes that a sentence like 'Cleon walks' may be a complete utterance, as may be a complex work like the *Iliad*: one is single because it signifies a single subject, the other because it is a structure made up of connected utterances. Chapter 21 (9.3) is devoted to a study of the noun. One classification is by quantity: nouns are single or multiple. Another is

according to the kind or quality of the noun, where we find the class divided into current, non-standard, metaphorical, ornamental, coined, lengthened, shortened and adapted. Finally, nouns are divided according to gender. The next chapter applies some of these lessons to the discussion of poetic style. Aristotle observes that the most important quality of diction is clarity, but the claims of linguistic elevation have also to be met in literature. Thus, the clearest style is one which uses only current words, but that is also the least elevated or dignified. Therefore, poets strive to use others kinds of words—unfamiliar words, metaphors, neologisms—in fact anything that is different from 'current' usage. But if one were to use merely such terms, it would result in the work being entirely incomprehensible. The trick is to steer a middle course. Homer and the tragic poets are praised for their creative use of unfamiliar words. Of course, one needs to know how to use these different kinds properly, and avoid seeming ridiculous. Of all the uses of language, the use of metaphor is the most difficult. It is something that requires natural talent, and cannot be learnt by rote: for 'the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving similarities' (chapter 22, 9.4).

Tragedy and Epic

We have now arrived at the last important issue discussed in the *Poetics*: the epic. The epic is never very far from Aristotle's mind when discussing tragedy. Early in the work, he explains why he wishes to discuss tragedy before the epic, even though epic poetry is the older form. The reason, it seems, is that tragedy is the more inclusive of the two forms; the differences between them notwithstanding, one who knows about tragedy, will also know the important features of the epic. That may explain why he deals with the epic relatively briefly. As we have seen before, Aristotle is assuming some kind of evolutionary pattern in the evolution of literary forms. As the later form, tragedy is

more 'evolved' in that it possesses all the qualitative elements of the epic as well as some features that are unique to it. The important differences discussed in chapter 5 (3.5) are that one is narrative and the other dramatic; tragedy tries to limit the duration of its plot to a single revolution of the sun, while the duration of the epic is not fixed. Yet Aristotle, as we have seen earlier, recognizes that tragedy-writing was inspired by the epic; the moral excellence of the tragic hero is something that emulates the practice of the epic. Aristotle's admiration for Homer is usually unqualified; time and again in the *Poetics* he gives examples from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. At the end of the *Poetics*, he comes back to Homer, and though he places tragedy above the epic, he devotes two chapters just to refuting charges against the greatest of epic poets.

The discussion that begins in chapter 23 (10.1) is largely comparative, Aristotle now drawing upon his detailed characterization of tragedy to point out features of the epic. The best epic plots are 'dramatic'; that is having the requisite beginning, middle and end, that is to say joined in probable and necessary sequence. They should, thus, not resemble histories, which is what many poets seem to think. Events that happen in a single period, or which concern a single person are not necessarily interrelated. The example of Homer is particularly important in this regard, for the *Iliad* shows the ideal way of constructing the plot. Homer avoids the temptation of writing a poem on the entirety of the Trojan War, and instead defines a clear beginning and end. Having done so, he is able to introduce various episodes into his work without breaking its unity. Epic plots are also simple or complex: the *Iliad* being simple and full of pathos, the *Odyssey* complex and involving recognition. In all these respects, Homer is exemplary: he is also pre-eminent in his mimesis of character and intellect. However, the 'modern' epic—about which we know little—is commended for its relative shortness. Aristotle, nevertheless, knows the length of the epic makes it possible to introduce various kinds of material. Unlike drama, verse narrative can present simultaneous actions, by switching from the narration of what is going on in the Trojan camp to a speech being delivered at the same

time by a Greek warrior. The epic is thus able to achieve an impressive grandeur as well as diversity in subject matter. Similarity palls after a while; this in fact is the cause of failure of many tragedies. The Homeric epic, in fact, is intensely dramatic, with the poet's narration being kept to a minimum, and characters introduced after brief narrative comments. (Later [10.6], he points out the necessity of carefully controlling the poet's own linguistic skill, so that the diction does not overshadow the depiction of character and reasoning.) Aristotle is again remembering Plato's tripartite division of poetic styles: the phrasing of the text is somewhat uncertain here, because it seems to be closer to the distinction Plato makes between narrative and imitative than to the classification of the narrative style of epic poetry as a kind of mimesis. Perhaps, Aristotle is using this (presumably) more familiar distinction in order to emphasize Homer's special excellence as a poet.

Aristotle returns to the idea of the marvellous in his discussion of the epic. The epic is more tolerant of the element of surprise, and many incidents, which would look absurd if shown on the stage, seem quite in place in the epic. We enjoy being astonished, he says a little wryly, as is seen in the fact that people exaggerate while telling things knowing that such exaggerations give pleasure. Falsehoods, too, can be effectively used in poetry, and here too Homer leads the way. It was he who showed how 'paralogisms', or false inferences, can be used in poetry. The point involves methods of logical reasoning. Earlier, in chapter 16 (8.2), Aristotle mentions false inferences in connection with various kinds of recognition. In simple terms, it is where a conclusion that does not logically follow from a premise or premises is made to seem logical in the poetic context. The example given in chapter 24 may be expanded as follows: 'Here is a man with a scar: Odysseus has a scar: therefore, this man is Odysseus.' This is logically incorrect, for other persons may well have scars too. In poetry, however, such reasoning may be made to appear natural and convincing. In fact, Aristotle says memorably that probable impossibilities are better than implausible possibilities. The onus, as

always, is on the skill of the poet in making something seem convincing in a specific poetic context. Repeating the point he made in chapter 15 (8.1) he stresses that the poetic plot itself is a rational entity, and all irrationality should kept outside it. What Aristotle seems to be saying is that the plot should not *itself* be inconsistent or irrational. There are a number of ways in which we might apply this dictum. Firstly, as we saw before, if it is unreasonable to believe that Oedipus could have married Jocasta without knowing how Laius died, the integrity of the plot itself is not affected by such a supposition. Secondly, the plot lays down its own rules about probability: if the plot is about three-headed Martians, it is likely that they will have three heads throughout, not two or four. Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly, Aristotle's stricture against irrationality does not prevent the poet from writing about people who are themselves inconsistent or prone to irrational actions. As he points out succinctly in chapter 15 (8.1), all that is required is that they should be consistently inconsistent.

Many critics take the next chapter (chapter 25 [11.1-3]) to be a continuation of the discussion of epic, and is commonly believed to be a synopsis of a much more extended discussion contained in the (lost) *Homeric Problems*. It is extremely compressed and difficult to follow, and we might follow Heath in trying to summarize its major contentions. In this chapter Aristotle is referring to various criticisms of the art of poetry, and trying to respond to them. Plato, as we saw, criticized poetry as being false, immoral and harmful. His main target was Homer: in spite of the general regard in which the epic poet was held, there were other hostile voices too. The fourth century critic Zoilus wrote a work in nine books on Homer's errors. The first contention that Aristotle makes is that poetry is not bound to what *is* the case, that is, what is true; it can also say what *might* be the case or what is commonly believed to be the case. The point about poetry being false therefore does not hold good. If the gods are shown as being vengeful or lecherous (something that Plato objects to in the *Republic*), that may be defended on the ground that though the philosopher may object to such a portrayal of the gods,

people accept the mythical accounts of the terrible deeds of the gods without question. The second contention is that poets use linguistic devices (like metaphors and figurative expressions) that are not applied in common usage. The third is the most telling: accuracy in poetry is different from accuracy in other branches of knowledge. If a poet tries to do something and does it badly, that is a fault of the poet. But if the poet says something about medicine or horse-riding that is not quite accurate by the lights of the physician or the horse-rider, it is not a defect in the art of poetry. 'Correctness is not the same thing in ethics and poetry,' says Aristotle, curtly brushing aside Plato's charge against the immorality of poets (chapter 25, 11.1).

We have, now, come to the last chapter of the *Poetics* (chapter 26 [12.1-2]). Aristotle takes up a final question: is the epic the superior form, or is tragedy? We have already seen Aristotle's view that tragedy is the more *evolved* of forms, as also the more inclusive. Here, he seems to be defending tragedy (and in general, dramatic art) against the specific charge that tragedy is somehow deficient because it uses gestures and is meant for large heterogeneous audiences. The epic, on the other hand, is directed at cultured and literate audiences, and is dependent merely on narration. Some of the arguments put forward here seem suspiciously, like special pleadings, he is on stronger ground when he repeats the point that tragedy contains most of the features of the epic and, in addition, has features of its own which make it more pleasurable. Aristotle argues that gesture in itself is not contemptible, nor is the use of gesture restricted merely to actors, for rhapsodes use gestures while reciting epics as well. Again, tragedies make their effect without the accompaniment of movements. It is more vivid and more compressed, and so, poetically more effective. The charge that epics are generally less unified is brought up, but Aristotle concedes that Homer cannot be faulted on this ground. The last chapter does not fully prove the conclusion that he draws. We may feel that that the succinct comment made in chapter 5 (3.5) is

more satisfying on this score: 'anyone who understands what is good and bad in tragedy also understands the epic, since anything that epic poetry has is also present in tragedy, but what is present in tragedy is not always present in epic poetry.'

Katharsis

We have left the discussion of the term *katharsis* till the end of our discussion. All discussions of the *Poetics* approach the term *katharsis* with some trepidation, given that there is a large body of discussion devoted solely to this topic. Perhaps we are now in a better position to assess the place of this concept in Aristotle's theory of poetry. The translation of the term itself is much debated: the terms 'purgation', 'purification' and 'clarification' have been suggested. Some idea of the debates will be found in appropriate places in the notes on the text, and here we shall merely try to interpret the term in the light of our own discussion of the *Poetics*. Instead of committing ourselves to any of the available interpretations, we might try to look at some of Aristotle's other formulations about the end of art in general and tragedy in particular. First of all, we need to remember that Aristotle emphasizes that the experience of art is pleasurable: each art-form has its own unique kind of pleasure. In chapter 14 (7.3), he defines the task of the tragic poet as producing 'the pleasure (*hedonen*) which comes from pity and fear (*apo eleou kai phobou*) . . . by means of imitation (*dia mimeseos*)'. If *katharsis* is present in this formulation, it is implicated in the notion of the pleasure of tragedy. Aristotle also assumes that the best tragedy is the one that produces pity and fear most effectively. If we try to relate this with the general argument that the pleasure of mimesis arises out of understanding, the acquisition of knowledge (*mathesis*), it may seem as though Aristotle is using *katharsis* in connection with the understanding that dawns upon us,

after we experience *Oedipus* or *Lear*: a new way of looking at things, a new perspective.

The critical question which arises here has to do with the tragic emotions themselves. If tragedy arouses pity and fear, possibly in great measure, what happens to these feelings? The ghost of Plato hangs uneasily over Aristotle. It seems that the choice of the term *katharsis* is to suggest that emotions are reduced or removed, in some measure, in the course of the tragic performance, so that we are not left in a disordered state of mind. If Aristotle is able to treat Plato's views on poetic mimesis with greater confidence, the mention of *katharsis* may suggest that he has difficulty in disregarding Plato's charge that poetry arouses dangerous emotions in the minds of people. The general thrust of Aristotle's ethical thought would suggest that some happy mean is reached, where the emotions are properly attuned and tempered. It is unlikely that *katharsis* is the ultimate 'end' of tragedy that the poet sets out to achieve. It is, as Hubbard terms it, 'a therapeutic by-product' of the tragic process. The passage in the *Politics*, which is usually taken as a guide to Aristotle's use of the term in the context of tragedy, makes the point that certain 'sacred tunes' produce 'frenzy' in those who are 'morbidly subject' to excitement. These persons are, thus, restored to good health and sanity, finding 'cure and *katharsis*'. The passage is instructive, especially the analogy with religious rituals. The Dionysiac cult, as we know, involved rituals in which its devotees passed through high excitement and orgiastic madness (witness, for instance, the practice of killing animals with bare hands [*sparagmos*] and devouring its flesh [*omophagia*]), but through this frenzied behaviour the devotees were apparently restored to a more equable state of mind. Dionysus was referred to, in this aspect, as 'Lusios', the liberator. E.R. Dodds mentions many kinds of ritual dances in his classical study, *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Of interest is his study of the Corybantes, a cult that by the fifth century was claiming to have special rituals for the treatment of madness.[6] The '*katharsis*' that they claimed to work also came through participation in rites accompanied by 'orgiastic' music. It should be remembered, however, that Aristotle

in the *Politics* speaks of musical *katharsis* as beneficial for those who are of an acutely morbid disposition. There is nothing to suggest that the audience in tragedy was thus affected. Other people—presumably those who are not unduly nervous or unbalanced—get 'harmless enjoyment' from kathartic melodies, says Aristotle casually in the section of the *Politics* that we were looking at. Maybe this is what the audience of tragedy experienced. But this may also make the term too weak and almost pointless. Aristotle's emphasis on the maximization of pity and fear may suggest that a great tragedy does affect the mind profoundly and alter it from its 'natural state'. But tragedy also brings us back to sanity, and leaves us better instructed and better equipped to deal with our own problems.

All discussions of *katharsis* are bound to be tentative, an attempt to piece together something like a consistent meaning from fragmentary and obscure textual traces. Even though Aristotle speaks of 'the pleasure that comes from pity and fear', in the end he has to provide for the passage from madness to reason. One of the most interesting features of Aristotle's analysis is its rigorous *theoretical* orientation, its hostility to history. The political and historical markers of tragedy are all but rubbed out: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, not to speak of lesser figures like Theodectes and Agathon, stand side by side, comparable purely on the basis of the formal disposition of the works that they write. Aristotle, one remembers, is writing at a time long after the great age of tragedy: the body of plays that he cites with such mastery are probably largely known through reading, not through viewing in the theatre. The contrast beween Aristotle's placing of the great masters with a text like Aristophanes' the *Frogs* is instructive. In the *Frogs* the point of the comparison beween Aeschylus and Euripides is, in fact, their extreme *incompatibility* in terms of age and outlook. Aeschylus is the classic, the relic of Marathon, an ancient heroic type, whereas Euripides is the representative of a clever and irreligious modernity. For Aristotle, the only kind of history that is relevant is the history of the *form*, its development from infancy to maturity. The point about *katharsis*, however, may signify a re-engagement with the world of

historical processes, for Aristotle feels reluctant to let the spectator of tragedy return to society in a heightened emotional state. Does tragedy—the experience of viewing or reading Oedipus or Medea or Lear—really allow us to return to normal life in a state of sanity? Or is the view of the terrible working of fate or the descent into madness or the experience of extreme human suffering, leave us marked in some ineradicable and creative way? If one part of Aristotle's view of the effect of tragedy is with regard to the knowledge that tragedy as a form of mimesis brings, that seems valuable. If, on the other hand, we emphasize the aspect of social hygiene that also seems to be implicated in Aristotle's view of *katharsis*, our response might be a little less positive.

NOTE ON TEXT AND EDITIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The translation given in this edition of the *Poetics* is that of Malcolm Heath (Penguin Books, 1992). All citations in the Introduction are of this translation. The translation has been compared with the Greek text as presented in Rudolf Kassel's edition of the *Poetics* (Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford, 1965). Other editions that have been consulted are those of Ingram Bywater (ed.cit below); D.S. Margoliouth (London, 1911) and A. Rostagni (2nd edition, Turin, 1945). Differences in reading are pointed out in the Notes accompanying this volume. The translations of Plato are from D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom (ed.), *Ancient Literary Criticism*, Oxford, 1972.

Given the problems surrounding the text of the *Poetics*, it is always advisable to consult more than one translation. The following are recommended:

Ingram Bywater: The Art of Poetry, text, translation, notes, Oxford, 1909; a famous edition, made nearly a century ago, but still very useful.

G.M.A. Grube: *On Poetry and Style* Indianapolis: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958.
T.S. Dorsch: *Poetics* in Classical Literary Criticism, London, 1965.
Gerald Else: *Poetics*, Ann Arbor, 1970, is idiosyncratic but insightful.
Margaret Hubbard's translation: *The Poetics* in the volume entitled *Ancient Literary Criticism* (ed.) D.A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, Oxford, 1972. Highly recommended. This volume also contains other Greek and Roman classical texts. Hubbard's translation is also included in the briefer anthology *Classical Literary Criticism* by the same editors (Oxford, 1989).
Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics*, Duckworth, 1987; Richard Janko, *Poetics,* Hackett, 1987.

An excellent general introduction to Aristotle's thought is J.L. Ackrill's *Aristotle the Philosopher,* Oxford, 1981; on his place in the tradition of classical criticism, J.W.H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* (volume 1, Cambridge, 1934) is still very useful. Another useful account is G.M.A. Grube's *The Greek and Roman Critics,* London, 1965. Humphrey House's brief volume *Aristotle's Poetics,* Hart-Davis, 1956, is useful, though somewhat dated. Francis Fergusson's brief but succinct study of the argument of the *Poetics* referred to above is to be found in his *Literary Landmarks,* Rutgers, 1975. A large body of criticism is available on the *Poetics*: a sampling is to be found conveniently in A.O. Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics,* Princeton, 1992. A comprehensive bibliography will also be found in this anthology. For the reader who wishes to study the world of Greek literary culture further, the following three books may suggest new lines of enquiry: E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational,* Berkeley, 1951; Jean-Pierre Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, Eng. trans., New York, 1981 and Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness,* Cambridge, 1986.

The present edition incorporates three essays on different aspects of the *Poetics*. Ramkrishna Bhattacharya considers the meaning of the term 'dianoia' translated as 'thought' or 'reasoning' and its place in

Aristotle's argument.Aristotle says relatively little about this and appears to refer the reader back to his work on Rhetoric. The author discusses the various problems in understanding the application of the term in the case of tragedy, and provides an incisive anagnorisis or recognition takes her beyond the confines of Aristotle's text to a larger philosophical context, thus illuminating the important question of how human knowledge may be constituted. She concludes with an analysis of two very different kinds of texts, Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, and Shakespeare's *King Lear.* The questions prompted by Aristotle's *Poetics*, we realize, prove to be crucial in our understanding both of philosophy and literature. The present editor's contribution extends the discussion of tragic agents in Chapters 13 and 14 and tries to throw light on the vexed problems created by the apparently contradictory judgements contained in them. The essays, it should be pointed out, draw upon different translations and editions of Greek texts (including the *Poetics*). The readings preferred by the authors have been retained and no attempt to achieve uniformity in this regard was thought advisable.

NOTES

1. Gerald Else, *Aristotle: Poetics*, Ann Arbor, 1970, p.10.
2. *Republic* 398; (ed.) D.A.Russell and M.Winterbottom, *Ancient Literary Criticism,* Oxford, 1972, p. 66.
3. D.A. Russell and M.Winterbottom (ed.) *Ancient Literary Criticism* (translation by M.E.Hubbard) Oxford, 1972, p. 134.
4. 'The *Poetics* by Aristotle', *Literary Landmarks* (Rutgers, 1975)
5. Else, p. 76-7
6. E.R.Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, 1951, p. 78-9.

Poetics

1. INTRODUCTION

Let us discuss the art of poetry in general and its species – the effect which each species of poetry has and the correct way to construct plots if the composition is to be of high quality, as well as the number and nature of its component parts, and any other questions that arise within the same field of enquiry. We should begin, as is natural, by taking first principles first. 1 47a

2. POETRY AS A SPECIES OF IMITATION

Epic poetry and the composition of tragedy, as well as comedy and the arts of dithyrambic poetry and (for the most part) of music for pipe or lyre, are all (taken together) *imitations*. They can be differentiated from each other in three respects: in respect of their different *media* of imitation, or different *objects*, or a different *mode* (i.e. a different manner).

2.1 *Medium*

Some people use the medium of colour and shape to produce imitations of various objects by making visual images (some through art, some through practice); others do this by means of the voice. Similarly in the case of the arts I have mentioned: in all of them the medium of imitation is rhythm, language and melody, but these may

be employed either separately or in combination. For example, music for pipe or lyre (and any other arts which have a similar effect, e.g. music for pan-pipes) uses melody and rhythm only, while dance uses rhythm by itself and without melody (since dancers too imitate character, emotion and action by means of rhythm expressed in movement).

The art which uses language unaccompanied, either in prose or in 47b verse (either combining verse-forms with each other or using a single kind of verse), remains without a name to the present day. We have no general term referring to the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and Socratic dialogues, nor to any imitation that one might produce using iambic trimeters, elegiac couplets or any other such verse-form. Admittedly people attach 'poetry' to the name of the verse-form, and thus refer to 'elegiac poets' and 'hexameter poets'; i.e. they do not call people 'poets' because they produce imitations, but indiscriminately on the basis of their use of verse. In fact, even if someone publishes a medical or scientific text in verse, people are in the habit of applying the same term. But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the form of verse they use; so it would be fair to call the former a poet, but the latter a natural scientist rather than a poet. On the same principle, even if someone should produce an imitation by combining all the verse-forms (as Chaeremon composed his *Centaur*, which is a rhapsody combining all the verse-forms) he should still be termed a poet. So this is the way distinctions are to be drawn in this area.

There are also some arts which use all the media mentioned above (i.e. rhythm, melody and verse), e.g. dithyrambic and nomic poetry, tragedy and comedy; these differ in that the former use them all simultaneously, the latter in distinct parts.

These, then, are what I mean by differences between the arts in the medium of imitation.

2.2 *Object*

Those who imitate, imitate agents; and these must be either admirable or inferior. (Character almost always corresponds to just these two categories, since everyone is differentiated in character by defect or excellence.) Alternatively they must be better people than we are, or worse, or of the same sort (compare painters: Polygnotus portrayed better people, Pauson worse people, Dionysius people similar to us). So it is clear that each of the kinds of imitation mentioned above will exhibit these differences, and will be distinguished by the imitation of distinct objects in this way. These dissimilarities are possible in dance and in music for pipe or lyre, and also in connection with language and unaccompanied verse (for example, Homer imitates better people; Cleophon people similar to us; Hegemon of Thasos, who invented parodies, or Nicochares, the author of the *Deiliad*, worse people); similarly in connection with dithyrambs and nomes (one could imitate as Timotheus and Philoxenus did the Cyclopes). The very same difference distinguishes tragedy and comedy from each other; the latter aims to imitate people worse than our contemporaries, the former better. 2 48a

2.3 *Mode*

A third difference between them is the mode in which one may imitate each of these objects. It is possible to imitate the same objects in the same medium sometimes by narrating (either using a different *persona*, as in Homer's poetry, or as the same person without variation), or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity. 3

So imitation can be differentiated in these three respects, as we said at the outset: medium, object and mode. So in one respect Sophocles would be the same kind of imitator as Homer, since both imitate admirable people, but in another the same as Aristophanes,

since both imitate agents and people doing things. This is the reason – some say – for the term 'drama': i.e. that the poets imitate people doing things. It is in consequence of this too that the Dorians lay claim to tragedy and comedy. The Megarians lay claim to comedy – both those on the mainland (who allege that it arose in the period of their democracy), and those in Sicily (that being the birthplace of the poet Epicharmus, who was much earlier than Chionides and Magnes); and some of the Peloponnesians lay claim to tragedy. They use the names as evidence. They say that they call outlying villages *kômai*, while Athenians call them *dêmoi*, the assumption being that comedians were so-called not from the revel or *kômos*, but because they toured the villages when expelled from the town in disgrace. And they say that they use the term *dran* for 'do', the Athenians *prattein*.

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So much, then, for the number of ways in which imitation is differentiated, and what they are.

3. THE ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY OF POETRY

3.1 *Origins*

4 In general, two causes seem likely to have given rise to the art of poetry, both of them natural.

Imitation comes naturally to human beings from childhood (and in this they differ from other animals, i.e. in having a strong propensity to imitation and in learning their earliest lessons through imitation); so does the universal pleasure in imitations. What happens in practice is evidence of this: we take delight in viewing the most accurate possible images of objects which in themselves cause distress when we see them (e.g. the shapes of the lowest species of

animal, and corpses). The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it. This is the reason why people take delight in seeing images; what happens is that as they view them they come to understand and work out what each thing is (e.g. 'This is so-and-so'). If one happens not to have seen the thing before, it will not give pleasure as an imitation, but because of its execution or colour, or for some other reason.

Given, then, that imitation is natural to us, and also melody and rhythm (it being obvious that verse-forms are segments of rhythm), from the beginning those who had the strongest natural inclination towards these things generated poetry out of improvised activities by a process of gradual innovation.

3.2 *Early history*

Poetry bifurcated in accordance with the corresponding kinds of character: more serious-minded people imitated fine actions, i.e. those of fine persons; more trivial people imitated those of inferior persons (the latter at first composing invectives, while the others composed hymns and encomia). We are not in a position to identify a poem of the latter kind by any of the poets who preceded Homer, although they are likely to have been numerous; but beginning with Homer we can do so (e.g. his *Margites* and similar poems). Because of its suitability, the iambic verse-form developed in these poems; indeed, the reason it is now called 'iambic' is that they wrote lampoons or *iamboi* against each other in that verse-form. And so some of the ancients became composers of heroic poetry, others of lampoons. But just as Homer was the outstanding poet of the serious kind, since he did not just compose well but also made his imitations dramatic, so too he was the first to adumbrate the form of comedy; what he composed was not an invective, but a dramatization of the laughable. His *Margites* stands in the same relation to comedy as the

49a *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do to tragedy. When tragedy and comedy made their appearance those who inclined towards either kind of poetry became, in accordance with their nature, poets of comedy (instead of lampoons) or of tragedy (instead of epic), because these forms were greater and more highly esteemed than the others.

3.3 *Tragedy*

This is not the place for a detailed investigation of whether or not tragedy is now sufficiently developed with respect to its formal constituents (judged both in its own right and in relation to theatrical performances). But originally it developed from improvisations. (This is true of tragedy, and also of comedy: the former arose from the leaders of the dithyramb, the latter from the leaders of the phallic songs which are still customary even now in many cities.) Then tragedy was gradually enhanced as people developed each new aspect of it that came to light. After undergoing many transformations tragedy came to rest, because it had attained its natural state.

The number of actors was increased from one to two by Aeschylus, who also reduced the choral parts and made the spoken word play the leading role; the third actor and scene-painting were introduced by Sophocles. In addition, the magnitude increased from short plots; and in place of comic diction, as a consequence of a change from the satyric style, tragedy acquired dignity at a late stage, and the iambic verse-form was adopted instead of the trochaic tetrameter. (They used tetrameters at first because the composition was satyric in manner, and more akin to dance. But when speech was introduced nature itself found the appropriate form of verse, iambic being the verse-form closest to speech. There is evidence of this: we speak iambics in conversation with each other very often, but rarely dactylic hexameters – and only when we depart from the normal conversational tone.) As for the number of episodes and other such features, the way each of them is said to have been elab-

orated may be taken as read; it would probably be a major undertaking to go through them all individually.

3.4 *Comedy*

Comedy is (as we have said) an imitation of inferior people – not, 5
however, with respect to every kind of defect: the laughable is a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction; for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain.

The transformations which tragedy has undergone, and those responsible for them, have not been forgotten; but, because it was not taken seriously, little attention was paid to comedy at first. Indeed, it *49b*
was relatively late that the archon first granted a comic chorus; before that the performers were volunteers. So comedy already had some of its features before there is any mention of those identified as comic poets, and it is not known who introduced masks, prologues, the number of actors and so forth. But plot-construction came originally from Sicily; among Athenian poets it was Crates who first abandoned the form of a lampoon and began to construct universalized stories and plots.

3.5 *Epic*

Epic poetry corresponds to tragedy in so far as it is an imitation in verse of admirable people. But they differ in that epic uses one verse-form alone, and is narrative. They also differ in length, since tragedy tries so far as possible to keep within a single day, or not to exceed it by much, whereas epic is unrestricted in time, and differs in this respect. (At first, however, people used to make no distinction between tragedy and epic in this respect.)

Some of the component parts are common to both, others are

peculiar to tragedy. Consequently anyone who understands what is good and bad in tragedy also understands about epic, since anything that epic poetry has is also present in tragedy, but what is present in tragedy is not all in epic poetry.

4. TRAGEDY: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Definition*

6 We shall discuss the art of imitation in hexameter verse and comedy later; as for tragedy, let us resume the discussion by stating the definition of its essence on the basis of what has already been said.

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions.

(By 'language made pleasurable' I mean that which possesses rhythm and melody, i.e. song. By the separation of its species I mean that some parts are composed in verse alone; others by contrast make use of song.)

4.2 *Component parts*

Since the imitation is performed by actors, it follows first of all that the management of the *spectacle* must be a component part of tragedy. Then there is *lyric poetry* and *diction*, since these are the medium in which the actors perform the imitation. (By 'diction' I mean the

actual composition of the verse; what is meant by 'lyric poetry' is self-evident.)

Now, tragedy is an imitation of an action, and the action is performed by certain agents. These must be people of a certain kind with respect to their character and reasoning. (It is on the basis of people's character and reasoning that we say that their actions are of *50a* a certain kind, and in respect of their actions that people enjoy success or failure.) So *plot* is the imitation of the action (by 'plot' here I mean the organization of events); *character* is that in respect of which we say that the agent is of a certain kind; and *reasoning* is the speech which the agents use to argue a case or put forward an opinion.

So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six component parts, which determine the tragedy's quality: i.e. plot, character, diction, reasoning, spectacle and lyric poetry. The medium of imitation comprises two parts, the mode one, and the object three; and there is nothing apart from these.

4.3 *The primacy of plot*

Virtually all tragedians, one might say, use these formal elements; for in fact every drama alike has spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning. But the most important of them is the structure of the events:

(i) Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality; people possess certain qualities in accordance with their character, but they achieve well-being or its opposite on the basis of how they fare. So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions. So the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all.

(ii) Furthermore, there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without character. The tragedies of most modern poets lack character, and in general there are many such poets. Compare, among painters, the relation between Zeuxis and Polygnotus: the latter is good at depicting character, but Zeuxis' painting has no character.

(iii) Also, if one were to compose a series of speeches expressive of character, however successful they are in terms of diction and reasoning, it will not achieve the stated function of tragedy; a tragedy which, though it uses these elements less adequately, has a plot and a structure of events will do so much more effectively.

(iv) Additionally, the most important devices by which tragedy sways emotion are parts of the plot, i.e. reversals and recognitions.

(v) A further indication is that those who are trying to write poetry are capable of accuracy in diction and character before they can construct the events; compare too almost all the early poets.

4.4 *The ranking completed*

So the plot is the source and (as it were) the soul of tragedy; character is second. *50b* (It is much the same in the case of painting: if someone were to apply exquisitely beautiful colours at random he would give less pleasure than if he had outlined an image in black and white.) Tragedy is an imitation of an action, and on account above all of the action it is an imitation of agents.

Third is reasoning. This is the ability to say what is implicit in a situation and appropriate to it, which in prose is the function of the arts of statesmanship and of rhetoric. Older poets used to make people speak like statesmen; contemporary poets make them speak rhetorically. Character is the kind of thing which discloses the nature of a choice; for this reason speeches in which there is nothing at all which the speaker chooses or avoids do not possess character. Reasoning refers to the means by which people argue that

something is or is not the case, or put forward some universal proposition.

Fourth is diction. By 'diction' I mean, as was said before, verbal expression; this has the same effect both in verse and in prose speeches.

Of the remaining parts, song is the most important of the sources of pleasure. Spectacle is attractive, but is very inartistic and is least germane to the art of poetry. For the effect of tragedy is not dependent on performance and actors; also, the art of the property-manager has more relevance to the production of visual effects than does that of the poets.

5. PLOT: BASIC CONCEPTS

Given these definitions, let us discuss next what qualities the structure of the events should have, since this is the first and most important part of tragedy. 7

5.1 *Completeness*

We have laid down that tragedy is an imitation of a complete, i.e. whole, action, possessing a certain magnitude. (There is such a thing as a whole which possesses no magnitude.) A *whole* is that which has a beginning, a middle and an end. A *beginning* is that which itself does not follow necessarily from anything else, but some second thing naturally exists or occurs after it. Conversely, an *end* is that which does itself naturally follow from something else, either necessarily or in general, but there is nothing else after it. A *middle* is that which itself comes after something else, and some other thing comes

after it. Well-constructed plots should therefore not begin or end at any arbitrary point, but should employ the stated forms.

5.2 *Magnitude*

Any beautiful object, whether a living organism or any other entity composed of parts, must not only possess those parts in proper order, but its *magnitude* also should not be arbitrary; beauty consists in magnitude as well as order. For this reason no organism could be beautiful if it is excessively small (since observation becomes confused as it comes close to having no perceptible duration in time) or

51a excessively large (since the observation is then not simultaneous, and the observers find that the sense of unity and wholeness is lost from their observation, e.g. if there were an animal a thousand miles long). So just as in the case of physical objects and living organisms, they should possess a certain magnitude, and this should be such as can readily be taken in at one view, so in the case of plots: they should have a certain length, and this should be such as can readily be held in memory.

The definition of length which is determined by theatrical performances and perception is not relevant to the art of poetry; if it were necessary to perform a hundred tragedies they would time the performances by the clock, as they say used to be done on other occasions. But the definition which agrees with the actual nature of the matter is that invariably the greater the plot is (up to the limits of simultaneous perspicuity) the more beautiful it is with respect to magnitude; or, to state a straightforward definition, 'the magnitude in which a series of events occurring sequentially in accordance with probability or necessity gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune', is an adequate definition of magnitude.

5.3 *Unity*

A plot is not (as some think) unified because it is concerned with a single person. An indeterminately large number of things happen to any one person, not all of which constitute a unity; likewise a single individual performs many actions, and they do not make up a single action. So it is clear that a mistake has been made by all those poets who have composed a *Heracleid* or *Theseid*, or poems of that kind, on the assumption that, just because Heracles was one person, the plot too is bound to be unified. Just as Homer excels in other respects, he seems to have seen this point clearly as well, whether through art or instinct. When he composed the *Odyssey* he did not include everything which happened to Odysseus (e.g. the wounding on Parnassus and the pretence of madness during the mobilization: the occurrence of either of these events did not make the occurrence of the other necessary or probable); instead, he constructed the *Odyssey* about a single action of the kind we are discussing. The same is true of the *Iliad*. 8

5.4 *Determinate structure*

Just as in other imitative arts the imitation is unified if it imitates a single object, so too the plot, as the imitation of an action, should imitate a single, unified action – and one that is also a whole. So the structure of the various sections of the events must be such that the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates and changes the whole. If the presence or absence of something has no discernible effect, it is not a part of the whole.

5.5 *Universality*

9 It is also clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or
51b necessity. The historian and the poet are not distinguished by their use of verse or prose; it would be possible to turn the works of Herodotus into verse, and it would be a history in verse just as much as in prose. The distinction is this: the one says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen.

For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The *universal* is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names. The particular is the actions or experiences of (e.g.) Alcibiades.

In the case of comedy this is in fact clear. The poets construct the plot on the basis of probabilities, and then supply names of their own choosing; they do not write about a particular individual, as the lampoonists do. In the case of tragedy they do keep to actual names. The reason for this is that what is possible is plausible; we are disinclined to believe that what has not happened is possible, but it is obvious that what has happened is possible – because it would not have happened if it were not. To be sure, even in tragedy in some cases only one or two of the names are familiar, while the rest are invented, and in some none at all, e.g. in Agathon's *Antheus*; in this play both the events and the names are invented, but it gives no less pleasure. So one need not try at all costs to keep to the traditional stories which are the subjects of tragedy; in fact, it would be absurd to do so, since even what is familiar is familiar only to a few, and yet gives pleasure to everyone.

So it is clear from these points that the poet must be a maker of

plots rather than of verses, insofar as he is a poet with respect to imitation, and the object of his imitation is action. Even if in fact he writes about what has happened, he is none the less a poet; there is nothing to prevent some of the things which have happened from being the kind of thing which probably would happen, and it is in that respect that he is concerned with them as a poet.

5.6 *Defective plots*

Of simple plots and actions, the episodic ones are the worst. By an *episodic* plot I mean one in which the sequence of episodes is neither necessary nor probable. Second-rate poets compose plots of this kind of their own accord; good poets do so on account of the actors – in writing pieces for competitive display they draw out the plot beyond its potential, and are often forced to distort the sequence. *52a*

6. PLOT: SPECIES AND COMPONENTS

6.1 *Astonishment*

The imitation is not just of a complete action, but also of events that evoke fear and pity. These effects occur above all when things come about contrary to expectation but because of one another. This will be more astonishing than if they come about spontaneously or by chance, since even chance events are found most astonishing when they appear to have happened as if for a purpose – as, for example, the statue of Mitys in Argos killed the man who was responsible for Mitys' death by falling on top of him as he was looking at it. Things like that are not thought to occur at random. So inevitably plots of this kind will be better.

6.2 *Simple and complex plots*

10 Some plots are simple, others complex, since the actions of which the plots are imitations are themselves also of these two kinds. By a *simple* action I mean one which is, in the sense defined, continuous and unified, and in which the change of fortune comes about without reversal or recognition. By *complex*, I mean one in which the change of fortune involves reversal or recognition or both. These must arise from the actual structure of the plot, so that they come about as a result of what has happened before, out of necessity or in accordance with probability. There is an important difference between a set of events happening *because* of certain other events and *after* certain other events.

6.3 *Reversal*

11 A *reversal* is a change to the opposite in the actions being performed, as stated – and this, as we have been saying, in accordance with probability or necessity. For example, in the *Oedipus* someone came to give Oedipus good news and free him from his fear with regard to his mother, but by disclosing Oedipus' identity he brought about the opposite result; and in the *Lynceus*, Lynceus himself was being led off to be killed, with Danaus following to kill him, but it came about as a consequence of preceding events that the latter was killed and Lynceus was saved.

6.4 *Recognition*

Recognition, as in fact the term indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, disclosing either a close relationship or enmity, on the part of people marked out for good or bad fortune. Recognition

is best when it occurs simultaneously with a reversal, like the one in the *Oedipus*.

There are indeed other kinds of recognition. Recognition can come about in the manner stated with respect to inanimate and chance objects; and it is also possible to recognize whether someone has or has not performed some action. But the one that has most to do with the plot and most to do with the action is the one I have mentioned. For a recognition and reversal of that kind will involve pity or fear, and it is a basic premise that tragedy is an imitation of ac- *52b* tions of this kind. Moreover, bad fortune or good fortune will be the outcome in such cases.

Since the recognition is a recognition of some person or persons, some involve the recognition of one person only on the part of the other, when it is clear who the other is; but sometimes there must be a recognition on both sides (e.g. Iphigeneia is recognized by Orestes from the sending of the letter, but the recognition of Orestes by Iphigeneia had to be different).

6.5 *Suffering*

So there are these two parts of the plot – reversal and recognition; a third is suffering. Of these, reversal and recognition have already been discussed; *suffering* is an action that involves destruction or pain (e.g. deaths in full view, extreme agony, woundings and so on).

6.6 *Quantitative parts of tragedy*

We have already mentioned the component parts of tragedy which 12 should be regarded as its formal elements. In quantitative terms, the separate parts into which it is divided are as follows: prologue; episode; finale; choral parts, comprising entry-song and ode – these are

common to all tragedies, while songs from the stage and dirges are found only in some.

The *prologue* is the whole part of a tragedy before the entry-song of the chorus; an *episode* is a whole part of a tragedy between whole choral songs; the *finale* is the whole part of a tragedy after which there is no choral song. Of the choral part, the *entry-song* is the first whole utterance of a chorus; an *ode* is a choral song without anapaests or trochaics; a *dirge* is a lament shared by the chorus and from the stage.

We have already mentioned the component parts of tragedy which should be regarded as its formal elements. In quantitative terms, the separate parts into which it is divided are these.

7. THE BEST KINDS OF TRAGIC PLOT

7.1 *First introduction*

13 What, then, should one aim at and what should one avoid in constructing plots? What is the source of the effect at which tragedy aims? These are the topics which would naturally follow on from what has just been said.

7.2 *First deduction*

The construction of the best tragedy should be complex rather than simple; and it should also be an imitation of events that evoke fear and pity, since that is the distinctive feature of this kind of imitation. So it is clear first of all that decent men should not be seen undergoing a change from good fortune to bad fortune – this does not evoke fear or pity, but disgust. Nor should depraved people be seen

undergoing a change from bad fortune to good fortune – this is the least tragic of all: it has none of the right effects, since it is neither agreeable, nor does it evoke pity or fear. Nor again should a very wicked person fall from good fortune to bad fortune – that kind of structure would be agreeable, but would not excite pity or fear, since the one has to do with someone who is suffering undeservedly, the other with someone who is like ourselves (I mean, pity has to do with the undeserving sufferer, fear with the person like us); so what happens will evoke neither pity nor fear. *53a*

We are left, therefore, with the person intermediate between these. This is the sort of person who is not outstanding in moral excellence or justice; on the other hand, the change to bad fortune which he undergoes is not due to any moral defect or depravity, but to an error of some kind. He is one of those people who are held in great esteem and enjoy great good fortune, like Oedipus, Thyestes, and distinguished men from that kind of family.

It follows that a well-formed plot will be simple rather than (as some people say) double, and that it must involve a change not *to* good fortune *from* bad fortune, but (on the contrary) *from* good fortune *to* bad fortune – and this must be due not to depravity but to a serious error on the part of someone of the kind specified (or better than that, rather than worse). There is evidence of this in practice. At first poets used to pick out stories at random; but nowadays the best tragedies are constructed around a few households, e.g. about Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus and any others whose lot it has been to experience something terrible – or to perform some terrible action.

So the best tragedy, in artistic terms, is based on this structure. This is why those who criticize Euripides for doing this in his tragedies, most of which end in bad fortune, are making the same mistake; for this is, as has been stated, correct. There is very powerful evidence for this. On stage and in performance people recognize that plays of this kind (provided that they are successfully executed) are the most tragic, and Euripides, even if his technique is

faulty in other respects, is regarded as the most tragic of poets.

Second-best is the structure which some say comes first – that which has a double structure like the *Odyssey*, and which ends with the opposite outcome for better and worse people. It is thought to come first because of the weakness of audiences; the poets follow the audiences' lead and compose whatever is to their taste. But this is not the pleasure which comes from tragedy; it is more characteristic of comedy. In comedy even people who are the bitterest enemies in the story, like Orestes and Aegisthus, go off reconciled in the end, and no one gets killed by anybody.

7.3 *Second introduction*

14 It is possible for the evocation of fear and pity to result from the 53b spectacle, and also from the structure of the events itself. The latter is preferable and is the mark of a better poet. The plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, anyone who hears the events which occur shudders and feels pity at what happens; this is how someone would react on hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*. Producing this effect through spectacle is less artistic, and is dependent on the production. Those who use spectacle to produce an effect which is not evocative of fear, but simply monstrous, have nothing to do with tragedy; one should not seek every pleasure from tragedy, but the one that is characteristic of it. And since the poet should produce the pleasure which comes from pity and fear, and should do so by means of imitation, clearly this must be brought about in the events.

7.4 *Second deduction*

Let us therefore take up the question of what classes of events appear terrible or pitiable.

Necessarily, we are concerned with interactions between people who are closely connected with each other, or between enemies, or between neutrals. If enemy acts on enemy, there is nothing pitiable either in the action itself or in its imminence, except in respect of the actual suffering in itself. Likewise with neutrals. What one should look for are situations in which sufferings arise within close relationships, e.g. brother kills brother, son father, mother son, or son mother – or is on the verge of killing them, or does something else of the same kind.

Now, one cannot undo traditional stories (I mean, for example, Clytaemnestra's death at Orestes' hands, or Eriphyle's at Alcmeon's); but one has to discover for oneself how to use even the traditional stories well. Let us state more clearly what this involves. It is possible for the action to come about in the way that the old poets used to do it, with people acting in full knowledge and awareness; this is in fact how Euripides portrayed Medea killing her children. It is also possible for the action to be performed, but for the agents to do the terrible deed in ignorance and only then to recognize the close connection, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus*. (This is outside the play: examples in the tragedy itself are Astydamas' *Alcmeon* or Telegonus in the *Odysseus Wounded*.) A third possibility besides these is for someone to be on the verge of performing some irreparable deed through ignorance, and for the recognition to pre-empt the act. Besides these there is no other possibility: necessarily the agents must either act or not act, either knowingly or in ignorance.

Of these, being on the verge of acting wittingly and not doing so is worst; this is disgusting, and is not tragic since there is no suffering. So no one composes in this way, or only rarely (e.g. Haemon and Creon in the *Antigone*). Performing the action is second; but it is better if the action is performed in ignorance and followed by a recognition – there is nothing disgusting in this, and the recognition has great emotional impact. But the last case is best; I mean, for example, in the *Cresphontes* Merope is on the verge of killing her son but does not do it, but instead recognizes him; the same happens *54a*

with sister and brother in the *Iphigeneia*; and in the *Helle* the son recognizes his mother when on the verge of handing her over.

For this reason, as I said some time ago, tragedies are concerned with a limited number of families. Although their search was guided by chance rather than art, poets discovered how to produce this kind of effect in plots; so they are forced to turn to just those households in which this kind of suffering has come about.

8. OTHER ASPECTS OF TRAGEDY

8.1 *Character*

Enough has been said about the structure of events and what plots
15 should be like; as for character, there are four things to aim at:

(i) First and foremost, *goodness*. As was said earlier, speech or action will possess character if it discloses the nature of a deliberate choice; the character is good if the choice is good. This is possible in each class of person: there is such a thing as a good woman and a good slave, even though one of these is perhaps deficient and the other generally speaking inferior.

(ii) Secondly, *appropriateness*: it is possible for the character to be courageous, but for this to be an inappropriate way for a woman to display courage or cleverness.

(iii) Thirdly, *likeness*: this is not the same as making character good and appropriate, as has already been stated.

(iv) Fourthly, *consistency*: even if the subject of the imitation is inconsistent, and that is the kind of character that is presupposed, it should nevertheless be consistently inconsistent.

An example of unnecessary badness of character is Menelaus in the *Orestes*; of impropriety and inappropriateness, Odysseus'

lament in the *Scylla* and Melanippe's speech. An example of inconsistency is the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*: when she pleads for her life to be spared she is not at all like her later self – but in characterization, just as much as in the structure of events, one ought always to look for what is necessary or probable: it should be necessary or probable that this kind of person says or does this kind of thing, and it should be necessary or probable that this happens after that.

(Clearly, therefore, the resolutions of plots should also come about from the plot itself, and not by means of a theatrical device, as *54b* in the *Medea*, or the events concerned with the launching of the ships in the *Iliad*. A theatrical device may be used for things outside the play – whether prior events which are beyond human knowledge, or subsequent events which need prediction and narration – since we grant that the gods can see everything. But there should be nothing irrational in the events themselves; or, failing that, it should be outside the play, as for example in Sophocles' *Oedipus*.)

Since tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are, one should imitate good portrait-painters. In rendering the individual form, they paint people as they are, but make them better-looking. In the same way the poet who is imitating people who are irascible or lazy or who have other traits of character of that sort should portray them as having these characteristics, but also as decent people. For example, Homer portrayed Achilles as both a good man and a paradigm of obstinacy.

One should observe these points closely, and in addition those corresponding to the perceptions that are necessary concomitants of the art of poetry. It is possible to make many mistakes with respect to these. But they have been discussed in sufficient detail in my published works.

8.2 *Kinds of recognition*

16 We have already said what recognition is. Its kinds are:

(i) First of all, the least artistic kind (and the one which people use most, because of their lack of ingenuity) is that by means of tokens. Some of these are congenital (e.g. 'the spear the earth-born bear', or stars such as Carcinus used in his *Thyestes*), and some are acquired; of the latter, some are physical characteristics (e.g. scars), others are external (e.g. necklaces, or the use of the boat in the *Tyro*). It is possible to make better or worse use of these. For example, Odysseus is recognized by means of the scar both by the nurse and by the swineherds, but in different ways. Recognitions that are used only for confirmation are less artistic (so too all recognitions of that kind); recognitions which arise out of a reversal, as in the bath-scene, are better.

(ii) Second are those which are contrived by the poet; for that reason they are inartistic. For example, Orestes in the *Iphigeneia* revealed his own identity; Iphigeneia's identity is revealed by the letter, but Orestes declares in person what the poet (instead of the plot) requires. This brings it close to the error mentioned above: it would have been possible actually to bring tokens with him. There is also the 'voice of the shuttle' in Sophocles' *Tereus*.

(iii) The third is by means of memory, when someone grasps the significance of something that he sees. This is how it is in Dicaeogenes' *Cyprians*, where he sees the painting and bursts into tears, and in the tale told to Alcinous, where Odysseus listens to the lyre-player, is reminded of his past and weeps; recognition results in both cases.

55a

(iv) Fourth is that which arises from inference. For example, in the *Choephori*: 'someone similar has come; no one is similar except Orestes; so he has come'. There is also the recognition which Polyidus the sophist suggested for Iphigeneia; he said that it was

probable for Orestes to infer that his sister had been sacrificed, and so it was now his turn to be sacrificed. Also in Theodectes' *Tydeus*, that he came to find a son, but is perishing himself. And the recognition in the *Sons of Phineus*; when the women saw the place they inferred that it was their fate to die there, since that was where they had been exposed.

(v) There is also a composite kind arising from a false inference on the part of the audience. For example, in *Odysseus the False Messenger*: the fact that he can bend the bow and nobody else is contrived by the poet as a premise, as is his claim that he will recognize the bow which he has not seen; and although he is going to make himself known by means of the former, he actually does so by means of the latter, which involves a false inference.

(vi) The best recognition of all is that which arises out of the actual course of events, where the emotional impact is achieved through events that are probable, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus* and the *Iphigeneia* (her wish to send a letter is probable). Only this kind does without contrived tokens and necklaces. Second-best are those which arise from inference.

8.3 *Visualizing the action*

When constructing plots and working them out complete with their linguistic expression, one should so far as possible visualize what is happening. By envisaging things very vividly in this way, as if one were actually present at the events themselves, one can find out what is appropriate, and inconsistencies are least likely to be overlooked. The criticism made of Carcinus provides evidence of this: Amphiaraus was coming back from the temple; this would have escaped the notice of anyone who did not see it, but it failed in performance because the audience was dissatisfied with it. 17

One should also, as far as possible, work plots out using gestures. Given the same natural talent, those who are actually experiencing

the emotions are the most convincing; someone who is distressed or angry acts out distress and irritation most authentically. (This is why the art of poetry belongs to people who are naturally gifted or mad; of these, the former are adaptable, and the latter are not in their right mind.)

8.4 *Outlines and episodization*

Stories, even ones which have been the subject of a previous poem, 55b should first be set out in universal terms when one is making use of them oneself; on that basis, one should then turn the story into episodes and elaborate it.

As an example of what I mean by considering the universal, take the *Iphigeneia*: 'A girl has been sacrificed and has disappeared without those who performed the sacrifice being aware of it. Set down in another country, where it was the custom to sacrifice foreigners to the goddess, she becomes the priestess of this rite. It subsequently happens that the priestess's brother arrives (the fact that the god ordered him to go there is outside the universal; so too the reason); on his arrival he is captured, but when he is on the verge of being sacrificed he discloses his identity (either as Euripides did it, or as in Polyidus, by saying – as was quite probable – that it was his lot, as well as his sister's, to be sacrificed). Escape ensues.' After that, one should supply the names and turn the story into episodes. The episodes must be appropriate – for example, in the case of Orestes the fit of madness which resulted in his capture, and the escape by means of the purification.

In plays the episodes are concise, but in epic poetry they are used to increase the length. The story of the *Odyssey* is not very long: 'A man has been away from home for many years; he is kept under close observation by Poseidon, and is alone; at home affairs are in such a state that his property is being squandered by the suitors, and plots are being laid against his son. Despite being shipwrecked he

reaches home, reveals his identity to a number of people and attacks. He survives and destroys his enemies.' That much is integral; the rest is episodes.

8.5 *Complication and resolution*

Every tragedy consists of a complication and a resolution. What is outside the play, and often some of what is inside, comprises the complication; the resolution is the rest. By *complication* I mean everything from the beginning up to and including the section which immediately precedes the change to good fortune or bad fortune; by *resolution* I mean everything from the beginning of the change of fortune to the end. Thus in Theodectes' *Lynceus* the complication consists of events before the play, the seizure of the child and the disclosure of the parents; the resolution is everything from the capital charge to the end. 18

8.6 *Kinds of tragedy*

There are four kinds of tragedy (since that was also the number of component parts mentioned): complex tragedy, depending entirely on reversal and recognition; tragedy of suffering (e.g. plays about Ajax or Ixion); tragedy of character (e.g. *Women of Phthia* and *Peleus*); and, fourth, simple tragedy (e.g. *Daughters of Phorcys*, *Prometheus* and plays set in the underworld). *56a*

By preference one should try to include all the component parts, or failing that most of them and the most important, especially given the captious criticisms which people make of poets nowadays. Because there have been poets good at each part, people expect individual poets to surpass the particular excellence of every one.

The proper basis for contrasting and comparing tragedies is principally in virtue of the plot, i.e. whether the complication and

resolution are the same. Many poets are good at complication but handle the resolution badly; but both should be treated with equal care.

8.7 *Tragedy and epic*

Bearing in mind what I have already said several times, one should not compose a tragedy out of a body of material which would serve for an epic – by which I mean one that contains a multiplicity of stories (for example, if one were to use the whole plot of the *Iliad*). In epic, because of its length, every part is given the appropriate magnitude; but in plays the result is quite contrary to one's expectation. There is evidence of this in the fact that everyone who has composed a *Sack of Troy* as a whole, and not piecemeal like Euripides, or a *Niobe* and not like Aeschylus, has either failed or done badly in the competition; even Agathon failed in this one respect.

8.8 *Astonishment*

In reversals and in simple actions poets use astonishment to achieve their chosen aims; this is tragic and agreeable. This happens when someone who is clever but bad (like Sisyphus) is deceived, or someone who is courageous but unjust is defeated. There is no violation of probability in this; as Agathon said, it is probable for many improbable things to happen.

8.9 *The chorus*

One should handle the chorus as one of the actors; it should be part of the whole and should contribute to the performance – not as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles. In the other poets the songs have no

more to do with the plot than they do with any other play; this is the reason why they sing interludes. This is a practice which Agathon was the first to start; but what is the difference between singing interludes and transferring a speech or a whole episode from one play into another?

9. DICTION

9.1 *Introduction*

The other formal elements have been discussed; it remains to discuss diction and reasoning. The discussion of reasoning can be reserved for my *Rhetoric*, since it has more to do with that field of enquiry. Under reasoning fall those effects which must be produced by language; these include proof and refutation, the production of emotions (e.g. pity, fear, anger, etc.), and also establishing importance or unimportance. 19 56b

(It is clear that in the events too one should apply the same principles when it is necessary to make something seem pitiable or terrible, important or probable. The only difference is that the one set of effects should be apparent without explicit statement, while the others must be produced in speech by the speaker, and must come about through the spoken word. What would the speaker's function be if the necessary effect were evident without the use of language?)

As for diction, one kind of enquiry is into the forms of utterance; knowledge of these belongs to the art of performance and to the person who has that kind of expert knowledge – e.g. what is a command, prayer, narrative, threat, question, answer, and anything else of that kind. Knowledge or ignorance of these matters does not give rise to any criticism relevant to the art of poetry that is actually worth taking seriously; no one could suppose that there is an error

in the point Protagoras criticized (i.e. that Homer thinks he is uttering a prayer but is in fact giving an order when he says 'Goddess, sing the wrath': Protagoras' point is that telling someone to do something or not is an order). So let us set that aside as an investigation belonging to an art other than that of poetry.

9.2 *Basic concepts*

20 Diction as a whole has the following elements: phoneme, syllable, connective, noun, verb, conjunction, inflection, utterance.

(i) A *phoneme* is an indivisible vocalization – not any kind, however, but one which can be part of a composite vocalization; some animal noises are indivisible, but these are not what I mean by phonemes. Phonemes are classified as vowels, continuants and mutes:

(a) a *vowel* does not involve contact between the organs of speech, and has audible sound;

(b) a *continuant* does involve contact between the organs of speech, and has audible sound: e.g. *s*, *r*;

(c) a *mute* does involve contact between the organs of speech, but does not have sound in itself; it becomes audible when combined with a phoneme which has audible sound: e.g. *g*, *d*.

Phonemes differ in the shape of the mouth, in the point of contact, in the presence or absence of aspiration, in length or brevity, and in acute, grave or intermediate pitch. Detailed discussion of these differences belongs to the study of verse-forms.

(ii) A *syllable* is a non-signifying composite vocalization, comprising a mute and a phoneme which has audible sound (thus *gr* is a syllable without an *a*, and also with an *a*, i.e. *gra*). Detailed discussion of the differences between syllables also belongs to the study of verse-forms.

(iii) A *connective* is:

57a (a) A non-signifying vocalization which neither prevents nor

effects the composition of a single significant vocalization from two or more vocalizations, and which should not occur at the beginning of an utterance by itself (e.g. *men, dê, toi, de*). Or:

(b) A non-signifying vocalization which is capable of creating a single significant vocalization from two or more vocalizations which are themselves significant (e.g. 'around', 'about', etc.).

(iv) A *conjunction* is a non-signifying vocalization which marks the beginning, end or division of an utterance, and which may occur at the extremities as well as in the middle of an utterance.

(v) A *noun* is a composite significant vocalization which does not express tense, no part of which is significant in its own right. (In nouns comprising two parts we do not treat either part as significant in its own right: e.g. the element *-dorus* in the name 'Theodorus' does not signify.)

(vi) A *verb* is a composite significant vocalization which does express tense, no part of which is significant in its own right (just as with nouns). 'Person' or 'white' do not signify tense; the signification of 'walks' or 'walked' includes present and past tense respectively.

(vii) An *inflection* of a noun or verb is that which expresses (a) case ('of him', 'for him', etc.), (b) number (e.g. 'person', 'persons'), or (c) modes of expression, e.g. interrogative or imperative (thus 'did he walk?' and 'walk!' are inflections of the verb according to these two categories).

(viii) An *utterance* is a composite significant vocalization, part or parts of which are significant in their own right. Not every utterance is composed of a verb and a noun (e.g. the definition of 'human being'); it is possible for an utterance to contain no verb. But it will always contain a part which signifies something (e.g. 'Cleon' in 'Cleon walks'). An utterance may be single in two senses: either because it signifies a single object, or because it comprises a connected plurality of utterances (e.g. the *Iliad* is a single utterance by connection, the definition of 'human being' is a single utterance by virtue of signifying a single object).

9.3 *Classification of nouns*

21 Nouns are classed as simple (by which I mean those not compounded from significant parts, e.g. 'earth') or double. Double nouns may be composed of a significant and a non-signifying element (although within the noun itself there is no distinction between significant and non-signifying elements), or of two significant elements. One may also have triple, quadruple or even multiplex nouns (e.g. most of those from Marseilles, such as 'Hermocaïcoxanthus').

57b Nouns are classed as current, non-standard, metaphorical, ornamental, coined, lengthened, shortened and adapted.

By a *current* noun I mean one which is in use among a given people; by a *non-standard* noun I mean one which is in use among other people. Obviously the same noun may be both current and non-standard, but not for the same people. (*Sigunon* is current among the Cypriots, but non-standard to us; 'spear' is current among us, but non-standard to them.)

A *metaphor* is the application of a noun which properly applies to something else. The transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy:

(i) By a transfer from genus to species I mean (e.g.) 'Here stands my ship'; lying at anchor is one kind of standing.
(ii) From species to genus: 'Odysseus has in truth performed ten thousand noble deeds'; ten thousand is a large number, and is used in place of 'many'.
(iii) Species to species: e.g. 'drawing off the life with bronze' and 'cutting off water with edged bronze'; here 'drawing off' means cutting, and 'cutting' means drawing off – each is a kind of removal.
(iv) By analogy I mean cases where *B* stands in a similar relation to *A* as *D* does to *C*; one can then mention *D* instead of *B*, and *vice versa*. Sometimes the thing to which the noun replaced stands in relation is expressed; I mean (e.g.) a cup stands in a similar relation

to Dionysus as a shield does to Ares; so one may call a cup the 'shield of Dionysus', or a shield the 'cup of Ares'. Or old age is to life as evening is to the day; so one may speak of evening as the old age of the day (as Empedocles does), and of old age as the evening of life, or life's twilight. In some cases there is no existing noun for one term of the analogy, but it can nevertheless be expressed. For example scattering seed is 'sowing', but there is no noun for the scattering of fire from the sun; but this stands in a similar relation to the sun as sowing does to seed; hence the expression 'sowing the god-created fire'. There is another way of using analogical metaphor: one may refer to something using the transferred noun, and negate some of its proper attributes; e.g. one might call a shield not 'the cup of Ares' but 'the wineless cup'.

An *ornamental* noun is . . .

A *coined* noun is one that is not in use by anyone, but is posited by the poet himself. There seems to be a few nouns of this kind (e.g. 'sproutages' for horns and 'invocator' for priest).

As for lengthening and shortening, a noun is *lengthened* if it has a longer vowel than usual or an extra syllable; a noun is *shortened* if something has been removed. Examples of lengthening are *polêos* (for *poleôs*, 'of a city') and *Pêlêiadeô* (for *Pêleidou*, 'of Peleus' son'); of shortening, e.g. *kri* (for *krithê*, 'barley'), *dô* (for *dôma*, 'house') and 'from two eyes single *ops' (for opsis*, 'sight'). *58a*

An *adapted* noun is one in which part of the word is kept unchanged, and part added; e.g. 'by the rightward breast' (for 'right').

Nouns themselves may be masculine, feminine or neuter. Masculine nouns are those ending in *n*, *r* and *s* (and its compounds, of which there are two, *ps* and *ks*). Feminine nouns are those ending in those vowels which are invariably long, i.e. in *ê* and *ô*, and (among the vowels which are capable of being lengthened) in *a*. (So the classes of masculine and feminine nouns turn out to be equal in number, since *ps* and *ks* are simply compound forms of *s*.) No noun ends in a mute or in a short vowel; only three end in *i* (i.e. *meli*,

kommi, peperi), and five in *u* (i.e. *doru, pôu, napu, gonu, astu*). Neuters end in these and in *n*, *r* and *s*.

9.4 *Qualities of poetic style*

22 The most important quality in diction is clarity, provided there is no loss of dignity. The clearest diction is that based on current words; but that lacks dignity (as can be seen from the poetry of Cleophon, and that of Sthenelus). By contrast, diction is distinguished and out of the ordinary when it makes use of exotic expressions – by which I mean non-standard words, metaphor, lengthening, and anything contrary to current usage. However, if one used nothing else the result would be a riddle or gibberish – a riddle if it were made up entirely of metaphors, gibberish if it were made up entirely of non-standard words. (The essence of a riddle is that it states facts by means of a combination of impossibilities; this cannot be done by putting other kinds of word together, but it is possible using metaphor; e.g. 'I saw a man welding bronze upon a man with fire', and such like. And what is composed of non-standard words is gibberish.) So what is needed is some kind of mixture of these two things: one of them will make the diction out of the ordinary and avoid a loss of dignity (i.e. non-standard words, metaphor, ornament and the other categories I mentioned earlier), while current usage will contribute clarity.

58b A major contribution to a style that is both clear and out of the ordinary is made by lengthenings, abbreviations and alterations. The variation from current usage makes the diction out of the ordinary, because we are not used to it; but it has something in common with what we are used to, so it will be clear. The people who find fault with this kind of style and satirize Homer are therefore mistaken in their criticism; e.g. the elder Eucleides argued that writing poetry is easy if one is allowed to use lengthening as much as one likes, and composed lampoons in the style in question: 'I saw Epichares walk-

ing to Marathon' and 'not mixing his hellebore'. Admittedly, obtrusive use of this style is absurd; but moderation is equally necessary in all aspects of diction; using metaphors, non-standard words and the other categories in an inappropriate and deliberately absurd way would produce the same effect. The difference that appropriateness makes in the case of epic poetry can be observed if one inserts the ordinary words into the verse. Equally in the case of non-standard words, metaphors and the other kinds, the truth of what I am saying is obvious if one substitutes current words. For example, Aeschylus and Euripides composed identical lines of iambic verse; but the change of a single word – a non-standard word in place of a current one – made one line seem excellent, and the other trivial by comparison. Aeschylus wrote, in his *Philoctetes*, 'the canker that eats up my foot's flesh'; Euripides substituted 'feasts on' for 'eats up'. Also in 'a scant and strengthless and unseemly man' one could substitute current words: 'a little, weak, ugly man'. And in 'setting down an uncomely chair and scant table': 'setting down a second-rate chair and little table'. And in 'the sounding sea-shore': 'the shouting sea-shore'. Ariphrades, too, ridiculed the tragedians for using expressions that nobody would use in conversation, e.g. 'the house without' (for 'outside the house'), 'of thine', 'Achilles round about' (for *59a* 'around Achilles'), etc. Things of this sort all make diction out of the ordinary because they are not part of current usage. Ariphrades failed to understand this.

It is important to use all the things I have mentioned appropriately, including compound and non-standard words; but the most important thing is to be good at using metaphor. This is the one thing that cannot be learnt from someone else, and is a sign of natural talent; for the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving similarities. Compound words are most appropriate in dithyramb, non-standard words in heroic verse, and metaphor in iambics. In heroic verse all the things I have mentioned have their use; but in iambic verse, because of its close resemblance to ordinary speech, the most appropriate words are the ones which could also be used in

prose speeches – i.e. current words, metaphor and ornamental words.

10. EPIC

10.1 *Plot*

Tragedy and imitation in action has been adequately covered in 23 what has already been said. As for the art of imitation in narrative verse, it is clear that the plots ought (as in tragedy) to be constructed dramatically; that is, they should be concerned with a unified action, whole and complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like a living organism) the unified whole can effect its characteristic pleasure. They should not be organized in the same way as histories, in which one has to describe not a single action, but a single period of time, i.e. all the events that occurred during that period involving one or more people, each of which has an arbitrary relation to the others. The naval engagement at Salamis and the battle against the Carthaginians in Sicily occurred simultaneously without in any way tending towards the same end; in exactly the same way one thing may follow another in succession over a period of time without their producing a single result. But perhaps the majority of poets compose in this way.

So (as we have already said) Homer's brilliance is evident in this respect as well, in comparison with other poets. He did not even try to treat the war as a whole, although it does have a beginning and an end. Had he done so, the plot would have been excessively large and difficult to take in at one view – or, if it had been moderate in magnitude, it would have been over-complicated in its variety. Instead, he has taken one part and used many others as episodes (e.g. the catalogue of ships, and other episodes which he uses to diversify his

composition). The other poets write about a single person, a single period of time, or a single action of many parts – e.g. the poet of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*. This means that only one tragedy can be made out of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or at most two, but many out of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad* (more than eight, e.g. *Adjudication of Arms*, *Philoctetes*, *Neoptolemus*, *Eurypylus*, *Beggary*, *Spartan Women*, *Sack of Troy*, *Putting to Sea*; also *Sinon* and *Trojan Women*). 59b

10.2 *Kinds and parts of epic*

Epic must also have the same kinds as tragedy; it is either simple or complex, or based on character or on suffering. The component parts, except for lyric poetry and spectacle, are also the same; it too needs reversals, recognitions and sufferings, and the reasoning and diction should be of high quality. Homer was the first to use all of these elements in a completely satisfactory way. Each of his two poems has a different structure; the *Iliad* is simple and based on suffering, the *Odyssey* is complex (recognition pervades it) and based on character. In addition, he excels everyone in diction and reasoning. 24

10.3 *Differences between tragedy and epic*

Epic is differentiated in the length of its plot-structure and in its verse-form. The stated definition of length is adequate; one must be able to take in the beginning and the end in one view. This would be the case if the structures were shorter than those of the ancient epics, and matched the number of tragedies presented at one sitting. Epic has an important distinctive resource for extending its length. In tragedy it is not possible to imitate many parts of the action being carried on simultaneously, but only the one on stage involving the actors. But in epic, because it is narrative, it is possible

to treat many parts being carried on simultaneously; and these (provided that they are germane) make the poem more impressive. So epic has this advantage in achieving grandeur, variety of interest for the hearer and diversity of episodes; similarity quickly palls, and may cause tragedies to fail.

As for the verse-form, experience has proved the appropriateness of the heroic verse. If one were to compose a narrative imitation in some other verse-form, or a combination of them, it would seem unsuitable. Heroic verse is the most stately and grandiose form of verse; this is why it is particularly receptive to non-standard words and metaphors (for narrative imitation departs further from the norm than other kinds). Iambic verse and the trochaic tetrameter 60a express movement (the latter having a dance-like quality, and the former being suited to action). It would be still more peculiar if one mixed them, as Chaeremon did. For this reason no one has composed a long structure in any verse-form other than the heroic; as we have said, nature itself teaches people to choose what is appropriate to it.

10.4 *Quasi-dramatic epic*

Homer deserves praise for many reasons, but above all because he alone among poets is not ignorant of what he should do in his own person. The poet in person should say as little as possible; that is not what makes him an imitator. Other poets perform in person throughout, and imitate little and seldom; but after a brief preamble Homer introduces a man or woman or some other character – and none of them are characterless: they have character.

10.5 *Astonishment and irrationalities*

While it is true that astonishment is an effect which should be sought in tragedy, the irrational (which is the most important source of astonishment) is more feasible in epic, because one is not looking at the agent. The pursuit of Hector would seem preposterous on stage, with the others standing by and taking no part in the pursuit while Achilles shakes his head to restrain them; but in epic it escapes notice. Astonishment gives pleasure; evidence of this is the fact that everyone exaggerates when passing on news, on the assumption that they are giving pleasure.

Homer, in particular, taught other poets the right way to tell falsehoods. This is the false inference. In cases where the existence or occurrence of *A* implies the existence or occurrence of *B*, people imagine that if *B* is the case then *A* also exists or occurs – which is fallacious. So if *A* is false, but its existence would entail the existence or occurrence of *B*, one should add *B*; then, on the basis of its knowledge that *B* is true, our mind falsely infers the reality of *A* as well. An example of this can be found in the bath-scene.

Probable impossibilities are preferable to implausible possibilities. Stories should not be constructed from irrational parts; so far as possible they should contain nothing irrational – or, failing that, it should be outside the narration (like Oedipus' ignorance of the manner of Laius' death) and not in the play itself (like the report of the Pythian Games in the *Electra*, or the man who comes from Tegea to Mysia without speaking in the *Mysians*). Saying that the plot would have been ruined otherwise is absurd; plots should not be constructed like that in the first place. But if one does posit an irrationality and it seems more or less rational, even an oddity is possible; the irrationalities involved in Odysseus' being put ashore in the *Odyssey* would be manifestly intolerable if a second-rate poet had composed them, but as it is the poet conceals the absurdity with other good qualities, and makes it a source of pleasure. *60b*

10.6 *Diction*

Diction should be handled with particular care in those parts in which little is happening, and which are expressive neither of character nor of reasoning; excessively brilliant diction overshadows character and reasoning.

11. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

11.1 *Principles*

25 As for problems and their solutions, their number and the classes into which they fall should become clear if considered in this way:

(i) The poet is engaged in imitation, just like a painter or anyone else who produces visual images, and the object of his imitation must in every case be one of three things: either the kind of thing that was or is the case; or the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case; or the kind of thing that ought to be the case.

(ii) The diction in which these things are expressed includes non-standard words, metaphors and many modifications of diction; these licences are allowed to poets.

(iii) In addition, correctness is not the same thing in ethics and poetry, nor in any other art and poetry. Error in poetry is of two kinds, one intrinsic, the other incidental. If someone has chosen to imitate accurately but failed to do so because of incompetence, the fault is intrinsic; but if he has chosen not to do so correctly (e.g. to show a horse with both right legs thrown forward) the error is in respect to the particular art (e.g. in respect to medicine or some other art), not in respect to the art of poetry itself.

II.2 *Applications*

So one should solve the objections posed in problems by considering them on the basis of these principles.

(i) First, those with regard to the art of poetry itself. If impossibilities have been included in a poem, that is an error; but it is correct if it attains the end of the art itself (the end has been stated above): i.e. if it makes either this or some other part have greater impact. An example is the pursuit of Hector. If, however, it is possible for the end to be achieved as well or better without contravening the art concerned with those matters, then the error is not correct; there should if possible be no error at all.

(ii) Also, which class does the error belong to: those in respect of the art, or those in respect of some other incidental? It is less serious if the artist was unaware of the fact that a female deer does not have antlers than if he painted a poor imitation.

(iii) Furthermore, if the objection is that something is not true, perhaps it is as it ought to be; e.g. Sophocles said that he portrayed people as they should be, Euripides as they are. That is the solution to use.

(iv) If it is neither true nor as it ought to be, one might reply that this is what people say; e.g. stories about the gods: it may be that talking like that is neither an idealization nor the truth, and perhaps Xenophanes was right; but at any rate, that is what people say. *61a*

(v) Other things, though not idealizations, may perhaps reflect the way things used to be; e.g. the passage about the weapons, 'their spears stood upright on the butt-end' – that was the norm then (as it is even now among the Illyrians).

(vi) In evaluating any utterance or action, one must take into account not just the moral qualities of what is actually done or said, but also the identity of the agent or speaker, the addressee, the

occasion, the means, and the motive (e.g. whether it is to bring about a greater good or avert a greater evil).

(vii) Other problems should be solved with an eye to diction. For example a non-standard word may provide the solution to 'first the mules' (perhaps he does not mean mules but sentinels), Dolon being 'ugly in appearance' (not physically deformed but facially disfigured, since Cretans call facial beauty 'beauty of appearance'), and 'mix the wine stronger' (not undiluted, as for drunkards, but faster). Other things are said metaphorically, e.g. 'all the gods and men slept through the night', while at the same time he says 'when he looked out over the Trojan plain . . . the sound of pipes and pan-pipes'; 'all' is said metaphorically for 'many', since all is a lot. Also 'alone with no share' is metaphorical, the best known instance being unique.

(viii) With reference to pronunciation, as in Hippias of Thasos' solution to 'we grant him achievement of glory' and 'part is rotted by rain'.

(ix) Punctuation provides the solution to some problems; e.g. Empedocles: 'at once mortal things were born that before were immortal, and things unmixed formerly mixed'.

(x) So does ambiguity; e.g. 'more of the night has passed' – 'more' is ambiguous.

(xi) Other problems can be solved with reference to linguistic usage. We call diluted wine 'wine'; hence the phrase 'greaves of new-forged tin'. We call people who work iron 'bronze-smiths'; hence Ganymede is said to pour wine for Zeus, although the gods do not drink wine (this could also be metaphorical).

(xii) Whenever a word seems to imply a contradiction, one should consider the number of meanings it could bear in the context; e.g. in 'by it was the bronze spear stayed' – how many different possible ways are there for it to be stopped there, in one way or another, however one might best take it? (This is the exact

61b opposite of what Glaucon describes, when he says that some people make unreasonable prior assumptions and then, although

the adverse verdict is one they have reached by themselves, they make inferences from it and if anything contradicts their own ideas they criticize the poet as if *he* had expressed *their* opinion. This is what has occurred in the case of Icarius. People assume that he is a Spartan, and that Telemachus' not meeting him when he went to Sparta is therefore odd. But perhaps the Cephallenians are right when they say that Odysseus married from among them, and that his name is Icadius not Icarius. So probably the problem is based on a misconception.)

11.3 *Conclusion*

In general:

(i) Impossibilities should be referred to poetic effect, or idealization of the truth, or opinion. With regard to poetic effect, a plausible impossibility is preferable to what is implausible but possible. Again, it is impossible for people to be as Zeuxis painted them, but that is an idealization of the truth; one should surpass the model.

(ii) Irrationalities should be referred to what people say: that is one solution, and also sometimes that it is not irrational, since it is probable that improbable things will happen.

(iii) Contradictory utterances should be subjected to the same scrutiny as refutations in arguments (i.e. is the same thing said, with reference to the same thing, and in the same sense?), to establish whether the poet contradicts either what he says himself or what a reasonable person would assume.

(iv) An objection, either to irrationality or to depravity, is correct when there is no necessity and the poet makes no use of the irrationality (as Euripides fails to use Aegeus) or of the wickedness (as that of Menelaus in the *Orestes*).

So the objections people make are of five kinds, i.e. that

something is impossible, irrational, harmful, contradictory, or contrary to correctness in the art. Solutions should be sought from those enumerated; there are twelve of them.

12. COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF EPIC AND TRAGEDY

26 One might pose the question whether epic imitation or tragic is superior.

12.1 *The case against tragedy*

If the less vulgar art is superior, and in all cases what is addressed to a superior audience is less vulgar, then it is perfectly clear that the art which imitates indiscriminately is vulgar. Assuming that the audience is incapable of grasping what the performer does not supply in person, they engage in a great deal of movement (as second-rate pipers spin round if they have to imitate throwing a discus, and drag the chorus-leader about if they have to play the *Scylla*). Tragedy is like that. This is in fact the opinion which older actors held about those who came after them; Mynniscus used to call Callippides
62a 'monkey' because of his excesses, and Pindarus was viewed in much the same way. The whole art of tragedy stands in the same relation to epic as these do to the others. So it is argued that epic is addressed to decent audiences who do not need gestures, while tragedy is addressed to second-rate audiences; if, then, tragedy is vulgar, clearly it must be inferior.

12.2 *Reply*

(i) First of all, this is not a criticism of the art of poetry but of the art of performance. A rhapsode performing epic poetry can make exaggerated use of gestures (like Sosistratus); so can a singer (this is what Mnasitheus of Opus used to do).

(ii) Next, not all movement is to be disparaged (any more than all dance is), but only that of inferior persons. This is the objection that used to be made against Callippides, and is made now against others, on the grounds that the women they imitate are not respectable.

(iii) Also, tragedy has its effect without movement, just as epic does: its quality is clear from reading.

So if tragedy is superior in other respects, this criticism at any rate does not necessarily apply to it. Further:

(iv) Tragedy has everything that epic does (it can even make use of its verse-form), and additionally it has as a major component part music and spectacle; this is a source of intense pleasure.

(v) Also it has vividness in reading as well as in performance.

(vi) Also, the end of imitation is attained in shorter length; what is more concentrated is more pleasant than what is watered down by being extended in time (I mean, for example, if one were to turn Sophocles' *Oedipus* into as many lines as the *Iliad* has). *62b*

(vii) Also the epic poets' imitation is less unified (an indication of this is that more than one tragedy comes from any given imitation). So if they treat a unified plot, either the exposition is brief and appears curtailed, or else it adheres to the length of that verse-form and is diluted. (I mean, for example, if it comprises a number of actions. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have many parts of this kind, which possess magnitude in their own right; and yet the construction of these poems could not be improved upon, and they are an imitation of a single action to the greatest possible degree.)

So tragedy surpasses epic in all these respects, and also in artistic effect (since they should not produce any arbitrary pleasure but the one specified); clearly, then, because it achieves its purpose more effectively than epic, tragedy must be superior.

13. CONCLUSION

So much for tragedy and epic, the number and variety of their forms and component parts, the causes of their success and failure, and criticisms and solutions.

TRAGEDY AND THE GOOD LIFE

AMLAN DAS GUPTA

Eur: At first was Oedipus in a happy state.
Aes: He wasn't! He was born and bred in misery,
Did not Apollo doom him still unborn,
To slay his father?
(*Frogs*: 1182–85, tr. G.Murray)

The purpose of this essay is to try to make sense of Aristotle's discussion of tragic agents and varieties of tragedy in chapters 13–14 of the *Poetics*. The section is a celebrated one and much discussed, but also one that raises problems of consistency and interpretation. It has especially been difficult to reconcile the discussion of error (*hamartia*) in ch. 13 with the advocacy of something close to tragicomedy in ch. 14. The interpretation that I will be offering draws upon the discussion of *eudaimonia*, roughly translated as happiness, or the good life, in the ethical writings. For reasons of convenience, I shall be basing my discussion mainly on a brief but extremely rich section in the *Nicomachean Ethics*[1] (I: 1099a–1102a), which deals with the relationship between luck and happiness. That Aristotle is willing to apply such concepts outside his ethical works is clear, as for instance in the long discussion of *eudaimonia* in the *Rhetoric* (1.5); *eudaimonia* is also used at an important juncture of the *Poetics*, and we shall later look at its implications for our interpretation of the discussion in question.

The title of this essay is meant, in the first instance, as a contrast. Tragedy, which involves pain, suffering and loss, is evidently opposed to the notion of a 'good' life; rather it would be easier to see the

process of tragedy as a movement away from a life that might be described, in any sense, as a good one: in view of Aristotle's interpretation of *eudaimonia*, this may seem as a reasonable thing to do.[2] Yet, even in the context of the *Ethics*, the exclusion of a different kind of relationship between the the experience of tragedy and a notion of 'tragic value', i.e. the sense that tragic experience is more valuable than unalloyed happiness and success, may not be wholly justified. In 1100b, Aristotle writes:

> ... nobility shines through ... when a man bears with resignation many great misfortunes (*megalas atuchias*), not through insensibility to pain but through nobility and greatness of soul (*alla gennadas hon kai megalopsuchias*).

Yet, this is not a position that Aristotle seems to defend very far. More frequently, as we shall see, *eudaimonia* is seen to be affected by misfortune and calamity. More pertinently, one might try to consider what it is that the tragic protagonist claims as his or her mark of singularity. It is evident that the obvious failure of the protagonist to preserve prosperity is not weighted in an obviously moral sense; tragic events obviously involve us in the problems of interpreting events that are, in a material sense, calamitous but may force us to reserve moral judgements altogether. The domain of tragedy is the shadow world of the ethical treatises. My purpose is to draw attention to some of the ethical questions that are posed by Aristotle's discussion of the events of the tragic plot.

A few terminological clarifications may be offered here. The principal subject of the *Ethics* is *eudaimonia*, a word that some scholars are reluctant to translate at all. It is used by both Plato and by Aristotle to describe 'happiness' as well as the ethical end of life: in Book 9 of the *Republic*, Socrates undertakes to describe to Glaucon why the philosopher's life is the best (in the sense of being the most *eudaimon*) of all lives (*FG* 141). Aristotle accepts the underlying premise that *eudaimonia* is the end of the ethical examination of human life. It might be correct to say that difference of various systems of Greek ethics could

be understood in terms of different ways of positioning *eudaimonia*. Both this word and its opposite, *kakodaimonia*, are compounded from *daimon*, and thus may contain the sense of something external to the human subject: but to discuss the question of agency, at this point, would lead us too far away from our subject. In Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is frequently contrasted with *eutuchia*, good fortune or luck, and the difference is evidently a significant one. The difference between the two, as traditionally understood, is expressed succinctly by Cope in a note to the *Rhetoric*, 1.5:17 (1362):

> *eutuchia* 'good fortune or luck', accidental, transitory, fragmentary, is opposed to *eudaimonia*, complete, permanent, substantial happiness, the essence of which resides in its *autarkeia* or independence of all accidental or transitory conditions (*Rhet.* I, 94).[3]

We shall try to look further into this distinction, for the distinction is central to our study. Early in the *NE* (1099a), Aristotle tries to work out the relationship between happiness and luck. It is by no means an easy task for him, and even as he tries to give us an outline of the problem he seems to experience the difficulty of weighing one against the other. The purpose of the first book seems to be to set out the main contours of the different arguments regarding happiness, and so it may be unwise to attribute them all to Aristotle: indeed, it may be more than usually difficult to decide where the writer stands, in the summary of available views. He finds most people agreeing that the end of human life is happiness and the essence of happiness is in the possession or capability with respect to certain goods, but there is less agreement as to what these goods are. Some identify happiness with virtue, some with philosophical wisdom, some with practical wisdom. Some would add pleasure to this, while others would say that external prosperity is also necessary. These widely ranging views are accepted by Aristotle as being both traditional and responsible, and consequently worthy of serious examination; it is also likely that they would all contain some element of truth. The Aristotelian requirement, at this point, appears

to be the insistence that happiness consists in activity, not merely in a mental condition.

Yet, the last requirement in the catalogue, that of external prosperity, is evidently more difficult to work into the general consensus, and it is here that the distinction between luck and happiness becomes important. It is important that Aristotle commends the inclusion of external goods into the definition of happiness as the 'best, noblest and most pleasant thing in the world' and that it arises out of the best kinds of activities (*aristais energeiais*):

> Yet evidently ... it needs the external goods as well: for it is not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from happiness, as good birth, goodly children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill born or solitary and childless is not very likely to be happy (*eudaimonikos*), and perhaps a man would be still less likely if he had thoroughly bad children or friends or had lost good children or friends by death ... happiness seems to need this kind of prosperity in addition; for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune though others identify it with virtue (*hothen eis tattousin enioi ten eutuchian tei eudaimoniai, heteroi de ten areten*: note that Ross's 'though' is supplied: Nussbaum renders '*and* others with excellence'[4]) (1099a-b).

Aristotle seems non-committal in terms of preference here, but he returns to it a little while later, now with a pointed example. What about a person who is persistently unhappy, or has suffered great reversals in her or his life? The example that he gives is that of Priam, one who undergoes great reversals in his old age: 'and one who has experienced such chances and has ended wretchedly no one calls happy' (*eudaimonizei*; 1100a. Nussbaum, renders the word 'living well').[5]

If we accept that *eudaimonia* is, more or less, a form of activity, it is also related to the condition of being *makariotes*, another important ethical term which is used in this context. The translation

does not always allow us to keep these terms separate: in the earlier passage cited the words are used in close proximity: 'there are some things the lack of which take the lustre away from happiness (*rhupainousi to makarion*, defiles [from *rhupainein*, to make dirty] blessedness)'. Nussbaum notes that this distinction was used by scholars who were desirous of attributing to *eudaimonia* a permanence beyond the vagaries of chance[6]: in their interpretation, Priam's *eudaimonia* was not affected by misfortune, but such persons could evidently not be called blessed. The textual support for this view is offered by a later gloss on the Priam argument to the effect that the *eudaimon* person can never become miserable, but he can never reach blessedness if he encounters the fate of Priam, 1101a. Nussbaum has persuasively argued that there is, in fact, no substantial difference between *eudaimon* and *makarios* at all.[7] Her argument is too difficult to summarize, but she concludes by pointing out that Aristotle concedes that extreme bad fortune can, in fact, destroy one's *eudaimonia*, even though it is something that is relatively—as far as human conditions go—stable. In fact, one who has lost his *eudaimonia* through misfortune is unlikely to regain his lost happiness, and if at all, only in the course of a prolonged new career of success.

Notwithstanding Nussbaum's attempt to integrate luck into the argument about happiness, the question is likely to remain unresolved. Fortune, as we know, is variable: so are we to call individuals happy at one time and wretched at another, as Aristotle contemptuously puts it, 'like a chameleon'? It seems reasonable to believe that the additions of prosperity are, in some sense, distinct from the kind of virtuous activity that constitutes happiness. One yardstick, discussed in 1101a (20-25) is a quantitative one. Small ups and downs do not disturb the exercise of virtue, but 'a multitude of great events ... if they turn out ill, crush and maim happiness'. The point is that bad luck, here, causes pain and does not allow individuals to act in ways that they want to.

The admission that happiness, the good life, is subject to chance or luck is an important one for Aristotle, especially in view of his demand for completeness (*teleia*) and unity in human striving. Happiness is constituted, he says, by the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there is more than one virtue, with the best and the most perfect (1098a). The analogous prescription in the *Eudemian Ethics* is unwilling, as Kenny points out,[8] even to admit that there may be more than one virtue for human life to seek assimilation with. Yet, one is aware that Aristotle is more than usually sensitive to the fact that the desire for unity notwithstanding, human life is permeated by obscurity, irrationality and passion. What is interesting is the fact that till the end of the *NE* the distinction between *eudaimonia* and *tuche* remains irreducible. Thus, though in the tenth book of the *NE* he is prepared to accept the view that the pursuit of philosophical wisdom is the pleasantest of all activities, and that the contemplation of truth is the most permanent pleasure known to human beings (1177a), he is also aware that even the philosopher and the perfectly just man needs the necessities of life and it is only through the possession of these that the just man is able to operate, he needs other people with respect of whom he can be just. There is more than a shadow of Plato in his encomium of philosophical life as being the most self-sufficient, on account of the fact that the philosopher contemplates only truth. Though the pleasures of deliberation of the truth are sufficient in themselves and engaged in for any other reason (as the action of the politician is directed ideally at personal and communal happiness) the kind of life that they entail would, in the final analysis, be beyond the realm of the human (1177b). To be perfectly in tune with reason would be to be like a god: '(i)f reason is divine, then in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life.' What remains possible within the human realm is a more modest definition of virtue:

But in a secondary degree the in accordance with the other kind of virtue is happy; for the activities in accordance with this befit our human estate.

Just and brave acts, and other virtuous acts, we do in relation to each other, observing our respective duties with regard to contracts and services and all manner of actions and with regard to passions; and all of these seem to be typically human. (1178a)

The god-like philosopher sets no store by actions and sees them as a hindrance to contemplation, but the just man 'in so far as he is man and lives with a number of people, he chooses to do virtuous acts.' The necessity for community as a condition for responsible living is powerfully presented in the detailed discussion of friendship, *philia*, in which Aristotle refuses to countenance the suggestion that the *eudaimon* individual can be happy without friends, who are called the greatest of external goods (1169b9-10). 'Surely it is strange' he writes,'to make the supremely happy man (*makarios*) solitary; for no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone, since man is a political creature and one whose nature is to live with others.' (loc.cit. 16-19)

It is not difficult to see how the worlds of myth and literature might be illuminated by these ideas: the example of Priam, or the discussion of the man who wounds and kills his father in ignorance, are important to the development of the argument itself. If we turn to *Poetics*[9] we find that there too the changes of human condition appear initially at least as changes in happiness:

for tragedy is the mimesis not of men but of actions and of life, and of happiness (and of unhappiness; and happiness) and unhappiness is in action and the end is some kind of action, not some quality. (6:1450a)

It is clear, then, from this passage that Aristotle is looking at *eudaimonia* in the tragic context, as a point of departure. The following points may be inferred (*a*) that tragedy shows a change from the good life to the bad life; (*b*) happiness and unhappiness can be expressed in action only and (*c*) the end of life is an action, not a quality. Inasmuch as tragedy is concerned with various kinds of activity and its results, and human activity, in a general way is seen to be conducive or otherwise

for the good life; tragedy exists within the domain of ethics. That tragedy habitually renders obscure the clarity of moral actions need not be doubted, but that would not be a reason for separating the two.

Eudaimonia does not figure at all in the discussion of tragic agents in ch. 13. The description of the states from which changes lead in opposite directions are expressed in terms of differences of fortune, *tuche*; yet as we have already argued, fortune or chance must be counted in estimations of happiness. Bad fortune is a restriction on *eudaimonia*, and the only way we can hold on to at least a part of the good life is by thinking about the intrinsic qualities of the agents of tragedy: are they able to resist great misfortunes with resignation? Aristotle does not himself discuss this, but he does reveal a concern with the correct moral labelling of the tragic character. It is important to note that the argument is discontinuous and often changes track. The initial diagram that is constructed is on the basis of moral dispositions and kinds of fortune, and the criteria for judgement are provided by the specific character of the tragic emotions, pity and fear, and the more general test of fellow-feeling or justice, *philanthropia*. The variables yield four separate possibilities: that of the virtuous man passing from good to bad fortune (it is non-tragic because it contravenes fellow-feeling, *philanthropia*); the evil man passing from good to bad fortune (which is non-tragic but is not against fellow-feeling); the virtuous man passing from bad to good fortune (which is not discussed at all) and the evil man passing from bad to good fortune (which is the worst because not only is it against *philanthropia*, but is also described as the most untragic, *atragodaton*).

It seems important to note that even though Aristotle seems to derive a conclusion from this analysis (*ho metaxu ara touton loipos*, thus the one in the middle is left), he has actually abandoned it. None of the above seem at, this point, to afford a subject for effective tragedy, and the choice made seems tame in comparison. We are left with:

> ... he who is neither outstanding in virtue and justice, nor through badness and wickedness is changed to bad fortune, but through some error ...

The initial formulation seems to be markedly devoid of ethical force. The tragic personage is neither particularly good or bad, which is in contrast to the generous use of moral terms in the earlier part of the argument (*epieikes, mochtherous, sphodra poneros*): the change happens because of some error, and I would like to emphasize the neutral, non-moral force of the word at this point.[9] There is no sense of active goodness in the description at all, and is, in fact, described in terms of his lack of virtue and justice. But Aristotle goes on to illustrate the argument by appealing to traditional myths of people held in high esteem (*en megale doxe*) and in good fortune (*eutuchia*) like Oedipus and Thyestes, and the recapitulation of the argument affords the opportunity for some kind of ethical revision, by more clearly allocating the causes for change.

> To change (*metaballein*) not into good fortune from bad fortune but in the other way ... not through wickedness (*dia mochtherian*) but through some great error (*di' hamartian megalen*) of whom we have spoken, [f]or better rather than worse.

It is this part of the argument that seeks partly to revive the terms of the earlier discussion: the tragic protagonist now appears to have *eutuchia* and can, in fact, accommodate some kind of moral excellence. The *hamartia* argument, used only in this part of the *Poetics* (though verbal forms are used to designate various misconceptions, e.g., 'people make a mistake [*hamartanousin*] when they criticize Euripides', 1453a24), appears to facilitate the accommodation of some notion of moral virtue, or at least moral innocence with respect to the acts committed. To attribute the actions of the tragic personage to *hamartia* would be to avoid judging them in terms of intention and volition, a subject that features prominently in the *Ethics*. *Hamartia* and *hamartema* are discussed in other contexts: in *Rhet.* 1.13.1374b errors are divided into three classes, the *hamartema* class lying between the products of mere accident (*atuchemata*) and unjust acts in the proper sense (*adikemata*). The points of distinction lie in the extent of premeditation

behind the act and in the nature of moral intention: that which is calculated and proceeds out of evil intention is unjust (*adikema*). A *hamartema* involves some degree of premeditation (unlike the *atuchema* which is merely a chance event) but is not accompanied by an evil intention (unlike the *adikema*). The clarity of such distinctions seem out of place in the world of tragedy, for one could go on speculating about the extent of actual responsibility for the deeds performed by tragic personages. It would be more interesting to consider how the attribution of praise and blame is rendered problematic in tragedy.

If the tragic personage is not *eudaimon* in the obvious sense, at least she or he can claim the lesser privilege of being in the temporary possession of good luck. How far would the turn of fortune cause us to revalue his or her ethical standing? It may be that, as with other ethical questions, (e.g., with respect to actions) the question of moral worth is one that tragedy habitually complicates: if it is right to characterize the tragic structure that emerges in the end in ch.13 as one of ignorance, it is evidently effective in protecting moral innocence. This seems largely a response to Sophocles, and as many critics have long held, to the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The hero is notably unfortunate, but in some obscure way he claims a pre-eminence that necessarily has a moral component. The argument, however, gets more complicated as it goes on. The best tragedies, Aristotle goes on to say, are based on a small number of eminent families, for it was their lot to suffer or perform fearful (*deina*) acts. It is important to note that, in this context, Aristotle emphasizes the degree of reversal and the unhappy ends of tragedy: Euripides' skill in constructing plots of this kind is especially commended. Plots that end with reconciliation are not favoured because the pleasure that they afford belongs to comedy, rather than tragedy.

The implications of the commendation of Euripides as the most tragic (*tragikotatos*) of all dramatists has, in my opinion, not been fully appreciated. R.K. Bhattacharya has recently shown that though it is commonly assumed that the run of Aristotle's comments on

Euripides is critical, there is little textual evidence to justify such an assertion.[10] Euripidean characters perform acts that are abundantly 'fearful'. But unlike Oedipus, who is able to assert his absolute moral innocence (cf. Oed.Col. 960 ff), Euripidean protagonists come very close to forfeiting it. Medea kills her children in the knowledge that it is wrong, all that prevents us from labelling her act as *adikos* in the extreme is her passion, her *thumos*, which acts on her as a terrible necessity:

> I know indeed what evil I intend to do
> But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury (1078-9)

The *tragikotatos* character of the Euripidean play comes from its closing the gap between the action and its moral valuation. The high moral ground of innocence can be maintained no longer and it is only the intensity of their passion that allows the protagonists to avert being labelled *poneroi* or *mochtheroi*. *Hamartia* is hardly the critical point of the chapter, rather, the need of devising a way of describing the tragic character gives rise to both the models of the tragedy of ignorance and that of passion.

Though Aristotle defends the reversal-oriented plot in this chapter, the Euripidean example seems to get more and more important for him to account for. The recommendations of chapter 14 are strikingly—even shockingly—different; but once we have the Euripidean example in view, it is not difficult to account for. Here, Aristotle argues that tragic deeds may be done either consciously or in ignorance, or else deeds are meditated in ignorance but a sudden recognition prevents them from being carried out. The last possibility is that there is full knowledge, but nothing is done at all, as there is no suffering involved, such plots are untragic. The examples of the first two kinds are *Medea* (in which tragic deeds are performed consciously) and *Oedipus* (where they are done in ignorance). But the highest praise is reserved for the third variety, in which recognition prevents the meditated deeds from being carried out. There is little doubt that this,

too, is directed at Euripides. The model, however, is not *Medea* but a different form of tragic construction altogether. As his contemporaries knew, too, Euripides' plays often came close to comedy, in that he avoided tragic endings. The most famous surviving example is that of the *Ion*. Aristotle mentions at least two Euripidean plays at the end, the *Cresphontes* and the *Iphigeneia*.

It seems to me that the argument, here, is closely related to the earlier one. Both the model of the tragedy of ignorance and that of passion have to contend with the actual commission of deeds of horror and bloodshed: in such cases the change from good fortune to bad fortune are maximized, and as he recognized in the *NE*, the retrieval of *eudaimonia* from such positions is not always feasible. The model of tragic construction proposed is to manage the consequences of tragic attenuation by avoiding reversal altogether: what is discarded in this model is the very idea of change from *eutuchia* to *dustuchia*. This is clearly an afterthought, fuelled by need of understanding how moral life stands with respect to tragic action. By jettisoning change altogether it is possible to enter new speculative domains: is some vestige of the good life preserved if the change does not take place in material terms, but is only recognized as a possibility?

Tragedy presents many problems for the estimation of happiness or the good life. Yet to think that the tragic personages are unhappy, in a simple sense, would be reductive in the extreme. Their claim to some kind of singularity or distinctiveness—from which the moral aspect cannot be fully detached—is undiminished, or even perhaps enhanced by their suffering. To claim an indifference to material events would not make much meaning in Aristotle's book, as he is concerned with doing rather than being, with forms of activity rather than with those of contemplation. Thus, the actions performed or suffered by tragic agents need to be understood carefully: how do they present to us both the vulnerability and the strength of the good life? How can tragic agents escape the crippling effects of being judged wretched, base or incontinent? In what way are we to understand the relational superiority claimed for the tragic character?

In its unique and relentless quest for understanding the true constituents of self-hood, the tragic theatre lays bare aspects of human experience that are ineluctably private: madness, irrationality, the life of the emotions, confusions of identity and gender. Aristotle, I have claimed, would have insisted on a moral estimation of this life too.

Notes

1. Henceforth *NE*. Translation used is that of W.D. Ross as given in the *Basic Works*, (ed.) R. McKeon, New York, 1941. The Greek text is that of Bywater, as made available on-line by the Perseus Project (www.perseus.tufts.edu). Variants are mentioned separately. I am aware of the debate over the differences among the three ethical treatises attributed to Aristotle. The view in support of the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) is presented in detail by A.Kenny in *The Aristotelian Ethics*, Oxford, 1978.
2. cf. M. Nussbaum: *The Fragility of Goodness*, Cambridge, 1986
3. E. Cope: *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, Vol. 1, Oxford, 1877, 84 n.
4. Nussbaum, 331.
5. Nussbaum, 328.
6. Nussbaum, 329.
7. Nussbaum, 331-3.
8. Kenny, 203-4.
9. On this, see T.C.W. Stinton 'Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy', *Collected Papers on Greek Tragedy*, Oxford, 1990.
10. 'Aristotle's Attitude to Euripides: A Study,' *Journal of the Department of English, Calcutta University*, 1998-99.

RECOGNITION

Supriya Chaudhuri

Recognition is one of the oldest terms in aesthetic theory, employed by Aristotle to define a crucial moment in the epistemology of the literary text. The word Aristotle uses is *anagnorisis*, which means a recovery of something known, rather than (as Aristotle himself explains it) a simple shift from *agnoia* (ignorance) to *gnosis* (knowledge).[1] The term's etymology requires it to be translated to the English word *recognition*, which stresses, in however muted a form, the element of repetition in its structure. It is true that Aristotle himself does not directly emphasize this, but he links the term with the *peplegmenos*, or 'folded' (usually translated as 'complex') plot, and with the associated process of *peripeteia*, or reversal. In the context of tragedy, which is where we find the three terms in conjunction, *anagnorisis* is part of that movement by which the complex plot, folded upon itself like a piece of pleated paper or a skein of wool, can be opened out or unravelled through a reversal which is also a reversion or recourse, returning us to the beginning of the story and requiring us to re-read it in the light of what we now know. This knowledge comes to the protagonist, then, in the form of a paradox: it was always there in experience, yet it must be recovered from the hidden structure of events.

In classical tragedy this structure is best exemplified by *Oedipus Rex*, whose hero is compelled to recognize, in his own person, the contrary identities of being chosen and being accursed. He is ignorant neither of his destiny nor of the events in which he has participated; the discovery he makes is that these two are the same, and that his

identity is such that he has always feared. What the oracle has told him is not an *end* that he can escape, but a truth *constitutive* of his being. In a sense, therefore, the extension of the plot in space and time, suggesting the possibility of travelling away from, or fleeing, as Oedipus tries to do, a predetermined structure, is countered by the collapsing of the narrative back into itself through Oedipus' enquiry into causes and origins. The retrospective movement of the plot in *Oedipus Rex*, a feature that led structuralist critics to see it as the paradigmatic detective story, makes recognition and reversal inescapable parts of the hermeneutic circle. Oedipus cannot know what he is if he did not, in some sense, *already* know what he is. This is of crucial importance to the Freudian plot of the return of the repressed: recognition is here characteristically reflexive, not directed at objects or actions outside the subject or knower, but at 'those wishes, repugnant to morality'[2] which are the subject's psychic property. The fictional structure of *anagnorisis*, which theorizes a certain kind of relation between the self and the world, is collapsed into a form that posits only the problem of the self. In consequence, it becomes easy to read tragic recognition primarily as self-recognition, ignoring the numerous and complex instances where the recognition scene involves the discovery of actions and motives belonging to others. The strictly reductive schema of the Freudian plot, similarly, makes knowledge *by* a self in the end no more than knowledge *of* a self.

Gilles Deleuze relates recognition to that movement he describes as repetition, through which the tragic hero *re-presents* a given knowledge to himself:

> This knowledge is in him, it is immersed in him and acts in him, but acts like something hidden, like a blocked representation . . . this unknown knowledge must be represented as bathing the whole scene, impregnating all the elements of the play and comprising in itself all the powers of mind and nature, but at the same time, the hero cannot represent it to *himself*— on the contrary, he must enact it, play it and repeat it until the acute moment that Aristotle called 'recognition'. At this point, repetition and

representation confront one another and merge, without, however, confusing the two levels, the one reflecting itself and being sustained by the other, the knowledge that is represented on the stage and as repeated by the actor then being recognised as the same.[3]

Would it be right to say that the truths literature offers us are all of this kind—that is, they are truths we already know, and are forced to re-cognize by the process of re-enactment? I am reminded here of a story told of Paul Dirac, who said once to a colleague: 'How can you do both physics and poetry? In physics we try to explain in simple terms something that nobody knew before. In poetry it is the exact opposite.'

For Dirac physics offers *new* truths, poetry old ones: the first is a form of knowledge, the other of repetition or *re*-cognition. Dirac's distinction privileges the epistemology of the natural sciences, and this is a privilege we are normally inclined to concede. Our sense of knowledge itself as a corpus is derived from faith in its empirical content and in the capacity of the mind to acquire new knowledge from observation, deduction and speculation. This is linked to the idea of progress that is fundamental to European science, positing knowledge as a process of growth and accumulation. In an essay published in 1911, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl noted that the achievements of the natural sciences had been so impressive as to lead to a crisis of confidence in the humanities.[4] This crisis is one we are still facing, and it has led to an obssessive absorption in problems of textuality and interpretation.

Yet even for the sensory realm, it is difficult, as Peirce saw, to abstract what Descartes would call an intuition from the principles, even the semiotic tools, which are required to organize it in our understanding. Peirce stressed the inferential character of perceptual judgments, and inference requires not only a hypothesis, but a form of corroboration (which may of course be gradual and incomplete) based on previous knowledge.[5] Kant considered space and time as forms of intuition (*Anschauung*) which make our perceptions of a

certain nature, but have no necessary relation with the nature of things themselves. Things themselves are unknowable, and Kant was interested not so much in the empirical problem of how we come by our *knowledge of* objects, as to how we establish our *knowledge that* certain propositions about the world are true. In consequence, as we know, he was concerned to elaborate not on the intractable matter of the world, but on the *a priori* concepts, or categories, by which our knowledge is ordered and realized. Beyond the categories lie the transcendental Kantian schemata, which, as Peirce says, if Kant had considered them early enough, would have overrun his whole work.[6] Strawson makes an analogous point when commenting on Kant's 'apparently technical' use of the term *imagination*, which implies that

> recognition of an enduring object of a certain kind *as* an object of that kind, or as a certain particular object of that kind, involves a certain sort of connexion with other non-actual perceptions. It involves other past (and hence non-actual) perceptions, or the thought of other possible (and hence non-actual) perceptions, of the same object being somehow alive in the present perception.[7]

(There is a similar Wittgensteinian argument regarding 'seeing' as 'seeing as'.) And yet Kant does not by any means deny the existence of the world, whose phenomena he accepts by a kind of 'naive realism' which remains in the main, undefended.

First knowledge of that world, that is, how *something new* is known in its newness, might be described as the hard problem of cognition. If the finite intuition, as Heidegger said, is 'in the first place anchored to the singular',[8] how do we see something (say a colour) for the first time before we compare it with something else? This problem is related to the question of *what it is like* to see a colour, and the difficulty, which seems to me crucial, of determining whether this is an epistemic question or a description/replication problem.[9] It is a problem of the phenomenal consciousness, which possesses intuitions—the redness of

red, for example—neither replicable nor communicable in their entirety. These constitute a body of experiential knowledge which is not re-knowable by others, nor analysable by the mind *except* through forms of abstraction and correlation. We could argue that the empirical intuition exists, but never constitutes knowledge as such. For that end, it must be integrated into a cognitive scheme, operating through the principles of identity and difference. Are these principles axiomatic? Moreover, what would be the difference between knowing that something is a tree (even a new, previously unobserved kind of tree) and that somebody is the same person we saw yesterday? A further problem arises if we ask, *who knows?* and *who knows what?* When Descartes says of the piece of wax: 'It is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax which I thought it to be from the start,'[10] two premises are involved—first, that of the unity of the thinking subject, and second, that of the collaboration of the faculties in establishing the identity of the object. Recognition is insufficient in itself to serve as a model of thought, though it is built into the structure of perception.

Another model is presented by the Platonic notion of *anamnêsis;* which makes all knowledge a recollection of what the immortal part of our being already knows through its identity with the absolute. This belief was central in the enterprise of the early modern scientific revolution (in the thought of Galileo, for example) and is echoed by some modern scientists at least. Philosophical Platonism is very often a part of the cognitive scheme assumed, for instance, by mathematical physics.[11] This is not in the least Kantian, since the truths Plato speaks of are not the product of our own modes of thinking, but exist independent of us. They constitute an absolute truth-content to which our ideas correspond and which not only confirms our speculation, but which we *re-cognize* when we glimpse at a mathematical truth. Even those scientists who would not subscribe to this belief might have difficulties finding a way out of the hermeneutic circle which the notion of truth itself implies.

Yet the hard sciences have made extraordinary gains, as Husserl saw, by bracketing off these problems of cognition (a disappointment to a philosopher who was particularly interested in how the mind acquires its knowledge of phenomena) and assuming that knowledge of singulars takes place, that it is cumulative and that it can be organized. Certain kinds of philosophy too have benefited by assuming what Quine called the 'inscrutability of reference': that is, by bracketing off the world and its objects from the domain of philosophical analysis. It is not my intention to worry indefinitely here about these problems of knowledge and truth. Some 'unexamined' assumptions work perfectly well for the real world. Physics is, therefore, a branch of knowledge, though we have not worked out how much re-cognition is involved in its practice.

Nevertheless, if we now look at the other side of Dirac's distinction, we may feel that poetry, apparently a poor relation of the hard sciences in epistemological content, seems to offer some truths after all. The recognition plot, using *anagnorisis* in the classical, or Aristotelian sense, is only one example of a confirmed identity. Tragedy employs such structures to undermine our hope in the possiblity of getting away from ourselves and our actions. As Aristotle stressed, *anagnorisis* confirms causal necessity: it is linked to the probable (*to eikos*) and the necessary (*to anangkaion*). Life overwhelms us in difference, in the chaos of particulars that occupy space and time. When, in the midst of these, we recognize others or ourselves, we make what we might call a *human* relation, by an intellective act which is the basis of knowledge itself.

This act involves a certain abstraction and generalization which is built into the hermeneutic circle. In rhetorical terms, we would describe this act as the figure of synecdoche. The plot of recognition, whether in tragedy or in the contemporary detective story, is normally dependent upon signs and tokens of presence. Classical writers call these *gnorismata* or *sêmeia*, objects indifferent in themselves, which can nevertheless function as means of knowledge to the person who recognizes their significance. The process involves

inference as well, either in the true deductive mode of syllogism, or in the speciously analogous form of paralogism (*Poetics*, p.16). Specific correspondences tell Electra that the stranger she sees is her brother Orestes; a number of clues prove to Holmes that Silver Blaze is himself the murderer of his corrupt trainer. The narrative urges us that the part implies the whole; at the same time, it shows us that if a general premise is valid, its particulars must be assumed to be true. This is a syllogistic, or—as Aristotle, again, described it—a *paralogistic* structure, having the appearance of logic without necessarily satisfying the strictest logical criteria.

Anagnorisis is not peculiar to tragedy: it is a feature of many narrative plots, a means through which the narrative 'makes sense of' the world by grouping exemplars in, what we might call, a similarity set. Similarity is understood as the obverse and cognate of difference, both necessary components of our experience. Not all experience, of course, will provide the radical and unsettling doubling of identity that Freud describes in his essay on 'The Uncanny' where, suddenly catching sight of his own reflection in the mirror of the washing-cabinet of a railway carriage, he fails to recognize himself and is disturbed by the apparent presence of a stranger. Freud himself uses this incident to theorize the nature of the 'uncanny' (*das unheimliche*) in human experience, arguing that 'the uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.'[12] The entire structure of Freudian psychoanalysis is built upon this premise of the new as the familiar but forgotten. Intimate self-knowledge is the possibility of the self's recovering what it has estranged through repression. Like the myths of psychic identity that Freud himself uses—such as those of Oedipus or Orestes—the story of the mirror in the washing-cabinet is an extreme example of its kind. Freud was fond of such examples, by which he resolved alterity into sameness by recourse to, what we can only call, *poetic truth*. Something of this effect is to be seen, too, in his famous analysis of Wilhelm Jensen's novel *Gradiva*, with its extraordinary superimposition of archaeological trace, work of art, memory, dream and reality.

That recognition is built into the structures of literature and art does not mean that art is a mirror. Just as knowledge (*pace* Rorty's argument)[13] is not a mirror of nature, but constructs its own synthesis by means of the intellect, language makes its meanings accessible to us through a process of endless semiosis where actual objects are never touched as such but always converted into signifying forms. Linguistic meanings, as we all know, are produced in a web of sameness and difference. The differential structure is only the ground from which the recognitions that constitute a signifying term are generated. Language imposes a process of recognition upon us along the signifying chain, so that grammatical syntax can be seen (as it has often been seen) as analogous to narrative.

Not for nothing, then, is *anagnostes* the Greek word for a reader, or for a slave trained to read. Plato uses the term approvingly for Aristotle himself, as Renaissance commentators are fond of noting.[14] Reading is pre-eminently the act by which we make the connexions that our interpretation of the world requires of us. Literature asks us to read, but so does the world. In literature, however, perceptions reach us in an endlessly reduplicating medium, that of representation or (to use the classical term) *mimêsis*. In Plato's famous reductive argument (*Republic X*), mimesis is trapped in the same kind of secondariness that Dirac attributes to poetry. This is a variant of the mirror analogy, which Plato also uses: according to this argument, literature reflects reality, and we may indeed see our faces in it, but we learn nothing from the experience, and the image itself may be distorted. Literature is therefore not a true form of knowledge, but is likely to mislead us by its simulations of non-existent identities (like Freud's reflection in the looking-glass).

Yet, the stranger Freud saw in the glass was recognized, not without some disaffection. The imagined other, produced by a logical and perceptual confusion, was resolved into an aspect of the self. As an exemplar, the anecdote serves, also, the neat, theoretical purpose of illustrating the thesis of repression. It is thus a double in another, semiotic sense. Indeed, it seems to combine the three functions of

Peirceian semiosis: the story is an icon which persuades through resemblance, it is an index which serves as a clue, and it uses the symbolic medium of language to make a point about phenomena in the world. Its mimetic truth offers itself for re-theorization on Aristotelian lines as an abstraction of universals from particulars.

It could be argued, thus, that literary representation, with its pervasive use of the model of recognition, confirms the ubiquity of that model in thought, which represents the world to our understanding. One version of representation ceaselessly rids the world of difference, or rather, domiciles it in the house of the Same: '*difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived similitude.*'[15] This is not the version I wish to adopt. It has been my argument in this essay that we cannot distinguish in mental life between the primary and the secondary, between cognition and recognition. Thought is inescapably reflexive, returning upon itself in the very moment of recording a perception. The recognition plots of literature, like language itself, foreground the endless re-presentation of experience in signs and in forms of knowledge. The literary text is necessarily founded on this structure of loss at one level for recovery on another. In one respect, it offers a fiction of reassurance; in another it seems to defer cognitive pleasure, collapsing the unknown into the always-already-known. The process of recovery and re-enactment which literature accomplishes is also mimetic; it simulates the extent to which re-knowing, in the Western philosophical tradition, is implicated in the act of knowing. Like knowledge systems, literary texts are constructions of memory, binding together the insistent particulars of experience by what Henry James called 'the spell of recognitions.'[16]

Should we conclude then that the literary model of recognition is only a means of confirming known identities? This is not my conclusion. If poetry, as Dirac thought, tells us no more than what we always knew, it also tells us what no one knew—or recognized—before. It was only because Freud had never seen the stranger he saw in the glass that he 'thoroughly disliked his appearance'. It is this

instinctive moment of revulsion that constitutes his knowledge of the episode: the *othering* of a self presumed as familiar and recognizable. In an analogous way, literary texts thrust difference upon us, not simply with respect to ourselves, but in relation to others. They are constructions of other minds that compel us to accommodate them to our own. The experience of reading is, therefore, as much that of encounter as it is one of repetition; indeed, if repetition were the only meaning of recognition, we would be condemned endlessly to repeat the world in thought. By contrast, thought shares in this and other worlds, just as literature, too, offers us possible worlds different from our own. Iser explains this in his theorizing of the fictional in its 'boundary-crossing' capacity: 'mimesis is a repetition which produces something.'[17] When we turn back to Freud's anecdote of his experience in the railway-carriage, we may be struck afresh by its *staged* quality, the extent to which it produces, like a literary text, the shock of the new as well as the recognition of the same. In terms of the text which incorporates them, these are purposive fictions. They remind us of the strangeness and intractability of the world, returning us to a sense of the self as an other among others.

The fact that literature does this is obviously related to the fact that experience, too, convinces us of the insufficiency of the recognition model in and for itself. This is well argued by Deleuze:

> Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a daemon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived . . . The object of encounter, on the other hand, really gives rise to sensibility with regard to a given sense. It is not an *aisthēton* but an *aisthēteon*.[18]

Deleuze is deeply hostile to the recognition model, which he connects to the Platonic model of reminiscence in offering a transcendent theory of knowledge. This response, too, seems to me to be founded on a misunderstanding of what recognition and, by extension, representation, involves. We think of representation as being *by* and *for* consciousness, *of* the phenomenal world. But, we live in a world constituted by recognition and representation, not one which can be bracketed off from the consciousness which experiences it. The texts of the world, like those of art, present us with strangers who may also be our sisters—or our mothers, as Oedipus found. The force of recognition is brought home in the compulsion to acknowledge this relation, even where it seems most alien and most unwanted. What we gain thereby is not a simple confirmation of what we already know, but a more difficult and more radical knowledge. When we ask, *what is recognized?*, we may answer that it is not the same but the other, the world that is not ours alone to experience or to think.

Literature founds this knowledge on an experience of the fictional: which is not, for that reason, simply the untrue. Poetic representation stages the world to our consciousness, as well as our consciousness to the world. The act of knowing in this double staging can only be seen as an act of recognition, which is why the scene of *anagnorisis* is proximate to a reversal, or doubling back of the plot on itself. But it would be wrong to see this moment purely as the doubling back of consciousness (in the narrow sense). Rather, the moment is one in which consciousness receives the existence of others into itself, accepting the burden of difference as well as that of relation. In this respect, the literary text impels us not towards solipsism but towards charity. That we can read at all would argue that language and the world are shared, though literature must be, above all, the instance that convinces us that there are other ways of thinking about the world. At the same time, it must also be the instance that proves that these other ways are open to our imagination and understanding, thus confirming the Davidsonian thesis of shared meanings rather than the poststructuralist hermeneutics of suspicion.[19] The literary text takes us

out of ourselves at the very moments when we believe ourselves to be most alone; it assures us that we are not only as we see ourselves, but as others see us. In classical tragedy, the moment of this recognition is also a moment of strangeness or *wonder* (*to thaumaston*) and it is this that constitutes the pleasure (and implicitly the profit) of poetry.

I would like to conclude by reflecting on two signal moments of recognition in literature, each canonical in two very different and separate literary traditions. The first is the recognition of Sakuntala by Dusyanta in Kalidasa's play *Abhijñāna Śākuntalaṃ*. It is a moment hedged around with miraculous and necessary provisions, especially the pre-recognition of the ring which has restored the king's memory. The encounter, itself, is elaborately prepared for, not only expected but anxiously desired by the audience, telling us no more than 'what we already knew.' But the lovers are taken by surprise, and the grief of the radical forgetting that had separated them is present in the king's amazed recognition of Sakuntala's continued identity through altered appearance.[20] Wonder functions, here, as a reminder of what we may lose by forgetting the existence of others in the world. The king's memory does not simply confirm 'what he already knew', it makes his own identity continuous with a larger objective reality that he had denied in the past. My other example is the recognition of Cordelia by Lear in the fourth act of Shakespeare's play. It is uncertain whether this larger objective reality is present in Lear's afflicted consciousness at all. In this condition, his ability to recognize his daughter is, itself, a wonder in a world beset by tragic accident:

> I am a very foolish, fond old man,
> Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
> And to deal plainly,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
> Methinks I should know you and know this man,
> Yet I am doubtful; for I am mainly ignorant
> What place this is and all the skill I have
> Remembers not these garments; nor I know not

> Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
> For, as I am a man, I think this lady
> To be my child Cordelia.
>
> (IV.7.60-69)[21]

Lear's act of recognition is not, primarily, an act of remembrance at all. Cordelia enters his consciousness as someone who is not contained by it as memory, who exceeds the structures of recollection and identification already, as he says, that are so impaired. The force of this meeting is the force of encounter: only afterwards can Lear think of the past with guilt:

> I know you do not love me, for your sisters
> Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
> You have some cause, they have not.
>
> (IV.7.73-75)

However, at the moment of seeing and knowing Cordelia, he knows her as someone other than the things he may or may not recollect: someone known, and therefore recognized, but also someone encountered, and therefore known for the first time. It is this profound coincidence of experiencing the new and recognizing that literature, similarly, struggles in its effort to tell us *what an experience is like.* This may indeed be why Freud chooses the anecdotal, literary mode of telling in his recounting of an experience of recognition.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Poetics* 11.4.
2. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (*SE*), (trans.introd.) James Strachey and Anna Freud, asst. A. Strachey and A. Tyson, 24 vols, London, 1953-74, vol. iv, p. 263.

3. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, (trans.) P. Patton, London, 1994, p. 15.
4. 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science', in E. Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, (trans.) Q. Lauer, New York, 1965.
5. 'Some Consequences of Four Incapacities' (1868), in *The Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2, Bloomington, 1983, p. 213. See also Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1934–48, 5. 116.
6. Peirce, *Writings*, 5. 258–59. I am indebted here to Umberto Eco's discussion of these problems in *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, (trans.) A. McEwen, London, 2000, chapters 2 and 3. See also Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, London, 1978, Introduction and *passim*.
7. P. F. Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception', in *Experience and Theory*, (ed.) L. Foster and J. W. Swanson, Amherst, Mass., 1970, p. 43.
8. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Bloomington, 1973, p. 2.
9. See Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), p. 435-50, and David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, Oxford, 1996.
10. René Descartes, 'Second Meditation' in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, (trans.) J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, Cambridge, 1984, vol. II, p. 21.
11. See, for example, Roger Penrose, in *The Emperor's New Mind* London, 1990, p. 147–50, 552–54, and *Shadows of the Mind* London: London, 1995, p. 412–17.
12. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919) *SE* vol. xvii, p. 225, p. 221.
13. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Princeton, 1979, 3.3.
14. See, for example, Pico della Mirandola, *Oration. On the Dignity of Man*, in *Renaissance Philosophy*, I. *The Italian Philosophers* (ed.) A.B. Fallico and H. Shapiro, New York, 1967, p. 160.
15. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 138.
16. Henry James, Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, (introd.) Graham Greene (ed.) Nicola Bradbury Oxford, 1981, p. xl.

17. Wolfgang Iser, 'Towards a Literary Anthropology', in Ralph Cohen, (ed.) *The Future of Literary Theory*, New York, 1989, p. 227.

18. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p.139-140.

19. Donald Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics' and 'Communication and Convention' in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, 1984.

20. *The Abhijñānaśākuntala of Kalidāsa* (ed.) S. K. Belvalkar, New Delhi, 1965, VII.22, p. 136.

21. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV.7.60-69 (ed.) R.A. Foakes, Arden, 3rd Series, 1997.

    I am generally indebted to Terence Cave's stimulating study, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics*, Oxford, 1988.

THOUGHT (*DIANOIA*) IN ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

RAMKRISHNA BHATTACHARYA

Which book, spare both in words and in size, has eluded its readers' repeated attempts to master it? The answer will vary from discipline to discipline. However, to the students of Western literary theory, the near unanimous answer will be: Aristotle's *Poetics*. The sole extant copy of the work on which all subsequent editions and translations are based has been a minefield of mislections and lacunae. Emendations are required for all the folios of the thirty-two page book (1447a-1462b in Immanuel Bekker's *editio princeps* [1830]). Whether or not Aristotle himself penned the book is still open to doubt. It may very well be an unsystematic collection of fragments of his lectures taken down by a not-very-bright student of his Lyceum where 'the master of all those who know' (in Dante's words) used to teach almost every subject under the sun while perambulating with his young pupils. The text of the *Poetics*, as we have it, lacks a systematic division into chapters and a methodical exposition of the topics that we are accustomed to find in the other works of 'the greatest thinker of antiquity' (as Marx described him). There are digressions and omissions which are inexplicable even to the best equipped classical scholars today. Modern translators have considered it essential that the chapters should be rearranged, and suspected interpolations of words, phrases, sentences and even whole passages should be weeded out in order to make the text more coherent than the available recension.[1] The Syrian translation and the Arabic retranslations and commentaries by Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) are of little help.[2] These translators and commentators had no idea what was meant by

a play; there was no dramatic literature either in Arabic or in Syrian. They, also, took the *Poetics* to be a branch of Aristotle's *Organon* (Logic).[3]

All this will be enough to disabuse the innocent young reader of the notion that the text of the *Poetics* is a definitive one, based on several manuscripts properly collated and edited in accordance with the four-fold canons of classical text-criticism (Heuristics, Recension, Emendation and Higher Criticism).[4]

This long and somewhat discouraging introduction is necessary, if not for anything else, but for reassuring students that they alone do not find the *Poetics* difficult to comprehend; there are certain in-built problems in the text of the *Poetics* that cannot be satisfactorily resolved. In what follows, I propose to discuss the vexed question of what is meant by *dianoia* in the *Poetics*, ch.6 and elsewhere.

I have called it a vexed question, but I am afraid the question vexes only the classical scholars, not the students who read the *Poetics* in one or another English translation. Speaking of the six parts of every tragedy, Aristotle mentions 'A Fable or Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Melody' (6.6.1450a 9-10).[5] Aristotle accords a position of eminence to Plot, then to Character and, next to Thought (6.14-16, 1450a, 37, 1450b, 1-4). Diction comes fourth, Song, fifth and Spectacle, last. The first four also constitute the essential parts of the epic (24.1-2, 1459b, 10). Aristotle writes: 'Its (*sc.* the Epic's) parts too, must be the same, with the exception of Song and Spectacle as it requires Peripeties, Discoveries, and scenes of suffering just like Tragedy. Lastly, the Thought and Diction in it must be good in their own way. All these elements appear in Homer first. As to *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Aristotle notes: '... they are more than this [viz. stories of suffering and character, having a simple and a complex plot respectively], since in Diction and Thought, too, they surpass all other poems' (22.2, 1459b, 16-17). Thus, Song and Spectacle are the differentia between tragedy and epic poetry along with the fact that tragedy, unlike the epic, is 'in the form of action, not of narrative' (6.2,

1449b, 24–28). Not content with this distinction, Aristotle explains that 'the Spectacle (or stage appearance of the actors) must be some part of the whole; and in the second [place] Melody and Diction, these two being the means of their imitation' (6.4, 1449b, 31-34). Those who take Aristotle to be a mere literary critic should pay more attention to this aspect; viz. that tragedy is to be comprehended holistically, with the stage elements, melody and spectacle, constituting integral parts of the play. The first three elements are the *objects* of imitation, the last three together make up the *means* of imitation.

Now to *dianoia*. The word *dianoia* is not found in Homer or Hesiod. We first encounter the word in Herodotus (*c.*484–*c.*420 BC) and Thucydides (*c.*455/460–*c.*399 BC), two historians of ancient Greece. The meaning is quite simple: 'thought, intention, purpose.' *Dianoia* appears again in Plato with certain subtle variations in signification. In a sense, it is allied to the Latin word *cogitatum* (from which the English noun 'cogitation' is derived); intelligence or understanding, and more specifically, the thought or meaning of a word or passage. It is in this sense that Demosthenes (348–322 BC) used expressions such as *te dianoia*, 'as regards the sense'. Almost all English translations of the *Poetics*, therefore, render *dianoia* as 'thought' and unwittingly confuse students, who take 'thought' to mean 'the controlling idea' of a play.[6]

But there are two notable exceptions. Margaret Hubbard boldly deviated from the existing practice. She translated *ethos* as 'the moral characters of the personages' and *dianoia* as 'the *mimesis* of intellect' (p.58). She follows the same practice in chs. 19.1-3 (p.75-76) and 24.2, 11 (p.82, 84). More recently, Malcolm Heath has opted for 'reasoning' instead of 'thought' or 'intellect'.

Since Aristotle concentrates more on plot and character, students pay less attention to the four other constituent parts of tragedy (all the more so because questions on the *Poetics* are set mostly on the first two parts). Yet, without a proper understanding of *dianoia*, one's understanding of character (at least what Aristotle means by it) remains incomplete. Character and *dianoia* are inextricably connected. M.W.

Blundell has rightly observed: 'Even though *ethos* and *dianoia* are listed as two different "parts" of tragedy, it should not surprise us if they turn out not to be mutually exclusive.'[7] She further points out: 'The six "parts" are qualitative, not quantitative (1450a, 8-9), and all of them may overlap.' Even if we omit the last two parts, viz. Melody and Spectacle, the fact remains that one cannot conceive of a character minus his or her speeches. All characters reveal themselves through what they say and what they think. Diction is not merely a matter of grammar, as any innocent student looking at chapters 19-22 of the *Poetics* is likely to believe. There is, of course, no separate chapter or even section devoted to *dianoia* in the *Poetics*. But this is not due to any lack of importance of this item. After dealing with plot and character, Aristotle mentions *dianoia* along with diction in ch.19 and states in the very second sentence: 'As for Thought, we may assume what is said of it in our Art of Rhetoric, as it belongs more properly to that department of enquiry.'[8] In order to understand what *dianoia* is, we have to go to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

In the *Poetics*, ch.24, as mentioned before, Aristotle praises Homer's epics on the ground that they surpass all other poems in Diction and Thought. In the last reference in ch.24, he says, 'Elaborate Diction, however, is required only in places where there is no action, and no Character or Thought to be revealed. Where there is Character or Thought, on the other hand, an over-ornate Diction tends to obscure them' (24.11, 1460b, 1-5).

So much about the *Poetics*. In *Rhetoric* (2.26), Aristotle mentions three points that must be studied in making a speech: (1) Examples, Maxims, Enthymemes, and in general the *thought*-element—the way to invent and refute arguments, (2) Style, and (3) Arrangement (2.26, 1403a, 35-1403b, 2). The *thought*-element, then, refers to 'the means of producing persuasion' (3.1, 1403b, 5). Aristotle does not care much for histrionic talents. 'Dramatic ability is a natural gift, and can hardly be systematically taught' (3.1, 1404a15-16). But that should not dishearten students of *Rhetoric*. Aristotle assures them:

The principles of good diction can be so taught and therefore we have men of ability in this direction too, who win prizes [as actors] in their turn, as well as those speakers who excel in delivery—speeches of the written or literary kind owe more of their effort to their diction than to their thought. (Ibid. lines 16-19).

The *Rhetoric*, then, helps us to understand what *dianoia* stands for. Broadly speaking, it refers to the *content* of the speech, more particularly the kind of speech which gives vent to the speaker's *mode of reasoning* in connection with some problem he proposes to solve, or the way he arrives at a conclusion. D.W. Lucas points out that *dianoia* should not be attributed to the author; it belongs to the characters, 'in whom we do not so sharply separate intellectual power from the remaining characteristics.'[9] Referring to the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1103a5) he shows that a man's power to assess a situation depends not on his *dianoia* but on his *ethos* (Character), which is his reaction to his *dianoia*. 'In drama *dianoia* is manifested mainly in the characters' arguments.' Lucas explains:

[A]s *ethos* is revealed mainly by action, so *dianoia* is revealed in *logoi* spoken or written, in demonstrations and in generalizations . . . *Ethos kai dianoia* (Character and Thought) are the two aspects of the whole man, corresponding, though rather superficially, to character and intellect. [10]

Obviously, these two features refer to the moral and intellectual sides of a man. Pedagogues of the past, we know from Aristotle's *Politics* (1337a, 38), were not unanimous as to which of these two ought to concern the educator. Even now, the debate has not been resolved, although everyone agrees that the two aspects are conceptually separable; they cannot be separated in practice. From this interpretation we may well understand why the word, Thought, for rendering *dianoia*, has been considered inadequate by some recent translators of the *Poetics*. Unfortunately neither Aristotle nor his commentators (except Stephen Halliwell) provide concrete examples from the Greek tragedies to illustrate the intellectual side of the character as revealed in their

speeches. We may now try, in our humble way, to fill up this gap by taking up Sophocles's *King Oedipus* (*KO*).

Gerald F. Else was of the opinion that the two definitions of *dianoia* are based on two different principles. 'The first describes it as a faculty of speaking, the second as the actual speeches in which arguments are given or general opinions stated.'[11] Vahlen, too, speaks of *dianoia* having two sub-species: (1) the revelation of character in speech and (2) argumentation and the expression of general views.[12]

King Oedipus offers a typical example of the second sub-species in the first episode. There was no convention of including stage directions in the text of Greek plays. Later scholiasts and editors, too, refrained from offering anything of the kind. In earlier tragedies there was little or no scope for soliloquies, although such set speeches in the opening of the play, are to be found in Euripides' works. With comedy, it was more or less an accepted device. Aristophanes uses it often (for instance, in *The Clouds*).

Yet, in Sophocles we come across a liberal use of 'asides', i.e., 'words spoken by an actor which the other persons on the stage are not supposed to hear', although in the text of *KO* there is no stage direction, to that effect. When Teiresias obstinately refuses to speak, Oedipus charges him with being an accomplice of Creon. The blind prophet denies this insinuation emphatically and suggests: 'Nay, Creon is no plague to thee, thou art thine own' (line 379).[13] Oedipus appears not to have heard this obscure observation. His mind is unwaveringly set. He knows in his heart of hearts, instinctively, that Creon must be behind what he suspects to be the conspiracy to oust him from power. Then he burst forth into an 'aside':

> O wealth, and empire, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy that cleaves to you, if for the sake, yea, of this power which the city (*polis*) hath put into my hands, a gift unsought, Creon the trusty, Creon mine old friend, hath crept on me by stealth, yearning to thrust me out of it, and hath suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who hath eyes only for his gains but in his art is blind! (lines 380-89).

This is *dianoia* of the second sub-species. Yet, it also expresses Oedipus's intellectual character. He is too hasty in his judgement, bases his conclusions on unverified premises and jumps to sudden denunciations. He is so confident of his instinctive judgements that he has no inclination to think twice or weigh the pros and cons of any alternative view. Having decided that Creon has been debauched by his ambition to replace his brother-in-law, instantly he turns to Teiresias and starts accusing him, in no uncertain terms: 'Come now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher [i.e. the Sphinx] was here who wove dark song, dids't thou say nothing that could free this folk?' (lines 391-94).

The way Teiresias defends himself against all these unfounded charges also offers an excellent example of *dianoia*. It is a forensic speech, made in the best democratic tradition which the Athenian audience of Sophocles could appreciate:

> King though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord. Not to thee do I live servant, but to Loxias; and so I shall not stand enrolled under Creon for my patron (lines 408-11).

A long speech follows this 'solemn exordium' (as Jebb calls it).[14] Prophesying is mixed with cursing: 'Therefore heap thy scorns on Creon and on my message: for no one among men shall ever be crushed more miserably than thou' (lines 426-28).

These two, are by no means, the only examples in *KO*, but rather obvious specimens of what Aristotle may have meant by *dianoia*. We may cite another example mentioned by Halliwell for a detailed analysis.

He picks up Creon's self-defence in *KO*, lines 583-615 as a case in point. Halliwell writes:

> [Creon's] reasoned speech . . . is both characteristic of the quasi-forensic mode of argument so often to be found in Greek tragedy, and precisely illustrative of the rhetorical factors mentioned in [the *Poetics*] ch.19's definition of 'thought'. Moreover it is easy to see from such a speech how

Ar. [Aristotle] can connect thought closely with character, for it is in such passages that we are given the clearest idea of the ethical dispositions of the dramatic agents: in the present case, it is Creon's preference for modesty over political ambition, and his honourable behaviour towards Oedipus, which are put across by his reasoning. If these characteristics, and the mode of their expression, seem somewhat insipid or abstract, that is partly a symptom of the difference between the rhetoric of Greek tragedy (to which Ar.'s concepts are in this respect aligned) and modern interest in a more inwardly psychological style of characterisation.[15]

In a note Halliwell adds: 'I should perhaps state that I am not excluding "psychology" altogether from the poetry of Greek tragedy, but emphasizing those aspects of the genre which help to justify the critical concepts and categories of the *Poetics*.'[16]

The difference between the ancient and modern interests, as stated by Halliwell, needs to be noticed well. Creon's self-defence may appear to a modern audience and readers as quite justified and convincing. The whole speech stands in contrast to Oedipus' rage that led him to falsely accuse Creon without an iota of evidence to support it. In contrast, Creon is not only modest but quite calm and persuasive. But did the speech have the same effect on the Athenian audience in the fifth century BC? Knox cautions the reader as follows:

Creon's speech, which sounds so reasonable to modern ears, may have made a different impression on the original audience. It is an argument from probability, from lack of motive, and this was a well-known fifth-century technique of argument, taught by professional rhetoricians, the sophists, as a defence to be used when evidence was lacking. So it may have sounded slightly glib and shopworn to Sophocles's contemporaries. (Oedipus, of course, has no evidence or witnesses either; he is acting on mere suspicion.)[17]

Reasoning, thus, is not to be taken in an absolute sense; it may not be convincing or considered appropriate by all at all times. However, figures of speech or tropes do not constitute any part of *dianoia*. *KO* abounds in quasi-forensic speeches, interrogations and

cross-interrogations. The whole play, in fact, has a courtroom atmosphere right from Oedipus enquiring of the suppliants before his palace what has brought them to him. Such interrogations stop when theTheban Shepherd ultimately breaks down to admit the truth about the child he had given to the Corinthian Shepherd.That is the *anagnorisis* which makes Oedipus realize who he is. *Dianoia*, therefore, is an essential element in *KO*.Without it, the characters of Creon, Oedipus and Tieresias would not come out in three-dimensional details.

Of the three Greek tragedians whose works are available to us, Euripides appears to be the most inclined to exploit the element of *dianoia* in his plays. Halliwell refers to Orestes's speech at lines 687-715 in *Iphigeneia in Tauris* as a case in point.[18] *Medea*, too, provides an outstanding example of *dianoia*. Rejected by Jason, who plans to marry Glyce, the daughter of Creon, King of Corinth, she decides to take her revenge on Jason by killing the children sired by him. Her long soliloquy, ranging from lines 364-409, slowly unfolds her plan.

Yet, *Medea*, a savage play of passion and barbaric infanticide, shows the other side of the coin: how reason is overpowered by anger. As Medea herself declares: 'At last I understand the awful deed I am to do; but passion, that cause of direct woes to mortal man, hath triumphed o'er my sober thoughts.'[19]

This submission to *thumos* (anger), however, betrays a strange predicament between knowledge and nescience. Medea knows by reasoning that the course she has chosen is diabolical. Her maternal instinct, too, is quite strong and yet not strong enough to combat her desire for revenge, her anger at being scorned. The whole speech, more in the nature of a soliloquy (although the children are present before her in the beginning) or an 'aside', is a specimen of *dianoia* in action.When the children are ordered to go into the house, she argues with herself:

> And whoso feels he must not be present at my sacrifice, must see to it himself;
> I will not spoil my handiwork.Ah! ah! do not, my heart, O do not do this deed!

Let the children go, unhappy one, spare the babes! For if they live, they will cheer thee in our exile there. Nay, by the fiends of hell's abyss, never, never will I hand my children over to their foes to mock and flout. Die they must in any case, and since 'tis so, why I, the mother who bore them will give the fatal blow. In any case their doom is fixed and there is no escape. Already the crown is on her (*sc.* Glyce, the Corinthian Princess) head, the robe is round her, and she is dying, the royal bride; that do I know full well. But now since I have a piteous path to tread, and yet more piteous still the path I send my children on, fain would I say farewell to them (p.326).

The examples cited above are enough to show that *dianoia* forms an integral part of Greek tragedy. However, for some strange reason it has been under-emphasized in later discussions on tragedy right from the Renaissance. For one thing, most of the commentators of the post-Romantic era tended to look at characters in Greek plays more as vessels of intense and uncontrolled passion than as rational beings able to judge the pros and cons of a case. By denying the cerebral aspect of tragedy, one also denies what Aristotle considered to be the third ingredient of serious drama, next only to plot and character.[20]

Since Indian students are more familiar with *KO* and *Medea* than any other Greek plays, I have concentrated on the examples of *dianoia* found in these two plays. This, I hope, would encourage them to locate further examples of *dianoia* in other Greek plays and consider whether the study of *dianoia* may be extended to all tragedies, Greek or English, ancient or modern.

Notes

1. Gerald F. Else (1970) and more recently Malcolm Heath (1996) have produced such rearranged translations of the *Poetics*. They are doubtless very helpful to the students who are being initiated to Aristotle, although all classical scholars may not share this view.

2. For a selected bibliography on the editions and commentaries on the *Poetics*, see Rorty (ed.), 1992, p.425-35.
3. See Dahiyat, 1974, p.10-11, 32, 52-53.
4. See Katre, 1941, p.31.
5. Since the translation by Bywater is still widely used in India, and maybe elsewhere in the Departments of English Studies, I have reproduced from his rendering. It should, however, be noted that the *Poetics* has only one word, *mythos*, for Plot, and no alternative expression equivalent to Fable.
6. Halliwell, 1987, p.96.
7. Rorty (ed.), 1992, p.171.
8. Aristotle adds: 'Thought of the personages is shown in everything to be effected by their language—in every effort to prove or disprove, to arouse emotion (pity, fear, anger, and the like), or to maximize or minimize things.' Apparently, Aristotle considers Thought impossible without language, and Thought is as much relevant for the production of emotions as for exhibiting reasoning.
9. Lucas, 1972, p.100.
10. Ibid., p.106.
11. Else, 1957, p.155-56.
12. Ibid., p.156n1.
13. All quotations from *KO* are from R.C. Jebb's translation.
14. Jebb, 1966, p.67n.
15. Halliwell, 1987, p.155-56.
16. Ibid., p.156n1.
17. Knox in Fagles, 1984, p.401.
18. Halliwell, 1987, p.156.
19. Trans. E. P. Coleridge, lines 1079-80.
20. Snell, 1960, (p.122), pointed out long ago that tragedy could not have come into being without the intellectual element.

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