

POETICS

ARISTOTLE

(Courtesy: Translation by S. H. Butcher)

(CBCS SEM – II: CH. 8 – 17, 23 & 26)

TERMS IN POETICS

Mimesis

Mimesis is the act of creating in someone's mind, through artistic representation, an idea or ideas that the person will associate with past experience. Roughly translatable as "imitation," mimesis in poetry is the act of telling stories that are set in the real world. The events in the story need not have taken place, but the telling of the story will help the listener or viewer to imagine the events taking place in the real world.

Hamartia

This word translates almost directly as "error," though it is often rendered more elaborately as "tragic flaw." Tragedy, according to Aristotle, involves the downfall of a hero, and this downfall is effected by some error on the part of the hero. This error need not be an overarching moral failing; it could be a simple matter of not knowing something or forgetting something.

Anagnorisis

Anagnorisis translates as "recognition" or "discovery." In tragedy, it describes the moment where the hero, or some other character, passes from ignorance to knowledge. This could be a recognition of a long lost friend or family member, or it could be a sudden recognition of some fact about oneself, as is the case with Oedipus. Anagnorisis often occurs at the climax of a tragedy in tandem with peripeteia.

Mythos

When dealing with tragedy, this word is usually translated as "plot," but unlike "plot," mythos can be applied to all works of art. Not so much a matter of what happens and in what order, mythos deals with how the elements of a tragedy (or a painting, sculpture, etc.) come together to form a coherent and unified whole. The overall message or impression that we come away with is what is conveyed to us by the mythos of a piece.

Katharsis

Katharsis was normally used in ancient Greece by doctors to mean "purgation" or by priests to mean "purification." In the context of tragedy, Aristotle uses it to talk about a purgation or purification of emotions. Presumably, this means that katharsis is a release of built up emotional energy, much like a good cry. After katharsis, we reach a more stable and neutral emotional state.

Peripeteia

A reversal, either from good to bad or bad to good. Peripeteia often occurs at the climax of a story, often prompted by anagnorisis. Indeed, we might say that the peripeteia is the climax of a story: it is the turning point in the action, where things begin to move toward a conclusion.

Lusis

Literally "untying," the lusis is all the action in a tragedy from the climax onward, or the denouement. All the plot threads that have been woven together in the desis are slowly unraveled until we reach the conclusion of the play.

Desis

Literally "tying," the desis is all the action in a tragedy leading up to the climax. Plot threads are craftily woven together to form a more and more complex mess. At the peripeteia, or turning point, these plot threads begin to unravel in what is called the lusis, or denouement.



PEOPLE IN POETICS

Homer

Greek poet from the 8th century BCE and author of the epic poems *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In several chapters of *Poetics*, Aristotle references aspects of Homer's works to illustrate the concepts he wants to convey—particularly in his discussions of epic poetry (although the influence of Homer's works on subsequent Greek tragedies cannot be overstated). Aristotle's reliance of examples from Homer is probably partly because everyone in Aristotle's audience would have been intimately familiar with his poems, but it is also clear from his continual praise of Homer that Aristotle held him in high regard as a poet.

Aeschylus

Greek poet who lived from approximately 525 BCE to 455 BCE, and who many consider the first great playwright of the Western tradition. Aeschylus is also called the father of tragedy. This is because—as Aristotle relates in Chapter 4 of *Poetics*—Aeschylus was the first to add a second actor to plays, which previously had rigidly adhered to a format that included only a chorus and a narrator. This innovation made dialogue the central focus of these works.

Sophocles

Ancient Greek tragedian who lived and wrote about a century before Aristotle. Sophocles' works—especially *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*—are referenced by Aristotle throughout *Poetics*. As with Homer, this is likely because Aristotle's audience would have been very familiar with these works and because Aristotle found much in the works worthy of citing as good examples. Sophocles is credited with building upon the earlier innovations to plays by Aeschylus by adding a third character as well as background scenery.

Euripides

The author of *Medea* and other tragedies, Euripides was a Greek contemporary of Sophocles, living and writing in the century before Aristotle. His work is cited numerous times in *Poetics*. In Chapter 12,

Aristotle says that Euripides "is felt to be the most tragic of poets," although he somewhat tempers this comment by adding, "faulty though he may be in the general management of his subject."

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ARISTOTLE'S POETICS NOTES

Aristotle's Poetics:

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- ❖ **Aristotle** (c. 384-322 B.C.E.) (c. 384-322 B.C.E.) • Ancient Greek Philosopher • Founder of literary criticism • Disciple of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great • Dante called him "the master of those who know" • Plato referred to Aristotle "as the mind" • Main article: Corpus Aristotelicum
- ❖ **Reasons for Poetry** • Poetics was the objections to dramatic poetry expressed by his teacher Plato in his Republic. • It is a reply to his master Plato. • Plato considered imitation merely as mimicry or a servile copy of nature. • Plato compared poetry to painting. • Poetry presents a copy of nature as it is. • Poetry twice removed from reality and it's a 'shadow of shadows'.
- ❖ **Poetics (c.335 B.C.)** • Short treatise of twenty-six chapters, forty-six pages, six parts. • 1-5 :Introductory remarks on poetry and its classification • 6-19 :Tragedy • 20-22 :Poetic diction • 23 :Narrative poetry and tragedy • 24-26 :Epic is compared with tragedy • 25 :Objections are answered
- ❖ **Theory of imitation** • Three ways of imitation • Means or medium of imitation (serious action). sound, form, colour • Objects of imitation (men in action). • Manner of imitation (verse in dialogue). ΔΔ narrative ΔΔ dramatic
- ❖ **Tragedy Definition of Tragedy** • "Tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, each kind brought separately in separate parts of the work, in the form of action and not in the narrative form, with incidents arousing fear and pity and wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions".

- ❖ **Formative parts of Tragedy** Formative parts of Tragedy Six formative parts of tragedy Plot Character Thought Song Spectacle Diction
- ❖ **Plot** Plot is the ordering of incidents. • Simple Plot is simple when the change in the fortunes of the hero takes place without peripety and discovery. • Complex The plot is complex when it involves one or the other both. The peripety is the change in the fortunes of the hero and the discovery is a change from ignorance to knowledge.
 - ❖ **Characteristics of Plot** Characteristics of Plot Plot should be whole It should have a magnitude Probability and Necessity Willing suspension of disbelief Organic unity
 - ❖ **Formative elements of Plot** Formative elements of Plot Peripetia- reversal of fortune Anagnorisis-recognition or discovery of truth Suffering-destructive or painful action
 - ❖ **Character** Characters are the agents for moving according to the plot. Essential features of characterisation
 - Characters should be good.
 - Characters should be appropriate.
 - Characters should be true to life.
 - Characters should be consistent.
 - ❖ **Thought** Thought is the intellectual element in a tragedy. It is the ability of the dramatist to say what is possible and appropriate.
 - Proof and reputation
 - Production of emotional effect
 - Introduction of the importance or significance of anything
 - ❖ **Diction and Style** Diction is the choice and arrangement of words and images in a literary composition. Six types of words
 - Current or ordinary words
 - Foreign terms borrowed or dialects
 - Metaphors
 - Ornamental periphrasis
 - Invented words
 - Not invented, but made new lengthening or shortening
 - ❖ **Songs or Melody** Song or Melody Prologue Episode Choric Song Exode Songs is the pleasurable addition to a play. In a tragedy, song is provided by the chorus.
 - ❖ **Spectacle or Stage** effect Spectacle is the mode of imitation by which the story is presented on a stage before an audience. It is the sight of disaster and Aristotle calls this can raise fear and pity in the spectator.
 - Types of spectacles
 - Plot
 - Character
 - Anagnorisis
 - Hamartia
 - ❖ **Epic and Tragedy** Poetry is divided into epic or narrative poetry and dramatic poetry on the basis of the manner of imitation. Epic is the narration of an action in verse and tragedy is the dramatic representation of an action.
 - ❖ **Similarities between Epic and Tragedy**
 - Use of refined diction
 - Both in tragedy and epic the poet should

know the artBoth in tragedy and epic the poet should know the art of telling lies the right way.of telling lies the right way. • Both should have the ability of artistic imitationBoth should have the ability of artistic imitation (mimesis).(mimesis).

- ❖ **Difference between Epic** andDifference between Epic and TragedyTragedy EpicEpic
 - NarrativeNarrative • LongLong • Unity of actionUnity of action • Use of one metreUse of one metre Heroic coupletHeroic couplet • All elements of tragedyAll elements of tragedy not song and spectaclenot song and spectacle TragedyTragedy • DramaticDramatic • Must be confined to aMust be confined to a single revolution of thesingle revolution of the sunsun • Three unitiesThree unities • Use various metresUse various metres • Six elements of tragedySix elements of tragedy
- ❖ **Rules of TragedyRules** of Tragedy • It is an imitation of an action.It is an imitation of an action. • He should imaginatively visualize the action.He should imaginatively visualize the action. • He should workout the emotions with the veryHe should workout the emotions with the very gestures of his dramatic personages.gestures of his dramatic personages. • He should begin with the universal form of the plot,He should begin with the universal form of the plot, adding the names and episodes later.adding the names and episodes later.
- ❖ **Types of TragedyTypes** of Tragedy • Complex tragedyComplex tragedy It consists of reversal and recognition of truth.It consists of reversal and recognition of truth. • Tragedy of sufferingTragedy of suffering Tragedy depicts suffering.Tragedy depicts suffering. • Tragedy of characterTragedy of character Character more involved than plot.Character more involved than plot. • Tragedy of spectacleTragedy of spectacle It depends upon the sensational effectsIt depends upon the sensational effects produced by the actors, the costume designers andproduced by the actors, the costume designers and other mechanical and artificial devices.other mechanical and artificial devices.
- ❖ **Types of RecognitionTypes** of Recognition Anagnorisis (discovery or recognition of truth)Anagnorisis (discovery or recognition of truth) • Signs or objects, symbolsSigns or objects, symbols • Author tells himselfAuthor tells himself • Discovery from memoryDiscovery from memory • Process of reasoningProcess of reasoning • Discovery arising from the false reasoningDiscovery arising from the false reasoning
- ❖ **Superiority of Tragedy** over EpicSuperiority of Tragedy over Epic • It has all the elements of an epic and has alsoIt has all the elements of an epic and has also spectacle and song which the epic lacks.spectacle and song which the epic lacks. • Unity of action only in a tragedy not in an epic.Unity of action only in a tragedy not in an epic. • Simply reading the play without performing it isSimply reading the play without performing it is already very potent.already very potent. • Tragedy is shorter that is more compact concentratedTragedy is shorter that is more compact concentrated effect.effect.
- ❖ **Ideal Tragic HeroIdeal** Tragic Hero • He should not be an utter villain.He should not be an utter villain. • He should neither the perfectly good not utterly bad.He should neither the perfectly good not utterly bad. • He must be intermediary sort of person.He must be intermediary sort of person. • He must posses both qualities and weakness.He must posses both qualities and weakness. • He must be a human being.He must be a human being. • Hamartia (tragic flow).Hamartia (tragic flow).