Aristotle

Poetics

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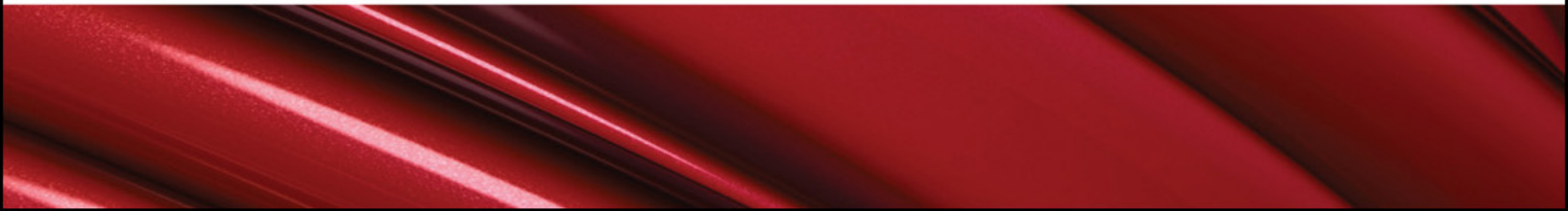

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ARISTOTLE

Poetics

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
ANTHONY KENNY

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POETICS

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BC), with Plato one of the two greatest philosophers of antiquity, and in the view of many the greatest philosopher of all time, lived and taught in Athens for most of his career. He began as a pupil of Plato, and for some time acted as tutor to Alexander the Great. He left writings on a prodigious variety of subjects, covering the whole field of knowledge from biology and astronomy to rhetoric and literary criticism, from political theory to the most abstract reaches of philosophy. He wrote two treatises on ethics, called *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean* after their first editors, his pupil Eudemus and his son Nicomachus.

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INTRODUCTION

The Literary Legacy of Greece

Of all the treasures that ancient Greece has bequeathed to us, its literature is the one that is best preserved. Greek architecture survives in ruins, Greek sculptures have suffered amputations, Greek paintings have almost vanished, and no one really knows how Greek music sounded. However, many masterpieces of literature have survived intact to be read and enjoyed across the centuries. We possess fine specimens of epic and lyric, of tragedy and comedy, of history and philosophy, and of rhetorical and political oratory. Moreover, Greece provided us not only with the earliest European literature, but also with the very earliest literary criticism, to which the present volume bears witness.

Epic was the first genre to be perfected in Greece. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer purport to recount events of the Trojan war of the thirteenth century BC, but they were probably put together in their present form in the eighth century. Perhaps at the end of that century, the poet Hesiod wrote epic texts on agriculture and on the gods of the Greek pantheon. In the late seventh century the poetess Sappho of Lesbos wrote enchanting love lyrics. The most famous Greek lyric poet was Pindar (518–446), who wrote odes in honour of the victors in panhellenic contests such as the Olympic Games.

The most glorious days of ancient Greece fell in the fifth century BC, during fifty years of peace between two periods of warfare. The century began with wars between Greece and Persia, and ended with a war between the city states of Greece itself. In the middle period flowered the great civilization of the city of Athens.

In 499 BC Greeks living in Ionia (now part of Turkey) rose in unsuccessful revolt against the Persian King Darius who ruled over them. Darius invaded Greece to punish those who had assisted the rebels; he was defeated by a mainly Athenian army at Marathon in 490. His son Xerxes launched a more massive expedition in 484, defeated a gallant band of Spartans at Thermopylae, and forced the Athenians to evacuate their city. By 479, however, he had been defeated both at sea (the battle of Salamis) and on land (the battle of Platea). At this point democratic Athens assumed

the leadership of the Greek allies and built up a powerful empire of mainland and island communities

The Athenian leader Pericles rebuilt the city's temples which had been destroyed by Xerxes. To this day visitors travel across the world to see the ruins of the buildings he erected on the Acropolis, and the sculptures with which these temples were adorned are among the most treasured possessions of the museums in which they are now scattered. When Pericles' programme was complete, Athens was unrivalled anywhere in the world for architecture and sculpture.

Athens held the primacy too in drama and literature. Aeschylus (525–456), who had fought in the Persian wars, was the first great writer of tragedy: he brought onto the stage the heroes and heroines of Homeric epic, and his re-enactment of the homecoming and murder of Agamemnon can still fascinate and horrify. Aeschylus also represented the more recent catastrophes that had afflicted King Xerxes in his play *Persians*. Younger dramatists, the pious conservative Sophocles (496–406) and the more radical and sceptical Euripides (485–406), set the classical pattern of tragic drama. Sophocles' plays about King Oedipus, killer of his father and husband of his mother, and Euripides' portrayal of the child-murderer Medea not only figure in the twenty-first-century repertoire but also strike disturbing chords in the twenty-first-century psyche. The serious writing of history also began in the fifth century, with chronicles of the Persian wars written by Herodotus (484–425) at the beginning of the century, and Thucydides' (455–400) narrative of the war between the Greeks as the century came to an end.

Philosophy, too, was practised in Periclean Athens, by Anaxagoras (500–428), an early proponent of Big Bang cosmology. But its golden days were still in the future, with the great trio of Socrates (469–399), Plato (429–347), and Aristotle (385–322). In the Peloponnesian war between Athens and the other Greek cities which brought to an end the Athenian Empire, Socrates served in the Athenian heavy infantry. During the war he displayed conspicuous physical courage, and after it remarkable moral courage in resisting political pressure to carry out illegal acts. This made him unpopular with successive Athenian governments, and he was executed, on trumped-up charges, by the democratic rulers in 399.

Socrates left no writings, and the only portrayal of him in his lifetime was made by Aristophanes (448–380), the greatest writer of Greek comedy,

who represents him (in the play *Clouds*) as presiding over a school of chicanery and an academy of bogus research. However, Socrates' philosophical views were preserved and adorned in the dialogues of his pupil Plato, and it is Plato's Socrates who has been the patron saint of philosophy ever since.

Socrates' own interests focused on moral philosophy: what was the nature of virtue, and could it be taught in the way that a craft can be taught? Plato presented a system of moral philosophy with an elaborate metaphysical underpinning, the theory of Forms or Ideas. In his best-known writings he used this theory to solve problems in logic and epistemology as well as in ethics; but in later life he began to see flaws in his system, and to reform it in fundamental ways. Some of the criticisms he set out to answer may have been derived from Aristotle, who was a member of Plato's philosophical school, the Academy, for twenty years.

Aristotle was a polymath: a logician, biologist, zoologist, economist, and political theorist as well as a metaphysician and philosopher of mind. As a moral philosopher, he followed Plato's structuring of the virtues and Plato's emphasis on the close connection between virtue and happiness. But he rejected the theory of Ideas, the metaphysical substructure of Platonic ethics, and developed his own moral theory, presented in magisterial form in two different treatises, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*.

In place of the Idea of the Good which was central for Plato, Aristotle offers happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the supreme good with which ethics is concerned, for, like Plato, he sees an intimate connection between living virtuously and living happily. In both ethical treatises a happy life is a life of virtuous activity, and each of them offers an analysis of the concept of virtue and a classification of virtues of different types. One class is that of the moral virtues, such as courage, temperance, and liberality, that constantly appeared in Plato's ethical discussions. The other class is that of intellectual virtues: here Aristotle, unlike Plato, makes a sharp distinction between the intellectual virtue of wisdom, which governs ethical behaviour, and the intellectual virtue of understanding, which is expressed in scientific endeavour and contemplation. The principal difference between Aristotle's two ethical treatises is that one of them regards perfect happiness as constituted solely by the activity of philosophical contemplation, whereas for the other it consists in the harmonious exercise of all the virtues, intellectual and moral.

Philosophy was the last form of literature to reach maturity in classical Greece, but with its arrival literature became for the first time reflective, and conscious of itself. Both Plato's and Aristotle's works contain reflections on the purpose and value of literature. Both philosophers are keenly interested in the relationship between literature and morality, and because they have different conceptions of morality they have different attitudes to literature. In Plato's writings the discussions of literature are scattered, the most interesting of them occurring in his dialogue the *Republic*, which is principally devoted to moral and political philosophy. (These reflections are reprinted in translation in this volume.) Aristotle, however, devoted a self-standing work, the *Poetics*, to the issues that Plato had discussed in fragmented fashion. His brief treatise stands out, therefore, as the first surviving work devoted to literary criticism, and indeed the first essay in the broader field of aesthetics.

Aristotle's Poetics

It is many centuries too late to change the title of this treatise of Aristotle's, but 'Poetics' gives a misleading impression of the contents of the treatise. The Greek word *poiesis* (literally 'making'), as used by Aristotle, has both a narrower and a wider scope than the English word 'poetry'. The *Poetics* treats at length of Greek epic and tragedy, both of which were written in verse; but there were many forms of Greek poetry in which Aristotle shows no interest: didactic treatises like Hesiod's, for instance, or love-lyrics like Sappho's. He was indeed well aware of the distinction between verse and prose, though there was no obvious pair of Greek words to make the distinction. But he is insistent that it is not the metrical form that makes something a poem; it is content rather than form that matters in poetry. The scientific writings of the philosopher Empedocles are not poetry, even though they are composed in hexameters; and if you put the histories of Herodotus into verse they would still be history and not poetry. On the other hand, it is clear to us—if not perhaps to Aristotle—that many of the features that he regarded as essential to epic and tragedy might well find expression in pure prose. If a verse Herodotus would still be history, might not a prose Homer still be what Aristotle calls poetry? After all, most of what the *Poetics* says about the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* remains true of the numerous prose versions of those works in modern languages.

What English term, then, covers all and only the things that Aristotle calls *poiesis*? ‘Imaginative writing’ and ‘creative writing’ come close, but one expression is too clumsy and the other too academic for regular use. The closest modern equivalent to Aristotle’s word is the German *Dichtung*, which covers prose fiction as well as verse. In this translation I have decided to retain the traditional translation ‘poetry’, having prefaced it with this health warning.

The semantic properties of Aristotle’s word for poetry mean that his treatise is inadequate as a treatment of Greek verse. But they confer on it an immense countervailing advantage. Because of them, Aristotle’s insights transcend the boundaries of ancient Greek culture and can be applied to creative writing of many ages and many nations. As we shall see in the course of reading the text, the technical concepts he here creates can be applied to novels, dramas, and operas in many languages—even, indeed, to detective stories. Aristotle provides a prism through which different kinds of imaginative writing may be viewed and evaluated.

The *Poetics* concentrates on a single art form: tragedy. Epic is taken seriously, but is given nothing like equal space. A treatment of comedy is promised, but the promise is never fulfilled. The emphasis is entirely intelligible: tragedy was the most fully developed literary product of the time. While seeking to lay bare the essence of tragedy, Aristotle was able to expose, through his close inspection of this single genre, some of the basic principles operative in the creative process itself.

Plato and Aristotle on Poetry

To understand Aristotle’s message in the *Poetics* one must know something of Plato’s attitude to poetry. In the second and third books of the *Republic* Homer is attacked for misrepresenting the gods and for encouraging debased emotions, and dramatic representation is attacked as deceptive and degrading. In the tenth book Plato’s theory of Ideas provides the basis for a further, and more fundamental, attack on the poets. Material objects are imperfect copies of the truly real Ideas; artistic representations of material objects are therefore at two removes from reality, being imitations of imitations (597e). Drama corrupts by appealing to the lower parts of our nature, encouraging us to indulge in weeping and laughter (605d–6c).

Dramatic poets must be kept away from the ideal city: they should be anointed with myrrh, crowned with garlands, and sent on their way (398b).

One of Aristotle's aims is to resolve this quarrel between poetry and philosophy. There are three elements in Plato's attack: theological, ethical, and metaphysical. Aristotle has a response to each of them, but he deals with each criticism in a different manner. The metaphysical system of Plato is rejected outright. Poetry is shown to have a significant role within Aristotle's own ethical system. The theological criticism is accepted, but in response tragedy is tacitly secularized.

To understand the vehemence of Plato's attack on epic poetry one must realize that in the Athens of his day the works of Homer enjoyed a status comparable to that of the Bible during much of Christian history. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were a principal source of information about the divine, they contained models for ethical behaviour, and they provided a common source of reference and allusion for the discussion of a wide variety of human interests and values. Plato combines the fervour of a Luther dethroning a debased theology and a David Friedrich Strauss demolishing a mythological farrago.

Plato was not the first philosopher to attack Homer's Olympian gods. Xenophanes had earlier complained that Homer attributed to the gods theft, adultery, deception, and everything that, among humans, would be considered a shame and a reproach. But even if Homer's gods had behaved honourably, they would still resemble humans too much to be credible. Men fashion gods in their own image: Ethiopians believe in gods that are dark and snub-nosed, while the gods worshipped by the Thracians have red hair and blue eyes. 'If cows and horses or lions had hands and could draw, then horses would draw the forms of gods like horses, cows like cows, making their bodies similar in shape to their own.' Instead of this childish anthropomorphism, Xenophanes offered a sophisticated monotheism. He believed in

> One god, lord over gods and human kind
> Like mortals neither in body nor in mind.

Aristotle in the *Poetics* accepts that Xenophanes may well have been right about the nature of the gods; he thinks, however, that Homer can still be defended. But as we shall see later in detail, in his treatment of the great

Greek tragedies he pares down to the minimum the divine element they contain.

Both Plato and Aristotle in their ethical systems treated at length of the emotions, and they shared a psychological model in which reasoning and feeling were activities of different parts of the soul, and the intellectual soul was paramount. The role assigned to the emotions was different in the two systems, however. In Plato's virtuous man the expression of emotion would be confined to the minimum. For Aristotle an important part of virtue was the appropriate amount of feeling: there could be too little, as well as too much emotion, in a man's life. In emotion as in action, Aristotle's virtuous person aims at a happy mean. Both philosophers emphasize that there is a close link between poetry and emotion; it is because they have different attitudes to emotion that they have different attitudes to poetry.

As we have seen, a key element in Plato's philosophy was the theory of Ideas. The theory can be characterized as follows. Socrates, Simmias, and Cebes are all called 'men'; they have it in common that they are all men. Now when we say 'Simmias is a man', does the word 'man' stand for something in the way that the word 'Simmias' stands for the individual man Simmias? If so, what? Is it the same thing as the word 'man' stands for in the sentence 'Cebes is a man'? Plato's answer is yes: in each case in which such an expression occurs it stands for the same thing, namely, that which makes Simmias, Cebes, and Socrates all men. This is the Idea of Man, which is something simple, universal, immutable, and everlasting. In general, in any case where the particular things A, B, and C, are all F, Plato is likely to say that they are related to a single Idea of F: they participate in or imitate the Idea. It was on the basis of this theory that Plato complained that works of art were imitations of imitations.

Aristotle rejected the classical theory of Ideas (which, it is fair to notice, was substantially criticized and modified by Plato himself in his later years). The theory, he claimed, fails to solve the problems it was meant to address. It does not confer intelligibility on particular things, because immutable and everlasting Forms cannot explain how particulars come into existence and undergo change. Moreover, the Ideas do not contribute anything to the knowledge of other things or to their being. All the theory does is to bring in new entities equal in number to the entities to be explained: as if one could solve a problem by doubling it. By rejecting the theory, Aristotle undercut the metaphysical objection to poetry.

Aristotle did, however, agree with Plato about the importance of universals; only, he denied that there were any universals separated from individuals. Like Plato, he attached supreme importance to truths that are universal and necessary: they are the province of philosophy. Like Plato, he attaches secondary importance to contingent truths about the empirical world. But he disagrees with Plato about the relative importance of empirical truths and dramatic fictions. Whereas Plato ranked in descending order the disciplines of philosophy, history, and poetry, Aristotle offers a different ranking: philosophy, poetry, and history. He does so on the basis that poetry is more philosophical than history, since it deals with universals rather than particulars.

Representation

Aristotle sites his criticism of Plato within a general theory of imitation or representation. Imitation, he says, so far from being the degrading activity that Plato describes, is something natural to humans from childhood, and is one of the features that makes man superior to animals, since it vastly increases his scope for learning. Secondly, representation brings a delight all of its own: we enjoy and admire paintings of objects that in themselves would annoy or disgust us (1448b5–24).

The Greek word used in this dialogue with Plato is *mimesis*—the word from which our ‘mime’ is derived. It is often translated ‘imitation’, and this is indeed appropriate to render Plato’s use, since its slightly pejorative overtones would be an expression of Plato’s distaste for the activity. But it is not clear that the word is the best English one to render the concept as understood by Aristotle. Several translators simply use the word *mimesis* itself inside an English context. Commonly, the use of transliteration instead of translation is a mark of cowardice in translators. But in this case the difficulty of finding an English word that fits in all the Aristotelian contexts makes one sympathize with those who have given up the task.

Having experimented with several renderings—‘mimicry’, ‘copying’, ‘portrayal’, and ‘imitation’ itself—I finally opted for ‘representation’. In most contexts this is clearly what Aristotle is talking about, and ‘representative arts’ sounds more natural than ‘imitative arts’. What has prevented translators from adopting this version is, I think, the fact that the concept is introduced in connection with the behaviour of children. When a

child pretends to be a tiger, or children play at doctors and nurses, it seems a little heavy to say that they are representing something, whereas ‘imitation’ is quite a natural description of what they are doing. None the less, what they are doing does fall under the concept of representation as sketched by Aristotle, and it is no accident that in English the word ‘play’ covers both childish pretence and dramatic performance. In the other contexts in which Aristotle uses the word *mimesis*, ‘representation’ is the English word that comes closest to his sense.

Aristotle begins with a very broad concept of representation. It covers epic, drama, painting, sculpture, dancing, and music. The last two items in this list may give us pause. Dancing, however, fits well enough if we remember that the kind of dances Aristotle would have seen resembled ballets or liturgical processions rather than ballroom dancing. But is music, as such, representational? We do not know enough about Greek music to guess whether Aristotle had in mind something like programme music or rather the imitative effects to be found in Haydn’s *Creation* and Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*.

At all events, that kind of music would be quickly ruled out by Aristotle’s further development of the concept of representation. Forms of representation, he tells us, differ from each other in respect of their medium, their object, and their mode. The broad concept outlined above was hospitable to many media, but when Aristotle moves on to consider object and mode he narrows the concept considerably. The objects of representation, he tells us, are people in action. Thus both comedy and tragedy are representational, differing only in the kinds of people represented; but there is no room for flutes imitating birdsong. Finally, representation may be effected in two different modes, the narrative (as in epic) or the dramatic (as in tragedy). Later, in chapter 24, in the interests of privileging tragedy over epic, Aristotle will even deny that narrative is truly representation; in the *Iliad* only the dramatic speeches really deserve the name. When the concept has been so tendentiously narrowed down from its original scope it begins to lose its utility.

The Natural History of Poetry

In the fourth and fifth chapters of the *Poetics* Aristotle offers a sketch of the development of poetry from the earliest times. First of all, representation

took the form of improvised ditties and sketches. The first truly poetical forms were, on the one hand, hymns to gods and panegyrics on heroes, and on the other, lampoons of fools and invectives against knaves. Tragedy developed out of the first kind of poem and comedy out of the second, with Homer as the common ancestor of both.

Tragedy, Aristotle tells us, went through many changes and then ceased to evolve. In its natural condition it has a certain defined length, it involves three actors, it is written in iambic trimeter, and it contains a limited number of choral lyrics. We may feel inclined to smile when we are told that the natural condition of tragedy is precisely the form it took in the works of Sophocles. Indeed, some critics have mocked Aristotle for regarding a human creation such as tragedy as exhibiting any pattern at all of natural evolution and development: this is one more example, they say, of Aristotle's obsession with biology as the model for every scientific discipline. But many respected writers to this day treat human institutions as having a natural history involving a development from primitive to mature forms. It is taken for granted by many political writers in the West, for example, that liberal democracy is the mature form of the state, with monarchy and oligarchy as primitive approximations to, or regressive deviations from, an ideal norm. And while Sophoclean tragedy may not be the one and only mature form of drama, it remains to this day one of the most impressive products of representational art.

Modern scholars tell us that Aristotle's historical account of the development of Greek poetry is inaccurate. Epic, for instance, did not grow out of hymnody and panegyric. The Homeric hymns were no earlier than Homer, and the poets of encomia, such as Simonides and Pindar, wrote considerably later. Defenders of Aristotle say that his treatment is meant to be more schematic than chronological. Those who regard democracy as the ideal form of polity do not contend, after all, that every democracy has reached its maturity by the same route.

The Nature of Tragedy

Aristotle defines tragedy in the following terms:

> Tragedy is a representation of an action of a superior kind—grand, and complete in itself—presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by actors rather than told by a narrator, effecting, through pity and fear, the purification of such emotions. (1449b24 ff.)

Every word in this definition needs careful explanation. Aristotle goes on to offer paraphrases for each of them—except for the most difficult of all, namely *katharsis* or purification. This is the only time the word is used in the *Poetics* and it is never defined. It has been the object of much discussion among commentators, as we shall see. But before contributing to the controversy I will summarize what Aristotle himself has to tell us in expansion of his definition.

Six things, Aristotle says, are necessary for a tragedy: the story, the moral element, the style, the ideas, the staging, and the music. It is the first two of these that chiefly interest him. Stage performance and musical accompaniment are dispensable accessories: what is great in a tragedy can be appreciated from a mere reading of the text. The ideas and the style are more important: it is the thoughts expressed by the characters that arouse emotion in the hearer, and if they are to do so successfully they must be presented convincingly by the actors.

The two things that bring out the genius of a tragic poet are called by Aristotle *muthos* and *ethos. Muthos* is often translated ‘plot’, but it is just the ordinary Greek word for any story, and the *Poetics* has a different expression to denote the plot of a drama, *sustasis pragmatōn*, ‘the putting together of events’. *Ethos* is often translated ‘character’, but this word on its own is inappropriate, since in English everyone who figures in the dramatis personae is a character in the drama, and on the other hand ‘character’ can also refer to a person’s individuality, which is not what Aristotle has in mind. In translation, I have used ‘moral element’ when Aristotle is talking about the *ethos* of a drama and ‘moral character’ when he is talking about the *ethos* of a person. It is these two features of tragedy that really interest Aristotle, and he devotes a long chapter to *ethos*, and no less than five chapters to *muthos*.

The protagonist or tragic hero must be neither supremely good nor supremely bad: he should be a person of rank who is basically good, but comes to grief through erring in some serious way. A woman may have the kind of goodness necessary to be a tragic heroine, and even a slave may be a tragic subject. Whatever kind of person the protagonist is, it is important that he or she should have the qualities appropriate to them, and should be consistent throughout the drama. Every one of the dramatis personae should possess some good features: what they do should be in character,

and what happens to them should be a necessary or probable outcome of their behaviour.

In Homeric epic the word ‘good’, applied to a person, can indicate either social or moral status: it is not always clear whether it indicates power, prowess, or virtue. Echoes of this ambiguity survived into modern times. ‘Aristocracy’, a word transliterated from the Greek, means etymologically the rule of the best people. In Victorian and Edwardian times to call someone ‘a gentleman’ might be to compliment him on a particular set of virtues, or simply to indicate the class to which he belonged.

Something of the Homeric ambiguity survives in the *Poetics*. When, in Chapter 14, Aristotle praises Homer for making Achilles a good man and also a paradigm of stubbornness one wonders what moral qualities constitute his goodness, given what is related of him in the *Iliad*. Power, yes, prowess, yes, even, eventually, pity: but virtue? Again, we are told that tragedy deals with people who are ‘better than us’ and that its plots should deal with noble families: this suggests that tragedy concerns our social betters. But the mention of the goodness of women and slaves shows that it is moral status that is primarily in question. Certainly in his ethical treatises Aristotle is in no doubt that moral virtue is an essential element in human flourishing, whereas noble birth and material wealth are optional extras.

But if it is moral worth that is in question, how far can we accept the principle that every character must have some goodness in them? Should we criticize *Othello* because Iago is bad through and through, or reject *Paradise Lost* because Satan is a protagonist, or condemn *Don Giovanni* out of hand because of its hell-bound hero? Perhaps Aristotle’s vision was narrowed because of the tiny number of characters in Greek drama. It is surely much more plausible to claim that every work of fiction should contain some characters with whom we can identify and who have something of goodness within them—though this is not a precept that every modern novelist obeys.

Aristotle insists that in tragedy the most important element of all is story: the characters are created for the sake of the story, and not the other way round. The plot must be a self-contained narrative with a clearly marked beginning, middle, and end; it must be sufficiently short and simple for the spectator to hold all its details in mind. The play must have a unity. You do not make a tragedy by stringing together a set of episodes connected only by a common hero; rather, there must be a single significant action on

which the whole plot turns (1451a21–9). Once again, one may query whether Aristotle's point can be generalized to fictions of other kinds: taken literally, his *diktat* would rule out *Don Quixote, Tom Jones,* and the *Divina Commedia*. Undoubtedly there is a great difference between a tragic drama and a picaresque novel: but the beneficial effects that Aristotle attributes to tragedy may be achieved in either genre.

As Dorothy Sayers pointed out, in her Oxford lecture reprinted here, many of Aristotle's concepts and precepts concerning plot fit very well a genre which is even further distant from Greek tragedy than the picaresque novel—namely, the detective story. A tragedy must be a unified whole, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it must be on an appropriate scale, not too long and not too short. In a typical tragedy, Aristotle tells us, the story gradually gets more complicated until a turning-point is reached, which Aristotle calls a 'reversal' (*peripeteia*). That is the moment at which the apparently fortunate hero falls to disaster, perhaps through a 'discovery' (*anagnorisis*), namely his coming into possession of some crucial but hitherto unknown piece of information (1454b19). The reversal marks the end of the complication (*deesis*) of the plot, which is followed by its explication (*lusis*) in which the twists earlier introduced are gradually unravelled (1455b24 ff.).

The most important of the six elements of tragedy are, then, the story and the morality of the characters. The third item is called by Aristotle *dianoia* —a common Greek word for 'thought', here rendered 'ideas'. By this he means the intellectual element of the dialogue: the thoughts expressed by the characters in offering arguments or reporting facts. *Dianoia* is the expression of the intelligence of the persons in the drama, while the choices they make are the expression of their moral character. *Dianoia* is closely related to the fourth element of tragedy, style (*lexis*), which is the literary quality of its expression.

The fifth element is called by Aristotle *opsis*, which is literally 'visual appearance'; it is often translated 'spectacle'. This, with the sixth element, music, is what makes the difference between attending a performance of a tragedy and merely reading it at home. 'Staging' seems the most appropriate translation—it includes not only the stage-setting but also the visible performance of the actors. Music is treated only summarily in the *Poetics*.

Aristotle's observations are illustrated by constant reference to actual Greek plays, in particular to Sophocles' tragedy *King Oedipus*. Oedipus, at the beginning of the play, enjoys prosperity and reputation. He is basically a good man, but has the flaw of impetuosity. This makes him commit two fatal errors: he kills a stranger in a scuffle, and marries a bride without due diligence. The 'discovery' that the man he killed was his father, Laius, and the woman he married was his mother, Jocasta, leads to the 'reversal' of his fortune, as he is banished from his kingdom and blinds himself in shame and remorse.

This analysis by Aristotle of *King Oedipus* is a striking illustration of the lengths to which he was prepared to go to secularize the plots of Greek dramas. According to the mythology on which Sophocles drew for his play, Laius, having offended the god Apollo, was told that if he fathered a son he would be killed by him. Accordingly, when his son Oedipus was born he was handed over to a servant with orders to kill the child by exposing it. The servant instead gave the baby to a shepherd, who handed him over to the king and queen of Corinth to bring up and treat him as their son. Oedipus, informed by the Delphic oracle that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother, swore never to return to Corinth where, as he supposed, his parents lived. He went instead towards Thebes, and then fulfilled both the curse and the prophecy by murdering Laius and marrying his widow Jocasta. To a modern reader the most chilling feature of the tragedy is the insistence that no matter what steps you take to thwart it, you must in the end succumb to a divine predestination. One who knew the Oedipus story only from Aristotle would never guess at the importance of this.

Tragedy and Emotion

In Aristotle's account of the moral virtues, as dealt with in books II to V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and in the second and third books of the *Eudemian Ethics*, the emotions play an important part. 'By emotions', Aristotle tells us (*EE* 1220b11), 'I mean things like anger, fear, shame, desire, and in general anything that as such is generally attended by feelings of pleasure and pain.' The mere occurrence of an emotion does not in itself imply any vice or virtue, but what does indicate character is the relation of emotion to reason. 'What is responsible for whether these emotions occur in accord

with reason, or in opposition to it, is states of character: things like courage, temperance, cowardice, intemperance.' The virtues are abiding states, and thus differ from momentary emotions like anger and pity. What makes a person good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy, is neither the simple possession of faculties nor the simple occurrence of passions. It is rather a state of character which is expressed both in purpose (*prohairesis*) and in action (*praxis*) (*NE* 1103a11–b25; 1105a19–1106a13; *EE* 1220b1–20).

Virtue is expressed in good purpose, that is to say, a prescription for action in accordance with a good plan of life. The actions which express moral virtue will, Aristotle tells us, avoid excess and defect. A temperate person, for instance, will avoid eating or drinking too much; but he will also avoid eating or drinking too little. Virtue chooses the mean, or middle ground, between excess and defect, eating and drinking the right amount. Virtue is concerned not only with action but also with emotion. An irascible man is one who gets angry more often than he should, and an impassive man gets angry less often than he should. We may have too many fears or too few fears, and courage will enable us to fear when fear is appropriate and be fearless when it is not. We may be excessively concerned with sex and we may be insufficiently interested in it: the temperate person will take the appropriate degree of interest and be neither lustful nor frigid (1107b1–9).

Since Aristotle's definition of tragedy suggests that its function is to effect a purification of the emotions, it is obviously important to relate what is said in the *Poetics* to the role of the emotions in his general ethical system. But Aristotle's fullest treatment of the emotions occurs not in either of his *Ethics* but in the second book of his *Rhetoric*. Emotions, he says, are feelings that alter people's judgements, and they are accompanied by pain and pleasure. He takes each major emotion in turn, offering a definition of the emotion and a list of its objects and causes. Anger, for instance, he defines as a desire, accompanied by pain, for what appears to be revenge for what appears to be an unmerited slight upon oneself or one's friends. He gives a long list of the kinds of people who make us angry: those who mock us, for instance, or those who stop us drinking when we are thirsty, or those who get in our way at work.

> Also those who speak ill of us, and show contempt for us, in respect of the things we most care about. Thus those who seek a reputation as philosophers get angry with those who show disdain for their philosophy; those who pride themselves upon their appearance get angry with those who

disparage it, and so on. We feel particularly if we believe that, either in fact or in popular belief, we are totally or largely lacking in the respective qualities. For when we are convinced that we excel in the qualities for which we are mocked, we can ignore the mockery. (1379a32–b1)

Aristotle takes us on a detailed tour of the emotions of anger, hatred, fear, shame, pity, indignation, envy, and jealousy. In each case his treatment is clear and systematic, and often shows—as in the above passage—acute psychological insight.

The statement that tragedy effects, through pity and fear, the purification of these emotions, raises two questions. First, what is it to purify an emotion? Second, why does Aristotle specify just these two emotions of pity and fear?

Aristotle nowhere defines *katharsis*. In his *Politics* (1341b38) he commends musical melodies that achieve *katharsis*, saying that he is using the word without explanation, but that he will give one when he comes to treat of poetry—but he does not keep his promise. The Greek word is a verbal noun related to the adjective *katharos*, which means pure and undefiled. ‘Purification’ is therefore the most obvious translation, and having considered several others—‘purging’, ‘cleansing’, ‘refining’—I concluded that it is also the most appropriate. But the word needs careful elucidation if it is not to be misunderstood.

First of all, Aristotle does not mean that tragedy cleanses the soul or purges the emotions, in the sense of getting rid of them altogether. This would be a Platonic rather than an Aristotelian project: according to the doctrine of the mean, feeling too little emotion can be as bad as feeling too much. Nor, I believe, does he mean that tragedy offers a harmless outlet for emotions that might otherwise find their expression in anti-social behaviour. This idea, though championed by some distinguished critics, presupposes an anachronistic, Freudian, hydraulic view of drives that must find some kind of passage from inside us to outside us if there is not to be some psychic explosion.

The translation of *katharsis* as ‘refining’ is closer to Aristotle’s meaning. A courageous man is one who fears what it is right to fear, at the right time, and in the right proportion. Something that adjusts our fears so that they achieve this ideal therefore refines the emotion of fear, and brings it into harmony with reason and virtue. But there is more than this to Aristotle’s notion of *katharsis*.

In the paean to the contemplative life that concludes the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tells us that that the pleasures of philosophy are the purest of all pleasures (NE 1177a25). From the context it is clear that he is not drawing any link between philosophy and chastity, but rather stressing that the philosopher's pleasures are unmixed with pain. Between his pursuits of pleasure, the libertine suffers the pains of unsatisfied desire; the statesman has to put up with the exertions of public life; but the pursuit of philosophy is—so Aristotle believed—unalloyed pleasure.

This sense of *katharos* must be relevant. In the *Poetics* Aristotle constantly stresses that the emotions are linked to pleasure and pain. Surely, one of the ways in which drama achieves the purification of emotions is that it allows us to experience even the most negative emotions without the pain that accompanies them in real life—we actually enjoy being frightened by what we see on the stage, and the tears we weep over tragic victims are an expression of a grief that is positively sweet. It is the pleasure that we take in feeling these normally depressing emotions that is the pleasure peculiar to tragedy. This is the dramatic counterpart of Aristotle's point that we enjoy seeing pictorial representations of things that in reality we would find ugly and repellent.

Why, finally, does Aristotle, when talking about the purificatory effect of drama, concentrate on pity and fear, rather than, say, love or anger? The obvious answer is that he is focused on tragedy as the paradigm form of drama, and these are the emotions most proper to be evoked by tragedy. In fact, pity and fear should not here be considered as two separate emotions. Watching the travails of Oedipus or Lear, I feel simultaneously pity for the sufferer and fear that I might myself suffer some comparable fate.

However, the very comparison between myself and the tragic hero serves to calibrate the emotions of pity and fear when felt in real life. Watching tragedy helps us to put our own sorrows and worries into proportion, when we observe the catastrophes that have overtaken people who were far superior to the likes of ourselves. Pity and fear, Aristotle continues, are most easily aroused if the tragedy exhibits people as the victims of hatred and murder where they could most expect to be loved and cherished. That is why so many tragedies concern feuds within a single family.

But if pity and fear are the emotions to be taken into account when evaluating the role of tragedy, there is no reason why Aristotle's theory of *katharsis* should not be extended to other emotions when considering other

forms of drama or fiction. No doubt Aristotle's own lost treatment of comedy will have explored the relation of the emotions of amusement to the virtue of wittiness or conviviality which he endorses in both of his *Ethics*. The plays of Vàclav Havel that circulated in samizdat served to purify the emotion of anger against communist tyranny, and a reading of *Anna Karenina* may teach us to love wisely rather than too well.

On one point Aristotle seems to have misjudged the relationship between drama and emotion. He tells us that, as far as possible, the poet should act the story as he writes it. People of the same temperament, he says, are more persuasive if they actually feel the emotions they enact: someone actually in distress best acts out distress, someone really angry best acts out rage. Surely this is wrong, both about actors and about poets. The actor who plays the hero does not necessarily act better if he is actually in love with the actress who is playing the heroine. And as for the poet, whatever emotion he may wish to put into his poetry had better be recollected in tranquillity.

Poetry and Truth

The poet's job, Aristotle tells us, is not to relate what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that *would* happen, either necessarily or probably. In the course of everyday life many events happen contingently, and many things turn out against all probability. History as a whole is full of accidents and unrelated coincidences. A mere chronological narrative will have few lessons to teach us. To be sure, history may help us to discover what are the necessary or probable consequences of different kinds of human action: but to turn these essentially statistical data into a teachable lesson is the task not of the historian but of the poet.

It is thus that Aristotle seeks to defuse Plato's criticism that the poet is at two removes from the truth. The necessary truths of philosophy are, for Aristotle no less than for Plato, truths par excellence, and take precedence over empirical truths. *Historia*, indeed, is Aristotle's general term for truths discovered by empirical inquiry: the results of his own biological investigations—detailed, and often surprisingly accurate—are presented in a treatise that we know as the *Historia Animalium*. But in the *Poetics*, since he is concerned with the dramatic representation of human actions, he takes his examples of *historia* from history proper. The actions of a historic

figure exhibit a much greater contingency than the number of feathers on a sparrow or the number of fins on a fish.

Poetry, for Aristotle, has a kind of truth that comes between the necessary truths of philosophy and the contingent particulars of history. It is not for the poet to tell us what Alcibiades actually said or did (or, for that matter, to tell us whether a skylark is or is not a bird). But what the poet has to tell us is of more importance than the details of a politician's career: they are truths that, even if not necessary in the philosophical sense, are universal in their application to human nature. The names of his characters can be used as representative of general types: we are more likely to describe our acquaintances as Eeyores or Uriah Heeps than as Drakes or Cromwells. Thus, in the Olympiad of truth it is poetry that takes the silver medal, while history takes the bronze, and Plato's ranking is reversed.

But is it right to speak of truth at all in connection with tragedy? Is not drama a form of fiction, of creative falsehood, which demands not our belief but only our willing suspension of disbelief? The sophist Gorgias said that tragedy deceives, though he went on to add: 'the deceived are wiser than the undeceived'. And late in the *Poetics* itself Aristotle praises Homer for teaching poets the right way to tell falsehoods

At this point we need to distinguish not two but three kinds of truth and falsehood that come into play when we compare history and drama. It is easier to explain this in terms of English tragedy, since we do not know what Aristotle thought was the historical truth about King Oedipus. So let us consider, for a moment, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. (The play fulfils most of Aristotle's criteria for a good tragedy, though he would have thought that there was too much supernatural intervention in the shape of witches and ghosts.) The historical king of Scotland, we are told, bears very little relation to the character of Macbeth in the play. But this kind of falsehood does not matter in the least; we do not go to the theatre to be informed about the murky early history of Scotland. At this level, what Sir Philip Sidney says is correct: 'the poet nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth'.

None the less, in most works of fiction there are passages where the author does set out deliberately to deceive his audience or his readers. This is most conspicuous in the case of mystery stories, where the reader is to be led up the garden path until the last moment. But many such passages occur in Shakespeare too: in *Macbeth*, when Malcolm pretends that he will be a

tyrant if chosen as king; and at the beginning of *Lear*, where the audience is led to believe that Regan and Goneril are loving daughters. This, we might say, is a second level of dramatic falsehood, and it is with this kind of thing in mind that Aristotle compliments Homer on his skill in deceiving the audience. The deception, of course, does not imply any moral fault on the part of the author, since it is always removed before the end of the fiction.

There remains the third, upper level of truth and falsehood: the universal generalizations about human nature, human character, and human action. These are not necessarily uttered on the stage in the drama (though they often figure in the choruses of Greek tragedy), but they are the lessons that the drama explicitly or implicitly seeks to draw. Aristotle insists that such lessons must be based on necessity or probability. The lessons that drama teaches may be the same as those that a moral philosopher might teach, but —as Sidney emphasizes, and as is implicit in Aristotle's insistence on the link between tragedy and pleasure—drama teaches us in a manner that motivates us, in a way that chill moral truisms do not.

But if drama can teach moral truth in an inspiring way, can it not just as well teach moral error? Of the apologists for poetry represented in this volume, the one to face up most candidly to this difficulty is Shelley. Shelley makes clear the possibility of a false ideology being promoted by a great work of literature. *Paradise Lost* was written to support a system of Christian theology which, as an atheist, Shelley thought false and corrupting. But somehow, he claims, genius forces Milton's poem to be a refutation of that very system.

> Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius.

Shelley's ingenious defence surely fails. Christianity is either true or false. If it is true, then *Paradise Lost* can be corrupting precisely because of its deifying of Satan; if it is false, then it can be corrupting because it accepts principal elements of the Christian system.

It was not until the nineteenth century that aestheticians presented detailed arguments for the conclusion that art could not be great unless it

was morally good. One such was John Ruskin, and another was Leo Tolstoy. For Ruskin, artistic creation was a demanding matter, and the demands made by art could be justified only by the seriousness of its moral purpose: namely, to reveal fundamental features of the universe. The experience of beauty, he maintained, arises from a truthful perception of nature, and leads on to an apprehension of the divine. Only if an artist is himself a morally good person will he be able to deliver this revelation in an incorrupt form, and set before us the glory of God. Ruskin applied his moralizing theory of art to two arts in particular: painting and architecture. He accepted Aristotle's parallel between painting and poetry: painting, for him, was essentially a form of language: technical skill was no more than mastery of the language, and the worth of a painting depended on the value of the thoughts that it expresses.

For Tolstoy too, art can be good only if it has a moral purpose. He rejected the idea that the aim of art is beauty and that beauty is recognized by the enjoyment it gives. The real purpose of art, he maintained was communication between human beings. While rejecting the romantic idea that art must give pleasure, he agreed with Wordsworth that its essence was the sharing of emotion. The feelings with which these works of art infect us may be good or bad. Art is only good if the emotions it injects are good; and those emotions can be good only if they are fundamentally religious and contribute to a sense of universal human brotherhood. The emotions to be communicated by art must be emotions that can be shared by mankind in general, and not just by a pampered elite. Where this is not the case we have either bad art or pseudo-art. Tolstoy is willing to accept that this judgement condemns many of the most admired works of music and literature—including his own novels. The greatest novel of the nineteenth century, he maintained, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which spread the message of universal brotherhood across the boundaries of race and class.

In the twentieth century the moralistic view of art quickly became unfashionable. Art, many held, should be autonomous, and a work of art might be good art, and even great art, while being morally or politically deleterious. Aristotle does indeed say in the *Poetics* that the standard of correctness in poetry is not the same as that in ethics, but he would have totally rejected the idea that the poet has no ethical responsibility. Art for art's sake is far removed from Aristotle's aesthetic theory. It might, indeed, have been thought to be at the furthest extreme, had it not been that

Nietzsche had already claimed that art was not only autonomous from, but supreme over, morality.

Advice to the Practising Poet

In most of the *Poetics* Aristotle seems to be addressing himself to dramatic audiences rather than to dramatists. Some of the information he offers is rather mundane: the list of the order of scenes and songs in Chapter 12, for instance, would be of use principally to a first-time theatregoer. It is comparable to telling someone about to hear for the first time a Mass by Mozart or Haydn that the Gloria comes after the Kyrie but before the Creed. But most of the time he has loftier purposes: to bring home to members of the audience how they should react to what they see and hear, and what they should hope to get out of the experience.

In later chapters, however, Aristotle offers practical advice to playwrights, particularly about the construction of their plots. Here again, some of the information offered operates at a basic level: Chapter 20 is of more interest to the grammarian or the historian of linguistics than it would be to any moderately competent dramatist about to put pen to paper. But the inclusion of such material is consistent with Aristotle's down-to-earth view of imaginative writing. The poet, in his view, is neither inspired nor engaged in self-expression: the nearest he comes to any such romantic view is the throwaway remark that to be a poet you must be either a genius or a madman. His considered opinion is that a poet is a craftsman, as befits the name of his trade; for *poiesis* in Greek is literally 'making'. Consequently, the advice that he offers is concrete and technical, about the choice of characters to represent and the internal structure to give to the plot.

The hero should be a person of such and such a kind, belong to such and such a social class, suffer at the hands of those close to him. There should be a turning-point in the plot, a reversal of fortune consequent upon the discovery of some crucial but hitherto unknown fact. Preferably the reversal of fortune should be from prosperity to adversity. If the story has an end that is happy for some characters, there must be countervailing suffering for others.

It is notable that every word of the advice in the previous paragraph could be applied without alteration to fictions of very various kinds. Jane Austen's novels deal, in her own words, with '3 or 4 families in a Country

Village', far removed from the royal families of Mycenae and Thebes. Yet every one of her novels contains a discovery and a reversal—often more than one. In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Elizabeth Bennet's discovery that her sister has eloped with the unprincipled Wickham leads to a reversal in the relationship between Mr Darcy and herself. In *Sense and Sensibility* Edward's discovery that his unwanted fiancée Lucy has switched her affections leads to his happy union with Elinor Dashwood. The novels have happy endings, which exclude them from Aristotle's favourite class of story, but they are endings of the tolerable kind, like that of the *Odyssey*, in which, as he says, there are different endings for the better and worse characters. The transitions from adversity to prosperity in Austen's works are, of course, always transitions in respect of eligibility as a marriage partner, and Aristotle would be disappointed that no one gets killed.

Aristotle's remarks on style are naturally much more tied to the Greek context than his guidelines on content, and few of them are likely to be helpful to twenty-first-century writers in English. He invented one device, however, which remains popular among teachers and critics of literature today: change one word in a line of a canonical author, and see what effect this has on the impact of the verse.

Finally, we come to the musical element. Though in his *Politics* Aristotle offers his opinion about the different emotional effects of different musical modes, he has very little to say about music in the *Poetics*, or even about the lyrical poetry which the music accompanies. Among modern art forms it is, of course, opera that most closely resembles Greek tragedy, particularly operas such as *The Magic Flute* and *Carmen*, where aria and chorus are interspersed with spoken passages as well as recitative. The one piece of advice that Aristotle offers remains useful: the chorus should not just stand about and sing but should take part in the action. It is this feature, among others, that makes Verdi's later operas preferable to his early ones.

The Afterlife of the Poetics

The *Poetics* is essentially a series of lecture notes, and it is much to be regretted that we do not possess a second book devoted to comedy. Nothing in the rest of Aristotle's *Nachlass* compensated for its loss. Substantial fragments survive of his dialogue *On the Poets*, but in spite of devoted

scholarly efforts to piece them together, they do not add much, apart from some gossip about Homer, to the content of the *Poetics*.

The Aristotelian corpus, in addition to the systematic scientific treatises, contains a massive collection of occasional jottings on scientific topics, the *Problems*. From its structure this appears to be a commonplace book in which Aristotle or someone else wrote down provisional answers to questions that were put to him by his students or correspondents. The collection contains many fascinating details that give insight into the workings of his omnivorous intellect. The *Problems* let us see Aristotle with his hair down, rather like the 'Table Talk' of later writers.

The eighteenth book of the *Problems* is concerned with issues connected with literature. It begins with a question that is particularly endearing to those who may have found it hard to read their way through Aristotle's more difficult works. 'Why is it that some people, if they begin to read a serious book, are overcome by sleep even against their will?' (916b1). Most of the problems discussed concern rhetoric rather than poetry, but two questions are raised that are relevant to the topics of the *Poetics*. Why, we are asked, do we feel more pleasure in listening to narratives in which the attention is concentrated on a single point than in hearing those which are concerned with many subjects? The answer offered is that what is definite is more easily understood than what is indefinite. Why, again, do we like to hear of events which are neither very old nor quite new? We are told in answer, 'We disbelieve events which occurred before our time, and we take no pleasure in events which we disbelieve. Recent events, on the other hand, are still as it were before our eyes and so we take no pleasure in hearing of them.' This seems naive in comparison with the elaborate theory of the pleasures of suspending disbelief in drama that we are offered in the *Poetics*.

The history of the *Poetics* in late antiquity is obscure, as is that of so many of Aristotle's works. The treatise appears in the list of his work in the life of Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius (*c*. AD 200–50), and some of the ideas it contains surface in the *Ars Poetica* of the Roman poet Horace, writing in the time of Augustus. But from then until the Renaissance it leaves little trace. Like other works of Aristotle, it was known to Islamic scholars before it was read by medieval Latins. The twelfth-century Cordoban philosopher Averroes commented on it, and one of his commentaries was translated into Latin in 1256. The *Poetics* itself was translated from the

Greek by Aquinas' collaborator William of Moerbeke in 1278; but his translation soon disappeared from view, and did not resurface until the twentieth century. Scholastic lack of interest in the *Poetics* is easy to understand: there was nothing in medieval culture that resembled at all closely Greek tragedy or comedy. In our own time, the novelist Umberto Eco has built an exciting historical novel, *In the Name of the Rose*, around the fiction of the survival and eventual destruction of a second book of the *Poetics* in a medieval conventual library.

The revival of Greek scholarship among Renaissance humanists brought with it a renewal of interest in the *Poetics*. In 1498 there appeared a Latin translation by Giorgio Valla, and the Greek original was printed in 1508. In 1536 the work was fairly launched on to the learned world by Alessandro de' Pazzi, in an edition with parallel Greek and Latin texts. But the Renaissance understanding of the work was flawed. Humanists prized rhetoric above philosophy as it had been understood in the Middle Ages, and they treated the *Poetics* as fundamentally a work of rhetoric. This was directly contrary to Aristotle's own conception, in which rhetoric and poetry were two quite distinct disciplines: rhetoric being the value-neutral art of persuasion, while poetry was an important contribution to the moral education of the human person.

The Italian humanist Ludovico Castelvetro published in 1576 a text of the *Poetics* with a translation and commentary. He blew up Aristotle's remarks on unity and scale into a doctrine of the Three Unities, of time, place, and action. The action of the drama should not last longer than the time of its performance, and the scene should not be changed throughout the play. The principles he set out could only dubiously claim the backing of Aristotle, but they had a great influence on the classical French tragedies of Corneille, and through him, on English Restoration dramatists such as John Dryden.

In the sixteenth century the most fruitful contribution to the understanding of the *Poetics* was made not by any of the learned humanist commentators on the text, but by a practising poet: Sir Philip Sidney. Sidney, a scholar and courtier who became governor of Flushing in 1585 and was killed by a Spanish bullet in gallant circumstances at the battle of Zutphen a year later, left behind a number of poetical works, of which the most famous is the sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. Sidney was perhaps the first writer since Aristotle to provide a seriously considered

answer to Plato's criticism of poetry and drama. He saw poetry as a force superior to rhetoric, history, and even philosophy, since it can bring the reader to tune his passions to the highest pitch of motivation to well-doing. Perceptive passages from his *Apology for Poetry* are included in this volume.

In using Aristotle's text to defend poetry against Platonic accusations, Sidney was the first of a long line of poets and literary critics. In the preface to *Samson Agonistes* Milton invoked Aristotle in support of the respectability of tragedy, quoting his claim that it had 'power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such-like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight'. There followed Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, while Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* contains Aristotelian elements.

Shelley, a radical who was expelled from Oxford for writing on the necessity of atheism, wrote his best poems after eloping with Mary Godwin in 1814. His masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, was written in Pisa in 1819, along with a number of shorter poems familiar to generations of schoolchildren, such as 'Ode to the West Wind' and 'To a Skylark'. Having written *Adonais*, an elegy on the death of Keats in 1821, he was himself drowned off Livorno in the following year. He was moved to take up his pen in defence of poetry by an essay of Thomas Love Peacock, *The Four Ages of Poetry*, which had argued that the best minds of the future should devote themselves to the social sciences rather than to literature. In response Shelley worked up some Aristotelian themes, as can be seen in the extract printed in this volume, though he went beyond Aristotle in his final triumphant claim that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Until comparatively recently, Aristotle's *Poetics* was of more interest to students of literature than to students of philosophy, and Ingram Bywater's 1909 translation was read more often in English departments than in departments of Classics. Interest in it, indeed, spread to the general literary intelligentsia with little philosophical investment, as is illustrated by the here reprinted public lecture of Dorothy L. Sayers, best known for her crime novels featuring Lord Peter Wimsey and her verse translation of Dante. In recent years, however, several scholars—most notably Stephen Halliwell in a series of studies—have shown the importance of reading the

Poetics as a significant part of Aristotle's ethical system. In offering this new translation, I have tried in particular to bring out the relationships between Aristotle's literary criticism and his moral philosophy.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

The text of the *Poetics* I have translated is that presented in the Oxford Classical Texts series, edited by Rudolf Kassel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). In some places where Kassel marks a lacuna or obelizes a passage I have accepted the conjectures of other scholars.

In translation I have not attempted to reproduce the order of words or clauses in the Greek manuscripts, or the punctuation of the OCT editor. I have aimed to produce clear and readable English that preserves Aristotle's sense, rather than to achieve word-for-word correspondence with the original. The decisions I made about the translation of key words in the vocabulary are recorded in the Glossary.

The numbering system, with references such as 1214a1, is that nowadays universally adopted: it derives from Immanuel Bekker's 1831 Berlin edition of Aristotle's works. The marginal numbers correspond to those of the Greek text, so that occasionally in the translation the correspondence is not exact. I have also noted the division into chapters in the Bekker text, which does not always correspond to the division into sections which seemed most appropriate in the translation.

The passages from Plato's *Republic* are taken from the translation by D. A. Russell in the Oxford World's Classics volume *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1989), and reprinted by permission. They are also numbered, as is standard practice, in accordance with the pagination of the sixteenth-century Stephanus edition, with letters to mark subdivisions of the pages.

Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* was published in 1595 in two editions. One, by Ponsonby, was entitled *The Defence of Poesy;* it is the other, by Olney, that is reproduced here.

Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, though written in 1821, was first published in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, edited by Shelley's widow.

'Aristotle on Detective Fiction' was a lecture delivered by Dorothy L. Sayers in Oxford on 5 March 1935, first published in 1936 and later reprinted in *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Gollancz, 1946). It is here reprinted by kind permission of the estate of Dorothy L. Sayers.

I am greatly indebted to previous translators into English of the *Poetics* and I found particularly helpful the works of Ingram Bywater, Malcolm Heath, Stephen Halliwell, and Margaret Hubbard. For comments on, and amendments to, my own translation I owe a great debt of gratitude to Jill Paton Walsh and to my wife Nancy Kenny.

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Most of Aristotle's works appear in the original Greek in volumes of the Oxford Classical Texts series, and many of them appear with a translation in volumes of the Loeb Classical Library. All of the surviving works are to be found in English in the two-volume Oxford Translation, edited by J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). The Clarendon Aristotle series (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963–) contains translations of selected texts, with detailed philosophical notes. Many of Aristotle's works are available in translation in Penguin Classics or in Oxford World's Classics.

On Aristotle in general, the following works can be recommended:

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Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield.

Ruskin, John, *Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF ARISTOTLE

(All dates are BC)

399 Trial and death of Socrates in Athens; Plato was around 30 at the time.

384 Aristotle born in Stagira, northern Greece. His father is doctor at the court of Macedon.

367 Aristotle goes to study in Athens, joins Plato's Academy.

347 Death of Plato, whose nephew Speusippus succeeds him as head of the Academy. Aristotle leaves Athens. He travels to Asia Minor and marries Pythias, the daughter of Hermias, who hosts him in Assos, Asia Minor.

342 Aristotle becomes tutor to Alexander, son of Philip II of Macedon.

338 Battle of Chaironeia, at which Philip II defeats Thebes and Athens, and becomes master of the Greek world.

336 Death of Philip; he is succeeded by his son Alexander.

335 Aristotle returns to Athens and founds his own 'school' the Lyceum. After the death of his wife he lives with a slave-mistress, Herpyllis, by whom he has a son, Nicomachus.

323 Death of Alexander; anti-Macedonian feeling prompts Aristotle to leave Athens.

322 Death of Aristotle at Chalcis in Euboia.

OUTLINE OF THE *POETICS*

I. THE VARIOUS KINDS OF POETRY

II. THE NATURE OF TRAGEDY

III. EXCELLENCE IN TRAGEDY

PLATO
REPUBLIC

From *Republic*, Books 2 and 3

‘We must begin by controlling the fable-makers, and admit 377b
only the good fables they compose, not the bad. We shall c
then persuade nurses and mothers to tell children the
admitted fables, and mould their minds with fable much
more than they now mould their bodies with the hand.
Most of the tales they tell now will have to be thrown out.’

‘Which?’

‘If we look at the big fables, we shall also see the little d
ones. Big and little need to be of the same type and have
the same effect. Don’t you agree?’

‘Yes: but I don’t see what you mean by the big ones.’

‘Those that Hesiod and Homer told, and the other poets.
For it’s the poets who told men, and still tell them, the false
stories they themselves compose.’

‘What stories? And what fault do you find with them?’

‘The fault one must find, first and foremost, especially
when someone tells falsehoods wrongly.’

‘But what is it?’

‘Making bad verbal likenesses of gods and heroes—just e
like a painter making a picture unlike the object he wants to
paint.’

‘Well, it’s certainly right to find fault with that sort of
thing. But just what do we mean?’

‘To begin with, the greatest falsehood, involving the 378
greatest issues, was wrongly told by the person who said
that Ouranos did what Hesiod said he did, and that Kronos
took his revenge upon him.* What Kronos did and what
happened to him at his son’s hands is something I should

not want to be told without precaution to the young and foolish, even if it had been true. If possible, it should have been veiled in silence; but if there had been great need to tell it, it should have been made a secret, for as small an audience as possible—and they should have had to sacrifice not a pig,* but some expensive and inaccessible victim, so that as few people as possible should hear the tale.'

'These stories are indeed difficult.'

'They are not to be repeated in our city, Adimantus. Nor b
is it to be said in a young man's hearing that if he committed the most outrageous crimes, or chastised an erring father by the direst means, he would be doing nothing remarkable, but only what the first and greatest of the gods have done.'

'I don't myself think that these are suitable stories.'

'It's the same with all the tales of how gods war, plot, c
and fight against gods—not that they're true anyway—if d
our future city-guardians are to believe that readiness to e
hate one another is the greatest scandal. Still less must they be told elaborate fables of battles of giants, and all the other various hostilities of gods and heroes towards their kith and kin. If we are somehow to convince them that no citizen has ever been the enemy of another, nor is it right that he should be, then *that* is the lesson that older men and women must impress on the children from the start, the lesson (more or less) that poets too must be forced to impress on the adult population. Hera tied up by her son, Hephaestus thrown out by his father because he was proposing to defend his mother against a beating, Homer's battles of gods—all this is inadmissible, whether it was composed allegorically or not. Young people can't distinguish the allegorical from the non-allegorical, and what enters the mind at that age tends to become indelible and irremovable. Hence the prime need to make sure that what they first hear is devised as well as possible for the implanting of virtue.'

‘That makes sense. But if we were to be asked what these things are, what the stories are, what should we say?’

‘You and I, Adimantus, are not poets, at the moment: we 379
are founders of a city. Founders have to know the patterns within which poets are to be made to construct fables, and beyond which they must not be allowed to go, but they don’t have to make up fables themselves.’

‘True enough: but just what *are* the patterns for an account of the gods?’

‘Something like this, I fancy. God must always be represented as he is, whether in epic or in lyric or in tragedy.’

‘Yes indeed.’

‘Now God is in truth good and must be so described.’ b

‘Of course.’

‘And nothing good is harmful, is it?’

‘No.’

‘Does the non-harmful harm?’

‘No.’

‘And does what doesn’t harm do any evil?’

‘No.’

‘And what does no evil is cause of no evil?’

‘Of course.’

‘Now again. The good is useful?’

‘Yes.’

‘Therefore the cause of felicity?’

‘Yes.’

‘The good therefore is not the cause of everything, but only of what is well.’

‘Certainly.’ c

‘God, therefore, being good, cannot be responsible for

everything, as is the common opinion, but only of some things in human life. There is much for which he bears no responsibility. Our blessings are far fewer than our troubles, and while none but God is responsible for the blessings, we must seek other causes for the troubles.’

‘That seems perfectly right.’

‘We must therefore not allow Homer or any other poet to d
make foolish mistakes about the gods.’ […]

‘The subject of men remains.’

‘Clearly.’ 392a

‘Well, we can’t legislate for that at the moment.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because, I imagine, we shall say that poets and prose- b
writers make serious bad statements about men—that there are many unjust men who are happy and just men who are miserable, that secret wrongdoing is profitable, that justice is the good of others and our own loss—and so on. We shall have to forbid them to say this, and command them to compose songs and fables to the opposite effect.’

‘I’m sure we shall.’

‘Then if you agree I am right, shall I say that you have c
agreed to what we have long been seeking?’

‘Yes, that’s right.’

‘Then we shall come to our agreement that this is the sort of thing to be said about men only when we have discovered what justice is, and what is its natural advantage to its possessor, whether or not he *appears* just.’

‘True.’

‘So much for what is said. We must next consider its expression. When that is done we shall have covered the whole subject of what is to be said and how.’

‘I don’t understand what you mean.’

‘You ought to; but perhaps you’ll know better if I put it like this. Everything that fable-tellers or poets say is a narrative of past or present or future.’ d

‘Of course.’

‘And they execute it either by simple narrative or by narrative conveyed by imitation (*mimēsis*) or by both.’

‘I should like a clearer account of that too, please.’

‘I must be a ridiculously obscure teacher. I’ll try to do what incompetent speakers do and show you what I mean by taking a little bit, and not the whole topic. Tell me: you know the beginning of the *Iliad*, where the poet says that Chryses asked Agamemnon to release his daughter, Agamemnon was angry, and Chryses, unsuccessful, cursed the Achaeans to the god?’ e 393

‘I know.’

‘Then you know as far as the lines

> and he begged all the Achaeans,
> and especially the two Atridae, the generals of the host,*

the poet speaks in his own person, and does not try to turn our attention in another direction by pretending that someone else is speaking. But from this point on he speaks as though he were Chryses himself and tries to make us think that it is not Homer talking, but the old priest. And he does practically all the rest of the narrative in this way, both the tale of Troy and the episodes in Ithaca and the whole *Odyssey*.’ b

‘Yes.’

‘Now it is narrative both when he makes the various speeches and in the passages between the speeches.’

‘Of course.’

‘But when he makes a speech pretending to be someone else, are we not to say that he is assimilating his expression as far as possible to the supposed speaker?’ c

‘Certainly.’

‘And to assimilate oneself in voice or gesture to another is to imitate him?’

‘Yes.’

‘So in this sort of thing Homer and the other poets are conveying their narrative by way of imitation (*mimēsis*)?’

‘Yes.’ […]

‘We must come to an understanding as to whether we are to allow our poets to narrate by imitation, or partly by imitation (and if so, what parts), or not to imitate at all.’ 394d

‘I have an inkling that you are asking whether we should admit tragedy and comedy into the city or no.’

‘Perhaps—or perhaps more than that. I don’t know yet: we must go where the wind of argument blows.’

‘That’s right.’

‘Well, then, consider whether our guardians ought to be imitative people or not. Or does this follow from our previous argument that an individual can do one thing well but is liable to fail in everything, so far as acquiring real note is concerned, if he tries to do many things?’ e

‘Bound to follow.’

‘Similarly with imitation—one individual can’t imitate many things well, though he can one?’

‘Yes.’

‘So still less will one man be able to pursue some worthwhile pursuit and also imitate many things and be an imitator. Even apparently closely related imitations cannot be practised well by the same person—tragedy and comedy for example. You called these two imitations, didn’t you?’ 395

‘Yes; and you’re quite right, the same people can’t do both.’

‘Nor can people be both rhapsodes and actors.’

‘True.’

‘Nor even tragic actors and comic actors. All these things are imitations, aren’t they?’ b

‘Yes.’

‘Now it seems to me as if human nature is specialized even more minutely than this. It is unable to imitate many things well, or to do well the things of which the imitations are likenesses.’

‘True.’ […]

‘But perhaps you would say it didn’t suit our “republic”, for we have no double or multiple men, because everybody performs one function. This is the only city where we shall find the cobbler a cobbler and not a ship’s pilot as well, the farmer a farmer and not a juryman as well, and the man of war a man of war and not a man of money. Isn’t it?’ 397e

‘It is.’

‘Suppose 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.’ 398

From *Republic*, Book 10

‘There are many respects in which I feel convinced, when I reflect on it, that we founded our city rightly—and not least in the business of poetry.’ 595a

‘In what way?’

‘In our refusing to admit imitative poetry. It is even

clearer, I think, that we ought not to admit it, now that we have distinguished the elements in the mind.’

‘How so?’ b

‘Between ourselves—and I know you’re not going to denounce me to the writers of tragedy and all the other imitators—all this kind of thing is ruination to the listeners’ minds, unless they are protected by the knowledge of what really is.’

‘What are you thinking of?’

‘I shall have to be frank—though my lifelong liking and c
respect for Homer inhibits me, for he is the prime teacher and leader of all these fine folk. Still, persons mustn’t be put before the truth. As I say, I shall have to be frank.’

‘Indeed you will.’

‘Listen then—or rather answer.’

‘Ask away.’

‘Can you tell me what imitation in general is? I can’t see myself what it means.’

‘Then it’s hardly likely that I should.’

‘There would be nothing surprising if you did. Duller 596
eyes often see sooner than sharp ones.’

‘I dare say. But with you there I shouldn’t be able even to want to speak if I had an idea. *You* try and see.’

‘Would you like us to begin with our usual procedure? We are in the habit of assuming a “Form” in relation to each group of particular objects to which we apply the same name. Or do you not understand?’

‘I understand.’

‘Let us posit then any of the sets of many things you like. b
For instance, there are many beds and many tables.’

‘Yes.’

‘But there are only two Forms of these articles, one of

bed and one of table.’

‘Yes.’

‘Now we are in the habit of saying that the manufacturer of these two articles looks to the Form and so makes either the beds or the tables we use, and similarly with everything else. None of the manufacturers makes the Form itself, surely?’

‘Of course not.’

‘Now see what you call the manufacturer I’m going to describe.’

‘What manufacturer?’ c

‘The one who makes all the things that each of the workmen makes.’

‘That’s a very marvellous person.’

‘You’ll say that even more in a moment. For this same workman is capable of making not only articles of furniture but everything that grows out of the earth and every animal, including himself, and indeed earth and heaven and gods and everything in heaven and in Hades beneath the earth. He makes it all.’

‘That’s a very clever professional you’re talking about.’ d

‘Don’t you believe me? Tell me now, do you think that there can’t be such a manufacturer, or that there might be a maker of all these things in some way? Don’t you realize that you might yourself be able to make all these things in a way?’

‘What way?’

‘Not a difficult one, but contrived in many ways and e quickly—quickest of all perhaps, if you will pick up a mirror and carry it round. You’ll soon create the sun and the objects in the sky, and the earth, and yourself and all the other animals and articles and plants and everything we were talking about.’

‘Yes, but appearances, not the real things.’

‘Well said, and to the point. The painter also is a craftsman of this sort, isn’t he?’

‘Yes, of course.’

‘But you will say that what he makes isn’t real, though in a way the painter also makes a bed.’

‘Yes, the appearance of a bed.’

‘But what about the bed-maker? Didn’t you say just now 597
that he doesn’t make the Form, which we call “what a bed is”, but an individual bed?’

‘I did.’

‘So, if he doesn’t make what is, he doesn’t make the real thing, but something resembling it but distinct from it. And it might not be right if one said that the work of the bed-maker or any other workman was completely the real thing?’

‘Well, no, at least in the view of people who are familiar with this sort of argument.’

‘So let us not be surprised if this too is a dim object compared with reality.’

‘Indeed not.’ b

‘Would you like us then, using these examples, to investigate this imitator, and see who he is?’

‘If you like.’

‘Well then, there are these three beds: one in nature, which we might say god makes—or is there someone else?’

‘No, there isn’t.’

‘And one which the carpenter makes.’

‘Yes.’

‘And one which the painter makes.’

‘Let us say so.’

‘Painter, bed-maker, god—these three preside over three sorts of beds.’

‘Yes.’

‘Now god—whether he so chose or whether there was some necessity not to make more than one bed in nature—made just this one, which is what a bed is; two or more such beds never were produced by god nor will they ever be.’ c

‘How so?’

‘Because, if he made just two, there would be one other the Form of which both would possess, and this would be “what a bed is”, not the two.’

‘Right.’

‘Well, god knew this, I imagine, and wanting to be the real maker of a real bed, not an individual maker of an individual bed, produced the one in nature.’ d

‘Seems likely.’

‘Then would you like us to call him its “nature-maker” or something like that?’

‘That would be proper, seeing that he has made this and everything else in nature.’

‘Then what about the carpenter? Is not he a manufacturer of a bed?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is the painter also a manufacturer and maker of such a thing?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘What would you say is his relationship to the bed?’

‘I think the fairest thing would be to call him an imitator of that of which the others are manufacturers.’ e

‘Very well. You call him an imitator in respect of the product third removed from nature.’

‘That’s right.’

‘Then the tragic poet also, since he is an imitator, will be in the same position, third in order from king and truth, and so will all other imitators be.’ […]

‘But we still haven’t brought the greatest accusation against him. It is a terrible thought that he can ruin good men, apart from a very few.’ 605c

‘But of course he can, if he does this.’

‘Listen and think. When the best of us hear Homer or some other tragic poet imitating a hero in mourning, delivering a long speech of lamentation, singing or beating his breast, you know how we feel pleasure and give ourselves up to it, how we follow in sympathy and praise the excellence of the poet who does this to us most effectively.’ d

‘Of course I know.’

‘But when we have some private bereavement, you notice how we pride ourselves on the opposite reaction—on keeping quiet and sticking it out—because this is a man’s reaction, and the other, which we were praising just now, is a woman’s.’ e

‘I notice that.’

‘Is this approval proper? Is it right not to be disgusted, but to feel pleasure and give praise when you see a man who you would be ashamed to be yourself?’

‘Well, it’s not reasonable.’

‘No, especially if you look at it like this.’ 606

‘Like what?’

‘The element which is forcibly restrained in our own misfortunes, starved of tears and the satisfaction of lamentation, though it naturally desires this, is the very element which is satisfied and given pleasure by the poets. In these circumstances, our best element, not being b

adequately trained by reason or habituation, relaxes its watch over the element of lamentation, because the sorrows it sees are others' sorrows and there seems no disgrace in praising and pitying a man who claims to be virtuous and is mourning out of season; indeed, the pleasure seems a positive gain, and we can't bear to reject the whole poem and be deprived of it. Not many people can see that the consequences of others' experiences invade one's own, because it is difficult to restrain pity in one's own misfortunes when it has grown strong on others.'

'Very true.' c

'Does not the same apply to the ridiculous? Suppose you enjoy in a comedy or a private conversation jokes you would be ashamed to make yourself, instead of disliking them as morally bad—aren't you doing the same thing as with the expressions of pity? You are releasing the element in you that likes jokes, and that you used to restrain by reason because you were afraid of a reputation for buffoonery. Without realizing it, you have made a big thing of it by your frequent indulgence in private conversation, with the result that you've become a comedian.'

'Quite so.'

'Poetical imitation in fact produces the same effect in d
regard to sex and anger and all the desires and pleasures and pains of the mind—and these, in our view, accompany every action. It waters them and nourishes them, when they ought to be dried up. It makes them our rulers, when they ought to be under control so that we can be better and happier people rather than worse and more miserable.'

'I cannot but agree.'

'So when you find admirers of Homer saying that he e
educated Greece and that for human management and 607
education one ought to take him up and learn his lesson and direct one's whole life on his principles, you must be kind and polite to them—they are as good as they are able to be

—and concede that Homer is the foremost and most poetical of the tragic poets, but you must be clear in your mind that the only poetry admissible in our city is hymns to the gods and encomia to good men. If you accept the "sweetened Muse" in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be enthroned in your city instead of law and the principle which the community accepts as best in any given situation.'

'True.'

'Well, these were the points that I wanted to recall to b
complete our justification for wishing to banish poetry from the city, such being its nature. The argument forced us. But let us say to her, lest she damn us as coarse and philistine, that there is an old quarrel between poetry and philosophy: I could quote a lot of passages for that.'

ARISTOTLE
POETICS

I. THE VARIOUS KINDS OF POETRY

Introduction

1. What is poetry, how many kinds of it are there, and what are their specific effects? That is our topic, and we will inquire how stories are to be put together to make a good poetical work, and what is the number and nature of poetry's component parts, and raise other questions arising in the same area of inquiry. We shall make our start, as is natural, from first principles. 1447a 10

Poetry as a species of representation

Epic poetry and tragedy, as well as comedy and dithyramb,* and most music for flute and lyre are all, taken as a whole, forms of representation. They differ from each other in three ways, either in respect of the medium, the object, or the mode of their representation. 15

Differences of medium

People represent and portray objects by using colours and shapes to make visible images of them; some do this by skill, and others by practice. Others again make use of the voice. In like manner, all the literary genres mentioned make use of rhythm, language, and melody, whether separately or in combination. Music for flute and lyre and other instruments with similar effects, such as pipes, make use of melody and rhythm only. Dancers make use of rhythm alone: it is by rhythm expressed in bodily 20 25 1447b 10 15 20 25

movement that they mime character, emotion, and action. There is an art that uses language unaccompanied, whether prose or verse, sometimes in a single metre and sometimes in combination: this so far remains unnamed. For there is no common name for us to give to the skits of Sophron and Xenarchus* on the one hand and to the Socratic dialogues* on the other. Nor is there one for any other representation that one might produce in iambic trimeters or elegiac couplets or any other metre.* To be sure, people attach the name ‘poetry’ to the verse-form, and speak of elegiac poets and epic poets. But this classification has no regard to the representative aspect of their poetry but only to the metre they share, so that writers are so described even if they publish medical or scientific treatises in metrical form. In fact Homer and Empedocles* have nothing in common except their metre; the former can be called a poet, but the latter should be termed a scientist. On the other hand, if someone were to compose in the greatest possible variety of metres—as Chaeremon did in his *Centaur*, a rhapsody containing every single metre—he would still deserve to be called a poet. That is how we should classify in this area. There are also arts that make use of all the media we have mentioned—rhythm, melody, and metre. Examples are dithyramb, nomes,* tragedy, and comedy. They differ in that the first two make use of them all together, and the last two in specific parts. These different ways in which the arts effect representation are what I call differences of medium.

Differences of objects

2. The things that representative artists represent are the actions of people, and if people are represented they are necessarily either superior or inferior, better or worse, than we are. (Differences in character you see derive from these categories, since it is by virtue or vice that people are ethically distinct from each other.) So too with painters: 1448a

Polygnotus* portrayed better people, Pauson worse people, and Dionysius people just like us. Clearly, each of the kinds of representation so far mentioned will exhibit these differences, and will differ from the others by representing objects that are distinct in this way. These dissimilarities can occur even in ballet and in music for flute and lyre, no less than in prose and unaccompanied verse. For instance, Homer represents people better than us and Cleophon people similar to us, while people worse than us figure in the works of Hegemon of Thasos, the inventor of parodies, and Nicochares who wrote the *Deiliad*.* The same is the case with dithyrambs and nomes: one could represent Cyclopses in the manner of Timotheus and Philoxenus.* The very same difference makes the distinction between tragedy and comedy: the latter aims to represent people as worse, and the former as better, than people nowadays are.

Differences in mode

3. A third difference is in the mode of representation of each of these objects. Within the same medium it is possible to represent the same objects either by narrative or by dramatization. Narrative may be borne throughout by a single narrator, or with variation as in Homer. In dramatization all the personages play their parts as active agents.

So representation, as we said initially, can be differentiated in these three respects: medium, object, and mode. So, in respect of representation, Sophocles belongs in one way with Homer, since they both represent superior people, but in another way with Aristophanes, since they both represent people in dramatic activity. This is why, according to some people, drama got its name—for the word is derived from a Greek verb for doing, namely *dran*. This too is why the Dorians* claim ownership of both tragedy and comedy, offering the names as evidence.

Comedy is claimed by the Megarians—both those on the mainland who date it to the time of their democracy, and those in Sicily which was the birthplace of the poet Epicharmus, who lived long before Chionides and Magnes.* Tragedy is claimed by some inhabitants of the Peloponnese. The Dorians point out that they call villages *komai* while the Athenians call them *demoi*; the assumption is that comedians got their name not because the Greek word for revelry is *komazein*, but because they strolled through villages having been ejected in disgrace from the city. Again the Dorians say that their word for doing is *dran*, while the Athenians say *prattein*.

So much, then, for the number of ways in which representation can be classified, and what they are.

The origins of poetry and its early development

4. Two things, both of them natural, seem likely to have been the causes of the origin of poetry. Representation comes naturally to human beings from childhood,* and so does the universal pleasure in representations. Indeed, this marks off humans from other animals: man is prone to representation beyond all others, and learns his earliest lessons through representation. A common phenomenon is evidence of this: even when things are painful to look upon —corpses, for instance, or the shapes of the most revolting animals—we take pleasure in viewing highly realistic images of them. The further explanation of this is that learning is delightful not only to philosophers but to ordinary people as well, even though they have less capacity for it. That is why people like seeing images, because as they look at them they understand and work out what each item is, for example, ‘this is so-and-so’.* Whereas, if one is unacquainted with the subject, one’s pleasure will not be in the representation, but in the technique or the colour or some other element.

Representation, then, comes naturally to us, as do melody and rhythm (which obviously includes metre as a sub-class); and so it was that, from the beginning, those with the greatest natural gift for such things by a gradual process of improvement developed poetry out of improvisation.

This, however, took two different forms according to the characters of the authors: the more serious among them represented noble people and noble actions, and the more frivolous represented the actions of ignoble people. The latter began by composing invectives, while the former produced hymns and panegyrics. We cannot identify a poem of that kind by any poet earlier than Homer, though there are likely to have been many such; but from Homer onwards we can do so, beginning with his own *Margites* and similar poems.* Because of its suitability the iambic metre came into use in these poems, and the reason why it is now called ‘iambic’ is because *iambizein* is the Greek word for ‘lampoon’. So some of the ancient poets composed heroic epics and others iambic lampoons. Just as Homer was the greatest poet in the serious style, unsurpassed not only in composition but also in the dramatic power of his representation, so too he was the first to put comedy into shape for us, no mere invective, but a dramatization of the ridiculous rather. Thus his *Margites* stands in the same relation to our comedies as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do to our tragedies. Once tragedy and comedy had made their appearance those who had an inclination towards either kind of poetry followed their natural bent and either composed comedies in place of lampoons or composed tragedies in place of epics. This was because these new art forms were grander and more highly esteemed than the old.

Tragedy

This is not the place to inquire whether even now tragedy is all that it should be in respect of its constituent elements, whether in itself or in relation to its audiences. Certainly it originally took shape out of improvisations. (This is true of tragedy as well as of comedy: the former began with the leaders of the dithyramb, and the latter from the leaders of the phallic singing* that is a tradition that still survives in many cities.) Then it developed gradually as people exploited new possibilities as they came to light. After undergoing many changes tragedy ceased to evolve, having achieved its natural condition.

The number of actors was first increased from one to two by Aeschylus, who also reduced the choral element and gave primacy to the spoken word. The third actor and the practice of scene-painting were introduced by Sophocles. Length was also a factor. Tragedy acquired its dignity only at a late stage, when, after a satyric period of short stories and comic diction, it adopted the iambic trimeter instead of the trochaic tetrameter. Tetrameter had been used at first as suitable to satyric verse and easy to dance to, but when the spoken word prevailed nature itself found the appropriate metre, because the iambic trimeter is the metre closest to speech. Evidence of this is the fact that we very often use iambics in conversation, while we utter hexameters very rarely and only when departing from our normal tone. Another change took place in the number of episodes. Let us take as read a number of further embellishments: it would no doubt be laborious to discuss them individually.

Comedy

5. Comedy is, as we said, representation of people who are inferior but not wholly vicious: the ridiculous is one category of the embarrassing. What is ridiculous is some error or embarrassment that is neither painful nor life-threatening; for example, a comic mask is ugly and

distorted but does not cause pain. The stages in the development of tragedy, and those responsible for them, have stayed in people's memory; but the early history of comedy is unknown because no serious interest was taken in it. It was only relatively recently that a magistrate* made provision for a comic chorus; before that performers were volunteers. The first mention of people called comic poets dates from a time when comedy had already taken shape. It is not known who introduced masks, prologues, multiple actors, and the like. Comic stories, however, originated in Sicily; among Athenians, it was Crates* who first abandoned the iambic style and began to compose stories and plots of a general kind.

Epic

Epic poetry resembles tragedy in so far as it is a representation in verse of superior subjects; but the two differ in that epic uses only a single metre and is in narrative mode. They differ also in length: tragedy tries so far as possible to keep within a period of twenty-four hours or thereabouts, while epic, in contrast, is unrestricted in time. (Initially, however, in this respect no distinction was made between tragedy and epic.) Epic and tragedy have some elements in common, while others are peculiar to tragedy. Hence, anyone who can tell what is good and what is bad in tragedy understands epic too, since all the elements of epic are present in tragedy even though not all the elements of tragedy are present in epic.

Leaving aside representation in hexameters and comedy for later discussion, let us now treat of tragedy, gathering up from what has already been said a definition of its essence.

II. THE NATURE OF TRAGEDY

Definition

6. Tragedy is a representation of an action of a superior kind—grand, and complete in itself—presented in embellished language, in distinct forms in different parts, performed by actors rather than told by a narrator, effecting, through pity and fear, the purification* of such emotions. 25

By ‘embellished language’ I mean language with rhythm and melody. When I say ‘in distinct forms in different parts’ I mean that some parts are in unaccompanied verse while others have melody as an extra. 30

Since the representation is performed by actors, a necessary part of tragedy must be the presentation on stage of the performance. In addition there is music-making and there is style, for these are the media of their representation. By ‘style’ I mean simply the composition of the verse; the meaning of ‘music-making’ is obvious to everyone.* 35

Now tragedy is the repesentation of action, and action involves agents who will necessarily have certain qualities of both character and intellect. It is because of the qualities of the agents that we classify their actions, and it is because of their actions that they succeed or fail in life. It is the story of the action that is the representation. By the ‘story’ I mean the plot of the events. ‘Moral character’ is what makes us evaluate agents in particular ways, while ‘ideas’ are what is expressed in the speeches used to prove a case or enunciate a truth. 1450a 5

Basic elements of tragedy

Hence, tragedy as a whole necessarily has six elements on the basis of which it is evaluated, namely, the story, the moral element, the style, the ideas, the staging, and the music. Two of these elements concern the means, one concerns the mode, and three concern the objects of the mimesis; and there is nothing else besides. Not a few tragedians can be said to have made use of these items, since every drama alike involves staging, a moral element, and a story, plus style and music and intellectual content.

The primacy of plot

The most important element is the construction of the plot. Tragedy is a representation not of persons but of action and life, and happiness and unhappiness consist in action. The point is action, not character: it is their moral status that gives people the character they have, but it is their actions that make them happy or unhappy. So it is not in order to portray moral character that the actors perform; rather, they include character for the sake of action. The events, the story, are the point of tragedy, and that is the most important thing of all.

Again, there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without moral character—indeed, the tragedies of most modern poets completely lack the moral element, and in general there are many such poets. Compare, in painting, the relationship between Zeuxis and Polygnotus: Polygnotus is a good portrayer of character, while Zeuxis' painting is totally lacking in it.* Further, if someone sets out a series of speeches expressive of moral character, polished in style and rich in ideas, it will not achieve the effect of tragedy. A tragedy deficient in these elements, provided that it has a story and a structured plot, will do so much more effectively. Moreover, the most

important devices that tragedy uses to affect the emotions are parts of the story—namely, reversals and discoveries. One other indication is that novice poets can master style and moral character before they can compose plots—the same goes for almost all the early poets.

So the story is the foundation and as it were the soul of tragedy, while moral character is secondary. (The like holds in painting: if someone were to apply the most beautiful colours to a surface at random, he would give less pleasure than if he had sketched a portrait in black and white.) Tragedy is representation of action, and it is chiefly for the sake of action that it represents people in action. 1450b

Third come the ideas, that is, the power of expressing what is involved in or appropriate to a situation— something that, in prose, is the function of the arts of statesmanship and rhetoric. Earlier poets made people speak like statesmen; contemporary poets make them speak like orators. Moral character is what reveals the nature of people's fundamental options; that is why there is no such thing in speeches in which the speaker reveals no choice or rejection. Intelligence, on the other hand, is expressed in what people say to show that something is or is not a fact, or to support some universal proposition. 5 10

The fourth element is style. By 'style', as I said, is meant the expression of thought in words, an effect that can be produced either in prose or in verse.

Of the remaining elements, music is the most important source of pleasure. Staging can be emotionally attractive, but is not a matter of art and is not integral to poetry. The power of tragedy can be exercised without actors and without a performance. Staging belongs more to the scene-painter's art than to that of the poets. 15 20

Characteristics of a good plot

7. Given these definitions, let us next discuss the proper construction of the plot, since this is the first and most important element in tragedy.

COMPLETENESS

We have laid it down that tragedy is a representation of an action that is whole and entire and on an appropriate scale. (A thing may be a whole and yet be wanting in scale.) A whole is something that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is an item that does not itself follow necessarily upon something else, but which has some second item following necessarily upon it. Conversely, an end is an item that naturally follows, either necessarily or commonly, upon something else, but has nothing following it. A middle is an item that both follows upon a preceding item and has another item following upon itself. Stories that are well constructed should not begin at some arbitrary point but should conform to the stated pattern.

SCALE

Moreover, any beautiful object, whether a living organism or any other thing made up of parts, must have those parts not only in proper order but also on an appropriate scale. Beauty consists in scale as well as order, which is why there could not be a beautiful organism that was either minuscule or gigantic. In the first case, a glimpse that is so brief as to be close to vanishing-point cannot be distinct. In the second case—say, of an animal a thousand miles long—the impossibility of taking all in at a single glance means that unity and wholeness is lost to the viewer. So, just as physical bodies and living organisms need to be on an appropriate scale that allows them to be taken in by the eye, likewise stories should have an appropriate length, which is such as to enable them to be held in memory.

A limit of length determined by the rules of competitions

and the capacity of audiences does not feature in the art of poetry. If you had to arrange a competition for a hundred tragedies you would time them by water-clocks. (On one occasion this is actually said to have taken place.)* The limit that is set by the nature of the subject is this: the longer the story, the grander the scale, provided it remains comprehensible as a whole. To give a general formula: an adequate limit of length is a size that permits a transformation from adversity to prosperity, or from prosperity to adversity, in a probable or necessary sequence of events.

UNITY

8. A story that is built around a single person is not, as some people think, thereby unified. An infinity of things happen to a single individual, not all of which constitute a unity; likewise, a single person performs many actions which do not add up to make a single action. So all those poets who compose a Heracleid or a Thesiad have clearly got things wrong, assuming that just because Heracles was one person his story too is sure to have a unity. Homer, here as elsewhere surpassing all others, grasped this point firmly, whether by art or instinct. When he composed the *Odyssey* he did not include just everything that happened to Odysseus, such as getting wounded on Parnassus, or pretending to be mad to avoid conscription, for these events had no necessary or probable connection with each other. Instead he constructed the *Odyssey*, and the *Iliad* too, around a single action of the kind we have been discussing.

In other representative arts a single representation has a single object. In just the same way a story, since it is the representation of an action, should concern an action that is single and entire, with its several incidents so structured that the displacement or removal of any one of them would disturb and dislocate the whole. If the presence or absence

of something makes no discernible difference, then it is no part of the whole.

UNIVERSALITY AND NECESSITY

9. From what has been said it is clear that the poet's job is not relating what actually happened, but rather the kind of thing that *would* happen—that is to say, what is possible in terms of probability and necessity. The difference between a historian and a poet is not a matter of using verse or prose: you might put the works of Herodotus into verse and it would be a history in verse no less than in prose. The difference is that the one relates what actually happened, and the other the kinds of events that would happen. 1451b

For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history; poetry utters universal truths, history particular statements. The universal truths concern what befits a person of a certain kind to say or do in accordance with probability and necessity—and that is the aim of poetry, even if it makes use of proper names.* A particular statement tells us what (for example) Alcibiades* did or what happened to him. In the case of comedy this is already manifest: the poets make up the story on the basis of probability and then attach names to the characters at random; they do not write about particular individuals as the lampoonists used to do. In the case of tragedy they retain the traditional names. The reason for this is that what is possible is credible. If something has not happened we are inclined to disbelieve that it is possible; but it is obvious that what has happened is possible, since if it were not it would never have happened. Nevertheless, even among tragedies there are some where only one or two of the names are familiar, while the rest are made up; and there are some plays without a single familiar name, for instance Agathon's *Antheus*.* In that play both the events and the names are inventions, but it gives no less pleasure on that account. So there is no need to adhere at all costs to

the traditional stories of tragedy. Indeed, it would be absurd to try, since even what is familiar is familiar only to a few, and yet it gives pleasure to everyone.

It is clear from all this that the poet must be a maker of stories rather than verses, in so far as it is representation that makes him a poet, and representation is of actions. Even if it turns out that he is writing about historical events he is no less a poet for that, since nothing prevents such events being the kind of thing that would happen. It is in that respect that he deals with them as a poet.

Of defective stories* and actions, the worst are those that are episodic. I call a story episodic when the sequence of episodes is neither necessary nor probable. Bad poets compose stories of this kind of their own accord, but even good ones do so under pressure from the actors. Writing pieces for competitions, they drag out the story and are often forced to distort the sequence of events.

Tragedy is an imitation not just of a complete action, but of events that evoke pity and fear.* These effects occur above all when things come about unexpectedly but at the same time consequentially. This will produce greater astonishment than if they come about spontaneously or by chance—for even chance events are found more astonishing when they seemed to have happened for a purpose. Think of the time in Argos when Mitys' murderer was killed by Mitys' statue falling onto him as he was looking up at it! Such things are not thought to occur randomly. So inevitably, stories of this kind will be better.

Types and elements of plot

10. Stories can be classified as simple or complex, since the actions of which they are the representations are similarly classified in the first instance. I call an action simple if it is, in the sense defined, continuous and unitary, and in which

the change of fortune takes place without reversal or discovery; I call it complex if the change of fortune involves a reversal or a discovery or both.* These should grow naturally out of the plot of the story, so that they come about, with necessity or probability, from the preceding events. There is a great difference between something happening *after* certain events and happening *because of* those events.

Reversal and discovery

11. Reversal is a change of direction in the course of events, as already stated, taking place, as we insist, in accord with probability or necessity. For instance, in *Oedipus* a messenger comes to bring Oedipus good news and rid him of his fears about his mother; but by revealing his true identity he produces the opposite effect.* Again, in the *Lynceus* the hero is being led off to death, with Danaus* behind him as executioner, yet the upshot of events earlier in the story is that Danaus dies and the hero survives.

Discovery, as the term implies, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and thus to either love or hate, on the part of those destined for good or bad fortune. Discovery takes its finest form when it coincides with reversal, as in the *Oedipus*. There are, of course, other kinds of discovery, for what has been described can occur in reference to inanimate and chance objects; and there is also such a thing as discovering whether someone has or has not done something. But the one that has most to do with the story and most to do with the action is the one described. Reversal and discovery together will evoke either pity or fear—just the kind of actions of which, according to our basic principle, tragedy offers an imitation—and will serve to bring about the happy or unhappy ending.

Since detection is something that takes place between people, it may be either the detection of one person by another (whose own identity is clear) or mutual recognition between a pair (for example, Iphigeneia was recognized by Orestes when she sent the letter, but something different was needed for her to recognize Orestes).*

These, then, are two components of the story: reversal and discovery; a third component is suffering, which is an action involving pain or destruction, such as murders on stage, extreme agony, woundings, and so on. The other two elements have already been explained.

The sequence of scenes in tragedy

12. The parts of tragedy that should be considered as its formal elements were mentioned earlier. In sequential terms the separate sections into which it is divided are the following: prologue, episode, finale, and chorus parts (sung either on entry or while stationary). These items are common to all plays; some have in addition arias and dirges.

A prologue is everything in a tragedy that precedes the opening chorus; an episode is whatever comes between two complete choral songs; and the finale is everything that comes after the final chorus. Of the choral part, the opening chorus is the first complete utterance of the chorus; while a stationary ode is a choral song without anapaests or trochees. A dirge is a lament shared between the chorus and the actors.

We have already mentioned the parts of tragedy that should be regarded as its formal elements; the ones just mentioned are the separate sections in sequential terms.

III. EXCELLENCE IN TRAGEDY

13. What should one aim at, and what should one avoid, when putting together a story? What will enable tragedy to achieve its effect? This is the next topic after what has been said.

Guidelines for plot construction

For tragedy at its best the plot should be complex, not simple, and it should be representative of fearsome and pitiable events, for that is the specific feature of this kind of representation. Hence it is clear first of all that good men should not be shown passing from good fortune to bad, for that evokes not fear or pity, but outrage. Nor should depraved men be shown passing from bad fortune to good —this indeed is the least tragic of all: it has none of the appropriate features, evoking neither pity nor fear nor even basic human sympathy. Finally, a very wicked man should not be shown passing from good fortune to bad: this may evoke basic human sympathy, but neither pity nor fear. One of those sentiments, namely pity, has to do with undeserved misfortune, and the other, namely fear, has to do with someone who is like ourselves. Accordingly, there will be nothing in the outcome to evoke either pity or fear.

We are left, then, with the person in between: a man not outstanding in virtue or justice, brought down through vice or depravity, who falls into adversity not through vice or depravity but because he errs in some way.* He is a personage enjoying renown and prosperity, such as Oedipus, Thyestes,* and eminent persons from families of that kind. A well-made story, then, will have a single rather

than (as some argue) a double upshot, and it will involve a change not from bad fortune to good, but from good fortune to bad. The cause of the change will not be depravity, but a serious error on the part of a character such as we have described (or someone better rather than worse). Evidence of this is provided by history. At first poets picked out stories at random, but nowadays the best tragedies are always constructed around a few families, for example, about Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus,* and any others whose lot has been to do or suffer something terrible.

Accordingly, the best tragedy, technically, follows this plot. Critics who find fault with Euripides for doing this in his tragedies, most of which have an unhappy ending, are making the mistake that I mentioned earlier. For this, as has been said, is the right thing to do. The best evidence for this is the fact that on the stage, and in competitions, such plays, if well performed, are the most tragic. Euripides, even if he mismanages some other matters, is at all events the most tragic of the poets.

Second best is the kind of plot which some people like most: a double plot like the *Odyssey*, with a different ending for the better and worse characters. It is regarded as best only because of the weaknesses of the audience; the poets follow the lead of their public and pander to its taste. But this is not the pleasure proper to tragedy, but is more characteristic of comedy. In comedy even those who are bitter enemies in the story, like Orestes and Aegisthus,* make friends and go off together at the end, and nobody gets killed by anybody.

The source of the tragic effect

14. Actually seeing a play performed may evoke fear and pity, but so too can the plot itself—this is more 1453a5

fundamental and the mark of a better poet. The story should be put together in such a way that even without seeing the play a person hearing the series of events should feel dread and pity. This is what someone would feel on hearing the story of Oedipus. Evoking this effect by a stage performance is less artistic and more dependent on the production. The effect that some producers try to achieve is not so much fear as horror: that has nothing at all to do with tragedy. One should not look to it for every kind of enjoyment, but only the appropriate one. The poet's job is to use representation to make us enjoy the tragic emotions of pity and fear, and this has to be built into his plots.

Let us therefore ask what kinds of event strike us as terrible or pitiable. The interactions in question must necessarily occur either between friends and relations, or between enemies, or strangers. If an enemy takes on an enemy, there is nothing in his acting or planning to arouse pity, only the actual suffering of the victim. So too when the characters are strangers. What should be looked for are cases where the sufferings occur within relationships, as between brother and brother, son and father, mother and son, son and mother—where one kills, or is on the point of killing, the other, or is doing something else horrible.

The traditional stories should not be tampered with—Clytemnestra must be killed by Orestes, and Eriphyle by Alcmaeon, and so on—but the poet needs to be inventive and make the best use of the traditional material. Let me explain what I mean by 'the best use'. The deed may be perpetrated in full knowledge and awareness, which is the way the old poets showed things, and as Euripides too made Medea kill her children.* It is also possible for the terrible deed to be done in ignorance, and the relationship be discovered only later, as with Sophocles' Oedipus. Here the deed is outside the play; examples within the tragedy itself are Astydamas' *Alcmaeon* or Telegonus in the *Odysseus Wounded*. A third possibility in addition to these

two is when a person is on the point of unwittingly doing some irreparable deed, but realizes the situation in time to desist. There is no further possibility, since the deed is either done or not done, and the agents must either know or not know.

Of these, the worst is being on the point of doing the deed knowingly, and then not doing it. This is monstrous without being tragic, since no one suffers. That is why poets never, or only very rarely, compose in this way (one example is Haemon and Creon in *Antigone*).* Second worst is the actual performance of the deed. This is best if the deed is one that is done in ignorance, with the relationship discovered only later—here there is nothing monstrous, and the discovery will make a great impression. Best of all is the last case: I mean, for example, when in *Cresphontes* Merope is on the point of killing her son, and recognizes him in time.* The same happens with sister and brother in the *Iphigeneia*, and in *Helle* when the son recognizes his mother when about to hand her over to the enemy.* 1454a 5

This is why, as I said earlier, not many families provide material for tragedy. It was chance, not art, that guided poets in their search for stories in which to produce their effects, so they are obliged to turn to the families who have suffered such woes. 10

Enough has now been said about the construction of plots and the kinds of stories that are appropriate. 15

Character in tragedy

15. We turn to moral character.* Here there are four things to aim at. The first and foremost is that the characters should be good.* As was said earlier, moral character will be shown if a speech or action reveals the nature of a person’s fundamental choice,* and the character will be 20 25

good if the choice is good. This is possible in every class of person: there is such a thing as a good woman and a good slave, even if one of these is perhaps inferior, and the other base. The second point is appropriateness: it is no good for a character to be courageous if the courage or intelligence is expressed in a way that is not appropriate for a woman. The third aim is plausibility, which is something different from making the character good and appropriate in the manner described. The fourth item is consistency: even if the character portrayed is someone inconsistent, and that is the whole point of the representation, he should nevertheless be consistently inconsistent.

An example of unnecessary badness of character is Menelaus in *Orestes*,* of inapt and inappropriate character the dirge of Odysseus in *Scylla* and the speech of Melanippe;* of inconsistency in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*—the girl who pleads to be spared is not at all like her later self.* In the case of moral character no less than in plot, we should always look for what is necessary or probable: it should be necessary or probable for this kind of person to say or do this kind of thing, and it should be necessary or probable for one kind of event to follow another kind of event.

Clearly, the explication* of a story should issue from the story itself, and not from a *deus ex machina* as in the *Medea*,* or in the departure scene in the *Iliad*.* A *deus ex machina* may be used for events outside the play—for past events beyond human ken, or subsequent events that can only be described in prophecy—since we believe that the gods are all-seeing. But there should not be anything implausible in the events themselves; or if there is, it should be outside the play, as with Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

Since tragedy is a representation of people who are better than we are, poets should copy good portrait-painters, who portray a person's features and offer a good likeness but nonetheless make him look handsomer than he is. In the

same way, a poet exhibiting people who are irascible and indolent should show them as they are, and yet portray them as good men—in the way that Homer made Achilles both a good man and a paradigm of stubbornness.*

These points are to be kept in mind throughout, and also the features of stage production that are essential to the art of poetry. Many mistakes are possible in this area. But they have been discussed in detail in my published works.

Further thoughts on discovery

16. Discovery has already been explained. It comes in six kinds.

The first is identification by signs and tokens—this is the least artistic form, though because of writers' lack of ingenuity it is the one most used. Some of these are congenital marks, like 'the spear the earth-born bear' or stars like the ones Carcinus uses in *Thyestes*, while others are acquired. Marks of this second kind may be bodily, such as scars, or external tokens, such as necklaces or the boat that leads to the discovery in *Tyro*.* Even these can be put to better or worse use: the way in which Odysseus' scar leads to his recognition by his nurse is different from the way in which it leads to his recognition by the swineherds. Recognitions that are merely to add plausibility—and all others of a similar kind—are less artistic; far superior are those linked to the reversal, as in the bath scene.*

Second are identifications that are made by the poet himself, which for that reason are inartistic. For example: Orestes in *Iphigeneia* reveals his own identity. Iphigeneia's identity is revealed by the letter, whereas Orestes is made to say in his own person what the poet, and not the story, demands. This makes it close to the error just discussed: he might well have brought some tokens with him. Another case is 'the voice of the shuttle' in Sophocles' *Tereus*.*

Third there is identification through memory, when the matter is brought to mind by something seen or heard. A case in point is Dicaiogenes' *Cyprians*, where the hero bursts into tears at the sight of the painting; another is the moment when Odysseus, telling his tale to Alcinous, weeps at the memories brought back by the sound of the harp. In each case recognition ensues. 1455a

Fourth there is identification by inference. The *Choephorae* provides an example: 'Someone resembling me has come; no one resembles me except Orestes; therefore Orestes has come.'* Polyides the Sophist suggested another in connection with *Iphigeneia*; he said it was natural for Orestes to infer: 'My sister was sacrificed, and so I will be too.' Another case is in Theodectes' *Tydeus*: 'I came to find a son, so I am doomed myself.' Again, in *Phinaedae*, when the women see the place: 'This is where we were exposed, so this is where we are to die.' 5 10

There is also a complicated kind of identification based on fallacious reasoning by the audience. For instance, in *Odysseus the False Messenger*: the premise that the poet offers is that Odysseus, and he alone, can bend the bow. Odysseus himself says that he will recognize the bow which he had never seen. The identification actually takes place on the former basis, when the audience thinks fallaciously that it takes place on the latter.* 15

The best discovery of all is one that ensues from the actual course of events, where the emotional impact is achieved through a probable sequence, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus* and in *Iphigeneia* (her desire to send a letter is entirely probable). Only this kind of identification can make do without artificial marks and necklaces. Second best are those that involve inference. 20

Advice to playwrights

17. When plotting stories and putting them into words one should do one's best to visualize the events. By envisaging things while they happen, as if one were an eyewitness, one will discover what is appropriate and one will be less likely to overlook inconsistencies. Evidence of this is offered by the criticism that was made of Carcinus. At the crucial moment Amphiaraus was returning from the temple—this would not be noticed by someone who did not see it, but on the stage it irritated the audience and the play was a failure.

As far as possible, the poet should act the story as he writes it. People of the same temperament are more persuasive if they actually feel the emotions they enact: someone actually in distress best acts out distress, someone really angry best acts out rage. This is why, in order to write tragic poetry, you must be either a genius who can adapt himself to anything, or a madman who lets himself get carried away.

The poet should first lay out the general structure and only then elaborate it into episodes: this is true whether the story is a ready-made one or a fresh composition. As an example of what I call laying out the general structure, take *Iphigeneia*. 'A girl has been sacrificed and then vanishes without trace. Unbeknownst to her sacrificers she is set down in another country where it is the custom to sacrifice strangers to the local goddess. She becomes the priestess of this rite. Much later her brother happens to arrive, and on arrival is taken prisoner. (His being sent by an oracle, and for what purpose, does not belong to the story.) On the point of being sacrificed, he discloses his identity—either as Euripides makes him do, or as Polyidus suggested, by saying, not improbably: 'As my sister was sacrificed, so must I be too'—and so he is saved. After that, names are to be supplied and episodes worked out—but the episodes should be appropriate, as are the fit of madness that led to Orestes' arrest and the purification that led to his being saved.

In plays the episodes are short; in epic they lengthen out the poem. A summary of the *Odyssey* is not at all long. ‘A man is away from home for many years; he is kept under surveillance by Poseidon and isolated. Meanwhile affairs at home are in such a state that his property is being squandered by his wife’s suitors, who are plotting against his son. After being shipwrecked he returns home, identifies himself to several people, and launches an attack in which his enemies are destroyed and he survives.’ That is the core of the story; the rest is episodes.

18. Every tragedy has both a complication and an explication. What goes before the opening, and often some of the events inside the play, make up the complication; the rest is the explication. What I call complication is everything from the beginning up to the point that immediately precedes the change to good or bad fortune; everything from the beginning of the change to the end I call explication. Thus, in Theodectes’ *Lynceus* the complication includes events before the play, the kidnapping of the child, and the […] of the parents; the explication is everything from the accusation of murder until the end.*

Different kinds of tragedy

There are four kinds of tragedy—the same number as that of the component parts mentioned. There is the complex kind, constituted by reversal and discovery (for example, plays about Ajax or Ixion); there is the morality tragedy (for example, *Women of Phthia* and *Peleus*); finally there is […] (e.g. *Daughters of Phorcys*, *Prometheus*, and plays set in the underworld).* 1456a

Preferably one should try to have all four, but if not all then the most important and as many as possible, especially given the way people criticize poets these days. Because in

the past there have been good poets in each genre, people expect a present-day poet to surpass each of them in his own particular excellence.

If we are to compare and contrast tragedies, we must do so principally in respect of the story, that is, whether they share the same complication and explication. Many poets complicate well but explicate badly, but the two need to be matched to each other.

Final advice on plot construction

You must call to mind what I have said several times: one should never build a tragedy with an epic structure, that is to say, one containing more than one story. Suppose one were to make the entire story of the *Iliad* into one play! Epic is long enough for every episode to appear on an appropriate scale, but in a drama the result is very disappointing. There is evidence of this. Consider those who have treated the sack of Troy as a whole, like Euripides, rather than piecemeal, or the whole story of Niobe, rather than what Aeschylus did. These people's plays were either complete failures or fared badly in the competition. There was even a play of Agathon's which was a flop simply because of this.

In reversals and in simple plots poets like to astonish us, in order to produce a desired effect that is both tragic and humane. This happens when someone who is both clever and wicked (like Sisyphus*) is taken in, or when someone who is brave but unjust is worsted. This is not improbable, since, as Agathon remarks, it is probable that many improbable things should happen.

The chorus should be treated as one of the actors; it should be part of the whole and should take part in the action. Sophocles, not Euripides, should be the model here. With other poets the songs have no more to do with the

story than with any other tragedy. That is why they sing interludes—a practice commenced by Agathon. But what difference is there between singing interludes and transferring a speech or an episode from one play into another?

Style and intellectual content

19. Now that the other elements have been discussed it is time to speak about style and ideas. The topic of ideas, however, can be left for my *Rhetoric*, the subject to which it more properly belongs. Under the head of ideas come all the effects that can be produced by reason: proof, refutation, the evocation of emotions (pity, fear, anger, and so on) and also the placing or removal of an emphasis. The same principles should be applied to the management of events, when there is a need to represent something as pitiful, or frightening, or important, or probable. The difference is that in stage-management the effect is to be produced without explicit statement, while in speeches the effect must be produced by the words of the speaker. What, indeed, would there be for the speaker to do if the required effects were evident without anything being said? 35 1456b 5

One topic of inquiry, under the head of style, is the distinction between different speech acts: command, prayer, statement, threat, question, answer, and so on. Knowledge of these is part of the art of performance and of stage-direction: no serious criticism of a poet can be made on the basis of his knowledge or ignorance of such matters. Protagoras* complained that when Homer writes, ‘Sing, goddess, of the wrath …’, he purports to be uttering a prayer, but in fact he is giving an order, since that is what telling somebody what to do or not to do actually is. Why should anyone think that is a fault in Homer? So let us set that aside as belonging to some art other than that of poetry. 10 15

20. Different grammatical elements go to make up style: phoneme, syllable, particle, noun, verb, conjunction, inflection, sentence. A phoneme is an indivisible vocal sound of a particular kind: it must be able to form part of a composite vocal sound, because animals too produce indivisible sounds, but none of them are what I call a phoneme.

Phonemes are classified as vowels, fricatives, and mutes. A vowel is an audible sound without contact between the organs of speech; a fricative is an audible sound which does involve such contact (for example, *s* and *r*); a mute involves such contact but makes no audible sound unless it is combined with a phoneme which does have audible sound (such as *g, d*). Phonemes differ from each other in several ways: the shape of the mouth; the point of contact of the organs; and the presence or absence of aspiration. They also differ by being long or short, and by having acute, grave, or intermediate pitch. Detailed discussion of these differences belongs to the theory of metre.

A syllable is a composite sound, made up of a mute and a sounding phoneme, that does not have a meaning in itself. *Gr* without an *a* is not a syllable* but becomes one with an *a*, namely *gra*. The various forms of syllable also belong to the theory of metre

A particle is a sound, without meaning in itself, that neither helps nor hinders the creation of a single semantic unit from two or more such units. It is meant to stand in the middle or at the end of a sentence, but may not stand at the beginning. Examples are *men, dh, toi*, and *de*.* Another kind of sound that lacks meaning in itself is capable of forming a single semantic unit from several semantic units that share a single meaning. A conjunction is a sound lacking meaning itself that marks the beginning, the end, or the division of a sentence: for instance, *amphi, peri*, and so

on.* Another such sound neither helps nor hinders the creation of a single semantic unit from two or more such units. It is meant to stand in the middle or at the end of a sentence, but may not stand at the beginning.

A noun* is a compound sound, lacking tense but bearing a meaning, no part of which is meaningful in its own right. (In composite nouns we do not treat any part as independently meaningful: ‘dorus’ in ‘Theodorus’ has no meaning.)

A verb is a compound sound bearing tense as well as meaning, no part of which is meaningful in its own right (just as with nouns). Words like ‘man’ or ‘white’ do not indicate time, but ‘walks’ and ‘walked’ indicate present and past tense respectively.

Verbs and nouns have inflections. With nouns, the inflections signify the case (the genitive ‘of’, the dative ‘to’, and so on) or the number (singular ‘man’, plural ‘men’). With verbs, the inflections signify things like the moods. The interrogative (‘did he walk?’) and imperative (‘walk!’) provide examples.*

A sentence is a compound significant sound which has a part or parts that have meaning in their own right. Not every sentence consists of a verb and a noun—a definition of ‘man’ might not. There can be a sentence lacking any verb, but there must also be a part which has meaning on its own, for example, ‘Cleon’ in ‘Cleon is walking’.

There are two ways in which sentences can be made into a unity: they may have just a single meaning, or they may simply be joined up together. The *Iliad* forms a unity in the latter sense, the definition of ‘man’ in the former.

The classification of nouns

21. Nouns come in two kinds, simple or double. Ones that have no parts that are meaningful—for example, ‘earth’—I

call ‘simple’. Double nouns again come in two kinds: those that have two meaningful parts, and those that are composed of one meaningful and one non-meaningful part (though neither part has any meaning within the noun itself). There can also be triple, quadruple, and multiplex nouns, like many from Marseilles, such as ‘Hermocaicoxanthus’.*

Every noun can also be classified in a different manner. 1457b
There are ordinary words, foreign words, metaphorical terms, euphemisms, and coinages. Again, a noun may be lengthened, or shortened, or modified.

An ordinary word is one that is in general use in a 5
community, a foreign word one that is in general use elsewhere. Obviously the same word may be both ordinary and foreign, but not in the same community: for instance, *sigunon* is the ordinary word for spear in Cyprus, but is foreign to us; ‘spear’ is an ordinary word for us but foreign for them.

Metaphor is applying to something a noun that properly applies to something else. The transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, or from species to species; or it may be a case of analogy.*

If someone says ‘My ship stopped here’, I call that a 10
transfer from genus to species, because mooring is one kind 15
of stopping.* ‘Odysseus wrought in truth ten thousand noble needs’ is transfer from species to genus: ‘ten thousand’, a specific large number, is used instead of the generic ‘many’. Examples of transfer from species to species are ‘drawing off the life with bronze’ and ‘cutting off with sharp bronze’: here ‘drawing off’ means ‘cutting’ and ‘cutting’ means ‘drawing off’—both activities are kinds of removal.

By analogy I mean the case where B is related to A as D 20
is to C; one can then speak of D instead of B or B instead 25
of D. Sometimes people add the thing to which the 30
replaced term is related. I mean, for instance, a wine bowl

is to Dionysus what a shield is to Ares, so you may call a wine bowl ‘the spear of Dionysus’ or a shield ‘the wine cup of Ares’. Or again, old age is to life as evening is to day, so you can speak of evening as the day’s old age, or, like Empedocles, call old age the evening or the twilight of life. Sometimes there is no current word for one term of the analogy, and yet the analogy can be used. A sower scatters seed-corn, the sun scatters rays of fire: the first is called ‘sowing’, the second has no name. Yet because the relation of the sun to its rays is the same as that of the sower to his seed-corn, the poet can speak of the sun ‘sowing his divine fire’. Yet another way of using this kind of metaphor is to refer to something by the transferred term minus one of its properties, as one might call a shield not just ‘the wine bowl of Ares’ but ‘the wineless wine bowl of Ares’.*

A coinage is a word not in use in a community which is made up by the poet himself; there seem to be a few examples, such as ‘sproutage’ for horns and ‘prayerman’ for priest.

Next, lengthening and shortening. A noun is lengthened if it has a long vowel instead of a short one, or if an extra syllable is inserted; it is shortened if something is removed. Examples of lengthening are *poleeos* for *poleos* and *Peleiadeo* for *Peleidou*. Examples of shortening are *kri* for the Greek word for barley, and *do* for the Greek word for house. In a famous line, ‘from a pair of eyes a single vision comes’, the abbreviation *ops* is used for the Greek word for vision.* Finally, what is modification? That is when you take a word as it stands, and then add something on to it—for example, ‘his rightward breast’ instead of ‘his right breast’.

Nouns themselves are either masculine, feminine, or neuter. Masculine nouns are those ending in *nu*, *rho*, *sigma*, or the two letters that contain *sigma*, namely *psi* and *xi*. Feminine are those that end in vowels that are always long (e.g. *eta* and *omega*), or among the vowels of variable

length, in *alpha*. (So it turns out that there are just as many kinds of masculine nouns as of feminine nouns, since *psi* and *xi* are compounds of *sigma*.) No noun ends in a mute or in a short vowel; only three end in *iota* (*meli, kommi, peperi*), and five in *upsilon*.* Neuter nouns end in these letters and in *nu* and *sigma*.

Excellence in poetic style

22. The best style is one that is clear without being vulgar. The clearest style is one that uses only common words, but that is vulgar, as the poetry of Cleophon and Sthenelus demonstrate. On the other hand, the use of exotic expressions—foreign words, metaphor, lengthening, and anything else out of the ordinary—makes a style solemn and elevated beyond the norm. But if you compose entirely in this style, the result will be either paradox or gibberish—paradox if made up entirely of metaphor, gibberish if made up of foreign words. The essence of paradox is to report actual facts by an impossible combination of terms. This cannot be done with ordinary words, but it can with metaphorical expressions—for example, ‘I saw a man use fire to fasten bronze upon his fellow’.* Passages composed entirely of foreign words produce gibberish. So what is needed is a mixture of these kinds of expression: the use of common words will produce clarity, and the use of exotic expressions (foreign words, metaphor, ornament, and the other items listed) will elevate the style above the vulgar.

A great contribution to a style that is both clear and elevated is made by lengthenings, shortenings, and modifications. By its unfamiliarity the variation from common usage will elevate the style, but the features shared with everyday speech will preserve clarity. Some people find fault with this style and mock Homer for it, but they are wrong to do so. (An example is the elder Euclid, who said that it was easy to write poetry if you can

lengthen words whenever you like—he offered parodies such as ‘I saw Epichares walking to Marathon’ and ‘not mixing his Hellebore’.)* An obtrusive use of this style certainly produces a comic effect; moderation is needed here, but equally in the employment of other elements of style. The use of metaphors, foreign words, and the other devices in an inappropriate and deliberately comic way would produce the same effect. The difference they make to epic, when used appropriately, can be observed if one takes a verse and substitutes common words for them. The truth of what I am saying can be observed in the particular cases of foreign words, metaphors, and the other devices, by this method of substituting common words. For instance, Aeschylus and Euripides each composed the same iambic line, but the change of a single word, the substitution of a foreign for a common noun, made one line seem splendid and the other banal. Aeschylus wrote in his *Philoctetes*, ‘the cancer that eats the flesh of my foot’, and Euripides changed ‘eats’ to ‘banquets on’. Again, in ‘a lowly, lank, and loathsome man’ one might substitute the words ‘small, weak, and ugly’. And compare ‘offering a misshapen chair and lowly table’ with ‘offering a bad chair and a little table’. Or again, ‘the resounding shore’ with ‘the noisy shore’.*

Ariphades ridiculed the tragedians for introducing 1459a
expressions that no one would ever use in conversation, such as ‘the palace from’ instead of ‘from the palace’, ‘of thine’ and ‘Achilles round about’ for ‘round Achilles’. Ariphrades failed to realize that it is precisely by being out of the ordinary that such expressions elevate the style.*

All the items I have mentioned must be used in an 5
appropriate manner. This goes for double nouns and 10
foreign words, but above all the poet must be skilled in the use of metaphor. This is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others, and it is a sign of genius, since it involves a keen eye for similarities. Double nouns are particularly

suited for dithyramb, foreign words for heroic verse, and metaphor for iambics. All the devices I have mentioned are in place in heroic verse, but in iambic verse, which is particularly close to conversation, the most appropriate ones are those that could also appear in prose—including metaphor and ornament as well as common words.

So much, then, for tragedy and imitation on the stage. 15

IV. EPIC

The whole and its parts

23. What of representation in verse that takes the form of narrative? The story should, as in tragedy, be constructed dramatically, that is, based on a single action that is whole and entire and that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Only thus can epic, like a living organism, produce its own proper pleasure. The stories should not be organized like histories which call for an exposition not of a single action but of a single period of time, with all the things that happened to one or more people during it, each with only a chance relationship to the others. The sea-fight at Salamis and the battle against the Carthaginians in Sicily occurred simultaneously, without converging on a single goal; so in successive periods of time one thing may come after another without any single outcome.* Most poets, however, probably compose in this way.

Homer's superlative talent, as I have said before, shows itself here as elsewhere. He did not try to cover the Trojan war in its entirety, even though it did have a beginning and an end, for the story would have been too long and difficult to take in at one view—or if curtailed in length, too complex in its variety. Instead, he singled out one segment, using others as episodes to add variety—episodes such as the catalogue of ships and the like. Other poets write about a single person or a single period, or a single action made up of many parts. Thus the author of the *Cypria* and of the *Little Iliad*. What is the result? From the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* only one or at most two tragedies can be made; but from the *Cypria* you could make many and from the *Little Iliad* no less than eight: for instance, *The Trial at*

Arms, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, Eurypylus, Going Begging, Spartan Women, Sack of Troy, Making Sail, as well as *Sinon* and *Women of Troy*.*

24. Epic, moreover, must needs come in the same kinds as tragedy: simple or complex, and based on character or suffering. The component parts, too, must be the same, with the exception of song and spectacle: we need reversals, discoveries, and sufferings, as well as intelligence and style. Homer was the first to employ all of these, and he did so most satisfactorily. His two poems exemplify different structures: the *Iliad* is simple and full of suffering, and the *Odyssey* is complex (full of identifications) and is based on character. In addition, he excels everyone in ideas and style.

Epic and tragedy compared

The difference between epic and tragedy lies in the metre and in the length of the plot. An adequate limitation of length has already been suggested: it must be possible to take the beginning and the end in a single view. This would be the case if the plots were shorter than the older epics, but as long as a series of tragedies presented at a single session. But epic offers particular scope for the extension of length. In tragedy it is not possible to represent several parts of the story occurring simultaneously, but only the one part on stage performed by the actors. But in epic the narrative form makes it possible to include many simultaneous incidents that, if germane to the issue, add weight to the poem. This gives epic the advantage in achieving grandeur, in offering variety to the hearer, and in diversifying the episodes, while uniformity quickly palls and may cause tragedies to flop.

As for the metre, experience has shown the suitability of heroic verse. If one were to try narrative imitation in one or 1460a

more of the other metres the incongruity would be manifest. Heroic verse is the most solemn and stately metre, while the iambic trimeter and the trochaic tetrameter are metres for movement—the latter for dancing, and the former for action.* (Hence heroic verse welcomes foreign words and metaphors, because narrative is an exceptional form of representation.) It would be even odder to combine these metres together, as Chairemon did. For this reason, no one has composed a long structure in any metre other than the heroic; as we have said, the very nature of the thing teaches people to choose what is most appropriate.

The excellence of Homer

Among all his other admirable qualities, Homer deserves praise because he is the only epic poet who knows what he should do in his own person. The poet should say as little as possible in his own voice; for that is not what makes him a mimic. Other poets are always coming forward in person, and engage in representation only rarely and briefly; whereas Homer, after a brief preamble, brings on stage a man or woman or other personage—every one a character and none of them mere dummies.

Astonishment is certainly something that tragedy must evoke—but the chief cause of astonishment is improbability, and this is more feasible in epic because we do not actually see the agent. The pursuit of Hector would seem ridiculous on stage, with the Greeks, because Achilles is shaking his head, standing still instead of joining in the chase, but in epic it excites no remark. Astonishment gives pleasure: evidence of this is the fact that we all exaggerate when recounting events, hoping to please our audience.

Homer, more than anyone else, taught poets the right way to tell falsehoods. That is by the fallacy of affirming the consequent. When the existence or occurrence of A

follows from the existence of occurrence of B, people think that if B is the case, A too exists or occurs—but that is a fallacy. Suppose that A is not the case, but if it were the case B would follow, the poet should insert B, and because our mind knows that B is true it will draw the false inference that A. An example of this is the bath scene in the *Odyssey*.

Probable impossibilities are to be preferred to implausible possibilities. Stories should not be made up from incredible parts. Ideally there should be nothing incredible, or failing that, it should lie outside the narrative (like Oedipus not knowing how Laius died) rather than inside the drama (like the report of the Pythian Games in *Electra* or the man in the *Mysians* who comes from Tegea to Mysia without saying a word). It is a ridiculous excuse to say that leaving these elements out would ruin the story; plots like this should never be constructed in the first place.* Even in the *Odyssey* the incredible details in the setting ashore of Odysseus would be manifestly intolerable if treated by an inferior poet. As it is, Homer uses his other talents to soften and conceal the incredibility.

Style needs particular attention in quiet passages where little is happening and there is no expression of character or intelligence; a brilliant style, on the other hand, obscures character and ideas.

How to respond to Homer's critics

25. Now for problems and solutions.* Consider the matter in the following way and you will see how many there are and the kinds in which they come.

The poet, like a painter or any other image-maker, is engaged in representation, and there are three kinds of thing that he is representing: things that are or were the case, things that are said or thought to be the case, and

things that ought to be the case. These are expressed in a style that includes foreign words, metaphors, and the various modifications that poets are licensed to make. The criterion of correctness is not the same in poetry as in ethics, and not the same in poetry as in any other art. But within poetry itself two kinds of error are possible, one intrinsic and the other incidental. If the poet meant to represent something and failed through incompetence, the fault is intrinsic.* But if he deliberately chooses to misrepresent—for example, to show a horse galloping with both right legs forward—the error is not a fault in the poetry, but a sin against some other art such as medicine. These, then, are the principles on which one should confront and solve the objections posed by problems.

First, those relating to the art of poetry itself. If a poem contains impossibilities, that is a fault. However, the fault may be forgiven if they serve the purpose of the art, as specified earlier, that is to say, if they make this or some other part of the poem more impressive. A prime example is the pursuit of Hector. However, if the purpose could have been achieved better, or equally well, without violating the rules of the art, then the fault cannot be forgiven. If at all possible, no fault at all should be committed.

The question may be raised: if there is a fault, where is it located? Is it a violation of the poetic art, or is it something incidental? It is less serious to be ignorant of the fact that a female deer has no horns than to paint a poor representation of one.

If the objection is that something is not true, then perhaps it is something that ought to be true. That was the answer that Sophocles gave when he said that while Euripides portrayed men as they actually are, he himself portrayed them as they ought to be. That is the right response.

If neither response is possible, then the response must be that it accords with popular opinion.

The stories about the gods, for instance, may be, as 1461a

Xenophanes says, neither true nor edifying; none the less they are current. In other cases it is not a matter of edification, but a reflection of past practice: when we read ‘the spears stood upright on their butt-end’, that was the custom in those days, as it still is among the Illyrians.

To determine whether something said or done was good or bad you have to look not only at the actual deeds or words, but also at the identity of the person saying or doing the thing, the person to whom he said or did it, plus the occasion, the means, and the motive (for example, whether it was to achieve a greater good or avert a greater evil).

Other criticisms are to be met by considerations of style. The foreign word *oureis* in the passage ‘first against the *oureis*’ perhaps means not ‘mules’ but ‘guards’. When we are told that Dolon was ugly in appearance, perhaps this does not mean that he was deformed, but simply plain-featured, since the Cretans call facial beauty ‘beauty of appearance’. The command ‘mix it stronger’ need not mean ‘serve the wine neat’, as for drunkards, but simply mix it faster. Other things are said metaphorically, for instance, ‘all gods and men slept through the night’ when at the same time he says ‘when he looked over the Trojan plain he marvelled at the sound of flutes and pipes’—here ‘all’ is said metaphorically for ‘many’, since ‘all’ is a subset of ‘many’. Metaphorical too is ‘alone without a share’, a person who is best known is unique. In some cases, as Hippias of Thasos suggested, difficulties may be removed by a change of accentuation, as ‘We allow the granting of his prayer’ and ‘the part the rain has rotted’. Sometimes punctuation does the trick, as in Empedocles’ ‘On a sudden, things once immortal mortal became, and things unmixed once mixed’. On other occasions, it is ambiguity: in ‘more of the night had passed’, ‘more’ is ambiguous.*

One can appeal to linguistic usage. People call diluted wine ‘wine’ and in the same way Homer speaks of ‘a

greave of new-forged tin’. We call ironworkers ‘bronze-smiths’, and in the same way Ganymede is said to pour wine for Zeus even though the gods do not drink wine. (This last case could also be metaphorical.)

Whenever a term seems to bear a sense that is contradictory, one should consider how many senses it might bear in the context. For instance, in ‘By it was the bronze spear stopped’, we should ask in how many different ways it might be stopped, and choose, among the alternatives, the one that gives the best sense. This is the exact opposite of the fault of which Glaucon complains, when people adopt unreasonable prejudices and deduce consequences, and if something in the text goes against their verdict they criticize the poet as if he had actually stated what they happen to believe. This is what happened in the case of Icarius. Some people think he was a Spartan. If so, they say, it is very odd that Telemachus did not meet him when he went to Sparta.* But the Cephallenians say that Odysseus’ wife came from a Cephallenian family, and that her father’s name was Icadius, not Icarius, and perhaps they are right. So probably the problem is created by a mistake of the critics. 35 1461b 5

In general, impossibilities should be justified by reference to the needs of poetry, the desire for edification, or the prevalence of an opinion. The needs of poetry make what is plausible though impossible preferable to what is possible but implausible. Perhaps it is not possible* for people to look the way Zeuxis painted them, but that is an idealization of the truth, and the artist should improve upon the model. Implausibilities should either be justified by their conformity to prevalent opinion, or made plausible by the defence that it is probable that some improbable things will occur. 10 15

Contradictory statements should be scrutinized in the same way as arguments rebutting a philosophical position.

Is the same thing said, about the same thing, and in the same sense?

Is the poet contradicting something he has said himself, or something a reasonable person would assume?

It is, however, right to object to implausibility and immorality when they are unnecessary and serve no dramatic purpose. Aegeus in Euripides* provides an example of such implausibility, and Menelaus in *Orestes* provides an example of such immorality.

The objections of critics, then, come under five heads: impossibility, implausibility, immorality, self-contradiction, and violation of artistic standards. They are to be answered under the heads I have set out, which add up to twelve.

The inferiority of epic to tragedy

The question may be asked whether epic or tragic representation is superior. If 'superior' means less vulgar, and an art is the less vulgar the more superior the public it addresses, it is utterly clear that an art which represents indiscriminately is vulgar. Actors believe that the audience is incapable of understanding anything unless they emphasize it, and so they go in for exaggerated motions—poor flute-players spin round if they have to show a discus being thrown, and they manhandle the conductor if the piece is about Scylla. Well, tragedy is like that—just as more recent actors were in the opinion of their predecessors. Mynniscus used to call Callippides an ape because of his overacting, and people took a similar view of Pindarus too.* The tragic art as a whole stands in the same relation to epic as the recent actors did to their predecessors. Critics say that epic addresses a decent public which does not need gestures, whereas tragedy addresses a public that is debased. If, then, tragedy is vulgar, it will manifestly be inferior.

First of all, this charge is laid not against the art of poetry, but against the art of performance. In reciting epic poetry too it is possible to overdo gestures, like Sosistratus; so too in a song recital, as Mnasitheus of Opus used to do.

Next, not all movement is to be condemned, any more than all dancing, but only that of debased people, which was the complaint against Callippides (and now against other actors too) for portraying women who were not respectable.

Again, tragedy, no less than epic, produces its effect even without movement; its quality is apparent from a mere reading. So if it is superior in other respects this charge need not damage it.

Further, there is nothing that epic has that tragedy does not also have—it can even use the same metre—but tragedy has a substantial extra element in the form of music, which is a source of intense pleasure. It offers verisimilitude when read no less than when performed. Tragedy achieves the purpose of representation in a shorter space, and the pleasure is greater through being more concentrated rather than diluted over a long time. Suppose someone were to expand Sophocles' *Oedipus* into as many lines as the *Iliad*!

Again, epic poets offer a less unified representation. (Evidence of this is that one epic provides material for several tragedies.) If they present a single story, it will seem either truncated if told briefly, or feeble if the telling is as long as is appropriate to epic metre. What I have in mind here is a plot containing many actions. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have many such parts, each on a considerable scale; yet the poems are structured as well as they possibly could, and are as close as possible to the representation of a single action.

Tragedy, then, excels in all these respects and also in artistic effect—remember that it is not just any pleasure,

but a specific one, that these two genres should produce. So, since it achieves its purpose better, it is superior to epic.

So much, then, about tragedy and epic, their kinds and parts, and the differences between them; so much also for the causes of their success and failure, and how to answer the criticisms made of them.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY
AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

From *An Apology for Poetry*

Truly, to all them that, professing learning, inveigh against poetry, may justly be objected that they go very near to ungratefulness, to seek to deface that which, in the noblest nations and languages that are known, hath been the first light-giver to ignorance, and first nurse, whose milk by little and little enabled them to feed afterwards of tougher knowledges. And will they now play the hedgehog, that, being received into the den, drove out his host? Or rather the vipers, that with their birth kill their parents? Let learned Greece in any of her manifold sciences be able to show me one book before Musaeus,* Homer, and Hesiod, all three nothing else but poets. Nay, let any history be brought that can say any writers were there before them, if they were not men of the same skill, as Orpheus, Linus,* and some others are named, who having been the first of that country that made pens deliverers of their knowledge to their posterity, may justly challenge to be called their fathers in learning. For not only in time they had this priority (though in itself antiquity be venerable) but went before them as causes, to draw with their charming sweetness the wild untamed wits to an admiration of knowledge. So as Amphion was said to move stones with his poetry to build Thebes, and Orpheus to be listened to by beasts, indeed stony and beastly people. So among the Romans were Livius Andronicus* and Ennius; so in the Italian language the first that made it aspire to be a treasure house of science were the poets Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch; so in our English were Gower and Chaucer, after whom, encouraged and delighted with their excellent foregoing, others have followed to beautify our mother-tongue, as well in the same kind as in other arts.

This did so notably show itself, that the philosophers of Greece durst not a long time appear to the world but under the masks of poets. So Thales, Empedocles, and Parmenides sang their natural philosophy in verses; so did Pythagoras and Phocylides their moral counsels; so did Tyrtaeus in war matters, and Solon in matters of policy; or rather they, being poets, did exercise their delightful vein in those points of highest knowledge which before them lay did to the world. For that wise Solon was directly a poet it is manifest, having written in verse the notable fable of the Atlantic Island

which was continued by Plato.* And truly even Plato whosoever well considereth, shall find in the body of his work, though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin, as it were, and beauty depended most of poetry. For all standeth upon dialogues; wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them; besides his poetical describing the circumstances of their meetings, as the well-ordering of a banquet, the delicacy of a walk, with interlacing mere tales, as Gyges' Ring* and others, which who knoweth not to be flowers of poetry did never walk into Apollo's garden.

And even historiographers (although their lips sound of things done, and verity be written in their foreheads) have been glad to borrow both fashion and perchance weight of poets. So Herodotus entitled his history by the name of the nine Muses; and both he and all the rest that followed him either stole or usurped of poetry their passionate describing of passions, the many particularities of battles which no man could affirm, or, if that be denied me, long orations put in the mouths of great kings and captains, which it is certain they never pronounced.

So that truly neither philosopher nor historiographer could, at the first, have entered into the gates of popular judgements, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry; which in all nations at this day, where learning flourisheth not, is plain to be seen, in all which they have some feeling of poetry. In Turkey, besides their lawgiving diviners they have no other writers but poets. In our neighbour-country Ireland, where truly learning goeth very bare, yet are their poets held in a devout reverence. Even among the most barbarous and simple Indians, where no writing is, yet have they their poets, who make and sing songs (which they call *areytos*), both of their ancestors' deeds and praises of their gods. A sufficient probability that, if ever learning come among them, it must be by having their hard dull wits softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of poetry; for until they find a pleasure in the exercises of the mind, great promises of much knowledge will little persuade them that know not the fruits of knowledge. In Wales, the true remnant of the ancient Britons, as there are good authorities to show the long time they had poets, which they called bards, so through all the conquests of Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, some of whom did seek to ruin all memory of learning from among them,

yet do their poets unto this day last; so as it is not more notable in soon beginning, than in long continuing.

But since the authors of most of our sciences were the Romans, and before them the Greeks, let us a little stand upon their authorities, but even so far as to see what names they have given unto this now scorned skill. Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*, is manifest; so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge. […]

But now let us see how the Greeks named it and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him a Poet, which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word *poiein*, which is 'to make'; wherein I know not whether by luck or wisdom we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker. Which name, how high and incomparable a title it is, I had rather were known by marking the scope of other sciences than by my partial allegation.

There is no art delivered unto mankind that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. So doth the astronomer look upon the stars, and, by that he seeth, set down what order nature hath taken therein. So do the geometrician and the arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the musician in times tell you which by nature agree, which not. The natural philosopher thereon hath his name, and the moral philosopher standeth upon the natural virtues, vices, and passions of man; and 'follow nature', saith he, 'therein, and thou shalt not err'. The lawyer saith what men have determined; the historian what men have done. The grammarian speaketh only of the rules of speech, and the rhetorician and logician, considering what in nature will soonest prove and persuade, thereon give artificial rules, which still are composed within the circle of a question, according to the proposed matter. The physician weigheth the nature of man's body, and the nature of things helpful or hurtful unto it. And the metaphysic, though it be in the second and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernatural, yet doth he, indeed, build upon the depth of nature.

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the heroes, demi-gods, cyclops, chimeras, furies, and such like; so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. […]

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the Heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature. Which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when, with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam,—since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted; thus much I hope will be given me, that the Greeks, with some probability of reason, gave him the name above all names of learning.

Now let us go to a more ordinary opening of him, that the truth may be the more palpable; and so, I hope, though we get not so unmatched a praise as the etymology of his names will grant, yet his very description, which no man will deny, shall not justly be barred from a principal commendation.

Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mim*ē*sis*, that is to say a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight. […]

… it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet (no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who, though he pleaded in armour, should be an advocate and no soldier), but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right

describing note to know a poet by. Although indeed the Senate of Poets hath chosen verse as their fittest raiment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in manner to go beyond them; not speaking (table-talk fashion, or like men in a dream) words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peizing* each syllable of each word by just proportion, according to the dignity of the subject.

Now, therefore, it shall not be amiss, first to weigh this latter sort of poetry by his works, and then by his parts; and if in neither of these anatomies he be condemnable, I hope we shall obtain a more favourable sentence. This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of. This, according to the inclination of man, bred man-formed impressions. For some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to astronomy; others, persuading themselves to be demi-gods if they knew the causes of things, became natural and supernatural philosophers. Some an admirable delight drew to music, and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics; but all, one and other, having this scope: to know and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence. But when by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall into a ditch, that the inquiring philosopher might be blind in himself, and the mathematician might draw forth a straight line with a crooked heart; then lo! did proof, the overruler of opinions, make manifest, that all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architektonik*ē, which stands, as I think, in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing, and not of well-knowing only; even as the saddler's next end is to make a good saddle, but his further end to serve a nobler faculty, which is horsemanship; so the horseman's to soldiery; and the soldier to have not only the skill, but to perform the practice of a soldier. So that the ending end of all earthly learning being virtuous action, those skills that most serve to bring forth that have a most

just title to be princes over all the rest; wherein, if we can show, the poet is worthy to have it before any other competitors.

Among whom as principal challengers step forth the moral philosophers; whom, me thinketh, I see coming toward me with a sullen gravity, (as though they could not abide vice by daylight), rudely clothed, for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things; with books in their hands against glory, whereto they set their names; sophistically speaking against subtlety; and angry with any man in whom they see the foul fault of anger. These men, casting largess as they go of Definitions, Divisions, and Distinctions, with a scornful interrogative do soberly ask whether it be possible to find any path so ready to lead a man to virtue, as that which teacheth what virtue is, and teacheth it not only by delivering forth his very being, his causes and effects, but also by making known his enemy, Vice, which must be destroyed, and his cumbersome servant Passion, which must be mastered, by showing the generalities that containeth it, and the specialities that are derived from it; lastly, by plain setting down how it extendeth itself out of the limits of a man's own little world, to the government of families, and maintaining of public societies.

The historian scarcely giveth leisure to the moralist to say so much, but that he, laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself for the most part upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay; having much ado to accord different writers, and to pick truth out of partiality; better acquainted with a thousand years ago than with the present age, and yet better knowing how this world goeth than how his own wit runneth; curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties, a wonder to young folks and a tyrant in table-talk; denieth, in a great chafe, that any man for teaching of virtue and virtuous action is comparable to him. […] 'The philosopher', saith he, 'teacheth a disputative virtue, but I do an active. His virtue is excellent in the dangerless Academy of Plato, but mine showeth forth her honourable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers and Agincourt. He teacheth virtue by certain abstract considerations, but I only bid you follow the footing of them who have gone before you. Old-aged experience goeth beyond the fine-witted philosopher; but I give the experience of many ages. Lastly, if he make the song book, I put the learner's hand to the lute; and if he be the guide, I am the light.' Then would he allege you innumerable examples, conferring story by story, how much the wisest senators and princes have been

directed by the credit of history, as Brutus, Alphonsus of Aragon (and who not, if need be?). At length the long line of their disputations maketh a point in this, that the one giveth the precept, and the other the example.

Now whom shall we find, since the question standeth for the highest form in the school of learning, to be the moderator? Truly, as me seemeth, the poet; and if not a moderator, even the man that ought to carry the title from them both, and much more from all other serving sciences. Therefore compare we the poet with the historian and the moral philosopher; and if he go beyond them both, no other human skill can match him. For as for the divine, with all reverence it is ever to be excepted, not only for having his scope as far beyond any of these as eternity exceedeth a moment, but even for passing each of these in themselves. And for the lawyer, though Jus be the daughter of Justice, and Justice the chief of virtues, yet because he seeketh to make men good *formidine poenae* than *virtutis amore*;* or, to say righter, does not endeavour to make men good, but that their evil hurt not others; having no care, so he be a good citizen, how bad a man he be; therefore, as our wickedness maketh him necessary, and necessity maketh him honourable, so is he not in the deepest truth to stand in rank with those, who all endeavour to take naughtiness away, and plant goodness even in the secretest cabinet of our souls. And these four are all that any way deal in that consideration of men's manners, which being the supreme knowledge, they that best breed it deserve the best commendation.

The philosopher therefore and the historian are they which would win the goal, the one by precept, the other by example; but both, not having both, do both halt. For the philosopher, setting down with thorny argument the bare rule, is so hard of utterance and so misty to be conceived, that one that hath no other guide but him shall wade in him till he be old, before he shall find sufficient cause to be honest. For his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and the general, that happy is that man who may understand him, and more happy that can apply what he doth understand. On the other side, the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine.

Now doth the peerless poet perform both; for whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in some one by whom he presupposeth it was done, so as he coupleth the general notion with the

particular example. A perfect picture, I say, for he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that wherof the philosopher bestoweth but the wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth. For as, in outward things, to a man that had never seen an elephant or a rhinoceros, who should tell him most exquisitely all their shapes, colour, bigness, and particular mark; or of a gorgeous palace, the architecture, with declaring the full beauties, might well make the hearer able to repeat, as it were by rote, all he had heard, yet should never satisfy his inward conceit with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge; but the same man, as soon as he might see those beasts well painted, or that house well in model, should straightways grow, without need of any description, to a judicial comprehending of them: so no doubt the philosopher, with his learned definitions, be it of virtues or vices, matters of public policy or private government, replenisheth the memory with many infallible grounds of wisdom, which notwithstanding lie dark before the imaginative and judging power, if they be not illuminated or figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy. […]

For conclusion, I say the philosopher teacheth, but he teacheth obscurely, so as the learned only can understand him; that is to say, he teacheth them that are already taught. But the poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs; the poet is indeed the right popular philosopher. Wherof Aesop's tales give good proof; whose petty allegories, stealing under the formal tales of beasts, make many, more beastly than beasts, begin to hear the sound of virtue from those dumb speakers.

But now may be it alleged that if this imagining of matters be so fit for the imagination then must the historian needs surpass, who bringeth you images of true matters, such as indeed were done, and not such as fantastically or falsely may be suggested to have been done. Truly, Aristotle himself, in his Discourse of poesy, plainly determineth this question, saying that poetry is *philosophōteron* and *spoudaioteron*, that is to say, it is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history. His reason is, because poesy dealeth with *katholou*, that is to say with the universal consideration, and the history with *kat' hekaston*, the particular. 'Now', saith he, 'the universal weighs what is fit to be said or done, either in likelihood or necessity, which the poesy considereth in his imposed names; and the particular only marketh whether Alcibiades did, or suffered, this or

that’: thus far Aristotle. Which reason of his, as all his, is most full of reason. […]

So, then, the best of the historian is subject to the poet; for whatsoever action or faction, whatsoever counsel, policy, or war-stratagem the historian is bound to recite, that may the poet, if he list, with his imitation make his own, beautifying it both for further teaching and more delighting, as it pleaseth him; having all, from Dante’s heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen. Which if I be asked what poets have done so? as I might well name some, yet say I, and say again, I speak of the art, and not of the artificer. […]

I conclude, therefore, that he excelleth history, not only in furnishing the mind with knowledge, but in setting it forward to that which deserveth to be called and accounted good; which setting forward, and moving to well-doing, indeed setteth the laurel crown upon the poet as victorious, not only of the historian, but over the philosopher, howsoever in teaching it may be questionable. For suppose it be granted (that which I suppose with great reason may be denied) that the philosopher, in respect of his methodical proceeding, doth teach more perfectly than the poet, yet do I think that no man is so *philophilosophos* as to compare the philosopher in moving with the poet. And that moving is of a higher degree than teaching, it may by this appear, that it is well nigh both the cause and the effect of teaching; for who will be taught, if he be not moved with desire to be taught? And what so much good doth this teaching bring forth (I speak still of moral doctrine) as that it moveth one to do that which it doth teach? For, as Aristotle saith, it is not *gnōsis* but *praxis* must be the fruit; and how *praxis* can be, without being moved to practise, it is no hard matter to consider. The philosopher showeth you the way, he informeth you of the particularities, as well as the tediousness of the way, as of the pleasant lodging you shall have when your journey is ended, as of the many by-turnings that may divert you from your way; but this is to no man but to him that will read him, and read him with attentive, studious painfulness; which constant desire whoever hath in him, hath already passed half the hardness of the way, and therefore is beholding to the philosopher but for the other half. Nay, truly, learned men have learnedly thought, that when once reason hath so much overmastered

passion as that the mind hath a free desire to do well, the inward light each mind hath in itself is as good as a philosopher's book; since in nature we know it is well to do well, and what is well and what is evil, although not in the words of art which philosophers bestow upon us; for out of natural conceit the philosophers drew it. But to be moved to do that which we know, or to be moved with desire to know, *hoc opus, hic labor est*.*

Now therefore of all sciences, (I speak still of human, and according to the human conceit) is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the very first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste you may long to pass further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margin with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness. But he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchanting skill of music; and with a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner; and pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue; even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things, by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste, which if one should begin to tell them the nature of the aloes or rhubarb they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth. […]

Where the philosophers, as they scorn to delight, so must they be content little to move, saving wrangling whether virtue be the chief or only good, whether the contemplative or the active life do excel, which Plato and Boethius well knew, and therefore made Mistress Philosophy very often borrow the masking raiment of Poesy. For even those hard-hearted evil men who think virtue a school-name, and know no other good but *indulgere genio*,* and therefore despise the austere admonitions of the philosopher, and feel not the inward reason they stand upon, yet will be content to be delighted, which is all the good-fellow poet seemeth to promise; and so steal to see the form of goodness (which seen, they cannot but love) ere themselves be aware, as if they took a medicine of cherries.

Infinite proofs of the strange effects of this poetical invention might be alleged; only two shall serve, which are so often remembered as I think all men know them. The one of Menenius Agrippa,* who, when the whole

people of Rome had resolutely divided themselves from the senate, with apparent show of utter ruin, though he were, for that time, an excellent orator, came not among them upon trust either of figurative speeches or cunning insinuations, and much less with far-fetched maxims of philosophy, which (especially if they were Platonic) they must have learned geometry before they could well have conceived; but, forsooth, he behave himself like a homely and familiar poet. He telleth them a tale, that there was a time when all the parts of the body made a mutinous conspiracy against the belly, which they thought devoured the fruits of each other's labour; they concluded they would let so unprofitable a spender starve. In the end, to be short—for the tale is notorious, and as notorious that it was a tale—with punishing the belly they plagued themselves. This, applied by him, wrought such effect in the people, as I never read that ever words brought forth but then so sudden and so good an alteration; for upon reasonable conditions a perfect reconciliation ensued.

The other is of Nathan the prophet,* who, when the holy David had so far forsaken God as to confirm adultery with murder, when he was to do the tenderest office of a friend, in laying his own shame before his eyes, (sent by God to call again so chosen a servant) how doth he it but by telling of a man whose beloved lamb was ungratefully taken from his bosom? The application most divinely true, but the discourse itself feigned; which made David (I speak of the second and instrumental cause) as in a glass to see his own filthiness, as that heavenly Psalm of Mercy* well testifieth.

By these, therefore, examples and reasons, I think it may be manifest that the poet, with that same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensueth: that as virtue is the most excellent resting-place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY
A DEFENCE OF POETRY

From *A Defence of Poetry*

The connection of scenic exhibitions with the improvement or corruption of the manners of men has been universally recognized: in other words the presence or absence of poetry in its most perfect and universal form, has been found to be connected with good and evil in conduct or habit. The corruption which has been imputed to the drama as an effect begins when the poetry employed in its constitution ends: I appeal to the history of manners whether the periods of the growth of one and the decline of the other have not corresponded with an exactness equal to any example of moral cause and effect.

The drama at Athens, or wheresoever else it may have approached to its perfection, ever co-existed with the moral and intellectual greatness of the age. The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stripped of all but that ideal perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become. The imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived; the good affections are strengthened by pity, indignation, terror and sorrow; and an exalted calm is prolonged from the satiety of this high exercise of them into the tumult of familiar life: even crime is disarmed of half its horror and all its contagion by being represented as the fatal consequence of the unfathomable agencies of nature; error is thus divested of its wilfulness; men can no longer cherish it as the creation of their choice. In the drama of the highest order here is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect. Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles. The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them from the simplicity of their elementary forms, and touches them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating its like wherever it may fall.

But in periods of the decay of social life, the drama sympathizes with that decay. Tragedy becomes a cold imitation of the form of the great masterpieces of antiquity, divested of all harmonious accompaniment of the kindred arts; and often the very form misunderstood, or a weak attempt to teach certain doctrines which the writer considers as moral truths; and which are usually no more than specious flatteries of some gross vice or weakness with which the author, in common with his auditors, are infected. Hence what has been called the classical and domestic drama. Addison's *Cato** is a specimen of the one; and would it were not superfluous to cite examples of the other! To such purposes poetry cannot be made subservient. Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it. And thus we observe that all dramatic writings of this nature are unimaginative in a singular degree; they affect sentiment and passion, which, divested of imagination, are other names for caprice and appetite. The period in our own history of the grossest degradation of the drama is the reign of Charles II, when all forms in which poetry had been accustomed to be expressed became hymns to the triumph of kingly power over liberty and virtue. Milton stood alone illuminating an age unworthy of him. At such periods the calculating principle pervades all the forms of dramatic exhibition, and poetry ceases to be expressed upon them. Comedy loses its ideal universality: wit succeeds to humour; we laugh from self-complacency and triumph, instead of pleasure; malignity, sarcasm and contempt succeed to sympathetic merriment; we hardly laugh, but we smile. Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less disgusting: it is a monster for which the corruption of society for ever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret.

The drama being that form under which a greater number of modes of expression of poetry are susceptible of being combined than any other, the connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form. And it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence; and that the corruption or the extinction of the drama in a nation where it has once flourished, is a mark of corruption of manners, and an extinction of the energies which sustain the soul of social life. But, as Machiavelli says of political institutions, that life may be preserved and renewed, if men

should arise capable of bringing back the drama to its principles. And this is true with respect to poetry in its most extended sense: all language, institution and form, require not only to be produced but to be sustained: the office and character of a poet participates in the divine nature as regards providence, no less than as regards creation.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

ARISTOTLE ON DETECTIVE FICTION

From ‘Aristotle on Detective Fiction’

LECTURE DELIVERED AT OXFORD, 5 MARCH 1935

Some twenty-five years ago it was rather the fashion among commentators to deplore that Aristotle should have so much inclined to admire a kind of tragedy that was not, in their opinion, ‘the best’. All this stress laid on the plot, all this hankering after melodrama and surprise—was it not rather unbecoming—rather inartistic? Psychology for its own sake was just then coming to the fore, and it seemed almost blasphemous to assert that ‘they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action’. Indeed we are not yet free from the influence of that school of thought for which the best kind of play or story is that in which nothing particular happens from beginning to end.

Now, to anyone who reads the *Poetics* with an unbiased mind, it is evident that Aristotle was not so much a student of his own literature as a prophet of the future. He criticised the contemporary Greek theatre because it was, at that time, the most readily available, widespread and democratic form of popular entertainment presented for his attention. But what, in his heart of hearts, he desired was a good detective story; and it was not his fault, poor man, that he lived some twenty centuries too early to revel in the Peripeties of *Trent’s Last Case* or the Discoveries of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.* He had a stout appetite for the gruesome. ‘Though the objects themselves may be painful’, says he, ‘we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms, for example, of the lowest animals and of dead bodies.’ The crawling horror of *The Speckled Band* would, we infer, have pleased him no less than *The Corpse in the Car, The Corpse in Cold Storage* or *The Body in the Silo*. Yet he was no thriller fan. ‘Of simple plots and actions’, he rightly observes, ‘the episodic are the worst. I call a plot episodic when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of the episodes.’ […] He maintained that dreadful and alarming events produced their best effect when they occurred, ‘unexpectedly’, indeed, but also ‘in consequence of one another.’ In one

phrase he sums up the whole essence of the detective story proper. Speaking of the denouement of the work, he says: ‘It is also possible to discover whether some one has done or not done something.’ Yes, indeed.

Now it is well known that a man of transcendent genius, though working under difficulties and with inadequate tools, will do more useful and inspiring work than a man of mediocre intellect with all the resources of the laboratory at his disposal. Thus Aristotle, with no better mysteries for his study than the sordid complications of the Agamemnon family, no more scientific murder-methods than the poisoned arrow of Philoctetes or the somewhat improbable medical properties of Medea’s cauldron; with detective heroes so painfully stereotyped and unsympathetic as the inhuman array of gods from the machine, yet contrived to hammer out from these unpromising elements a theory of detective fiction so shrewd, all-embracing and practical that the *Poetics* remains the finest guide to the writing of such fiction that could be put, at this day, into the hands of an aspiring author.

In what, then, does this guidance consist? From the start Aristotle accepts the Detective Story as a worthy subject for serious treatment. ‘Tragedy’ he observes (tragedy being the literary form which the detective story took in his day) ‘also acquired magnitude—that is, it became important both in form and substance. ‘Discarding short stories and a ludicrous diction, it assumed, though only at a late point in its progress, a tone of dignity.’ I am afraid that ‘short stories and a ludicrous diction’ have characterised some varieties of the genre up to a very late point indeed; it is true, however, that there have recently been great efforts at reform. Aristotle then goes on to define tragedy in terms excellently applicable to our subject; ‘The imitation’ (or presentment, or representation—we will not quarrel over the word) ‘of an action that is serious’—it will be admitted that murder is an action of a tolerably serious nature—‘and also complete in itself’—that is highly important, since a detective story that leaves any loose ends is no proper detective story at all—‘with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.’

Too much has already been said and written on the vexed subject of the catharsis. Is it true, as magistrates sometimes assert, that little boys go to the bad through reading detective stories? Or is it, as detective writers prefer to think with Aristotle, that in a nerve ridden age the study of crime stories provides a safety valve for the bloodthirsty passions that might

otherwise lead us to murder our spouses? Of all forms of modern fiction, the detective story alone makes virtue *ex hypothesi* more interesting than vice, the detective more beloved than the criminal. But there is a dangerous error going about—namely that ‘if… detective fiction leads to an increase in crime, then the greater the literary merit, the greater will be the corresponding increase in crime’. Now this is simply not true: few people can have been inspired to murder their uncles by the literary merits of *Hamlet*. On the contrary, where there is no beauty there can be no catharsis; an ill-written book, like an ill-compounded drug, only irritates the system without purging. Let us then see to it that, if we excite evil passions, it is so done as to sublimate them at the same time by the contemplation of emotional or intellectual beauty. Thus far, then, concerning the catharsis.

Aristotle next discusses Plot and Character. ‘A detective story’, we gather, ‘is impossible without action, but there may be one without character.’ A few years ago, the tendency was for all detective stories to be of the characterless or ‘draughtboard’ variety; to-day, we get many examples exhibiting a rather slender plot and a good deal of morbid psychology. Aristotle’s warning, however, still holds good.

One may string together a series of characteristic speeches of the utmost finish as regards diction and thought, and yet fail to produce the true dramatic effect; but one will have much better success with a story which, however inferior in these respects, has a plot.

And again:

The first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of the detective story is the plot and the characters come second.

As regards the make-up of the plot, Aristotle is again very helpful. He says firmly that it should have a beginning, a middle and an end. Herein the detective story is sharply distinguished from the kind of modern novel which, beginning at the end, rambles backwards and forwards without particular direction and ends on an indeterminate note, and for no ascertainable reason except the publisher’s refusal to provide more printing and paper for seven-and-sixpence. The detective story commonly begins with the murder; the middle is occupied with the detection of the crime and the various peripeties or reversals of fortune arising out of this; the end is the discovery and execution of the murderer—than which nothing can very well be more final. Our critic adds that the work should be of a convenient

length. If it is too short, he says, our perception of it becomes indistinct. […] He objects, still more strongly to the work that is of vast size, or ‘one thousand miles long’. ‘A story or plot’, he reminds us, ‘must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory.’ A man *might* write a detective story of the length of *Ulysses*,* but, if he did, the reader would not be able to bear all the scattered clues in mind from the first chapter to the last, and the effect of the final discovery would be lost. In practice, a length from 80,000 to 120,000 words is desirable, if the book is to sell; and this is enough to allow, in Aristotle’s general formula, of ‘the hero’s passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness or from happiness to misfortune’. Later, however, he conveys a very necessary warning: ‘A writer often stretches out a plot beyond its capabilities, and is thus obliged to twist the sequence of incident.’ It is unwise to ‘write-up’ a short-story type of plot to novel length, even to fulfil a publisher’s contract.

The next section of the *Poetics* gives advice about the unity of the plot. It is not necessary to tell us everything that ever befell the hero. For example, says Aristotle, ‘in writing about Sherlock Holmes’ (I have slightly adapted the instance he gives)

> the author does not trouble to say where the hero was born, or whether he was educated at Oxford or Cambridge, nor does he enter into details about incidents which—though we know they occurred—are not relevant to the matter in hand, such as the cases of Vamberry the Wine Merchant, the Aluminium Crutch, Wilson the Notorious Canary-Trainer or Isadora Persano and the Remarkable Worm.

The story, he says

> must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole.

In other words, ‘murder your darlings’—or, if you must write a purple passage, take care to include in it some vital clue to the solution which cannot be omitted or transposed to any other part of the story. […]

Concerning the three necessary parts of a detective story—peripety, or reversal of fortune, discovery and suffering—Aristotle has many very just observations. On suffering, we need not dwell long. Aristotle defines it as ‘action of a destructive or painful nature, such as murders, tortures, woundings and the like’. These are common enough in the detective story and the only remark to be made is that they ought always to help on the

action in some way and not be put in merely to harrow the feelings, still less to distract attention from a weakness in the plot.

A reversal of fortune may happen to all or any of the characters: the victim—who is frequently a man of vast wealth—may be reduced to the status of a mere dead body, or may, again, turn out not to be dead after all, as we had supposed. The wrongly suspected person, after undergoing great misfortunes, may be saved from the condemned cell and restored to the arms of his betrothed. The detective, after several errors of reasoning, may hit upon the right solution. Such peripeties keep the story moving and arouse alternating emotions of terror, compassion and so forth in the reader. These events are best brought about, not fortuitously, but by some *hamartia* or defect in the sufferer. The defect may be of various kinds. The victim may suffer on account of his unamiable character, or through the error of marrying a wicked person, or through foolishly engaging in dubious finance, or through the mistake of possessing too much money. The innocent suspect may have been fool enough to quarrel with the victim or to bring suspicion on himself by suppressing evidence with intent to shield somebody. The detective suffers his worries and difficulties through some failure of observation or logic. All these kinds of defect are fruitful in the production of Peripety. […]

This brings us to the very remarkable passage in which Aristotle, by one of those blinding flashes of light which display to the critic of genius the very core and centre of the writer's problem, puts the whole craft of the detective writer into one master-word: *Paralogismos*. That word should be written up in letters of gold on the walls of every mystery-monger's study —at once the guiding star by which he sets his compass and the jack-o'lantern by which he leads his readers into the bog; paralogism,—the art of the false syllogism—for which Aristotle himself has a blunter and more candid phrase. Let us examine the whole paragraph, for it is of the utmost importance.

'Homer', says he—if he had lived in our own day he might have chosen some more apposite example, such as Father Knox* or Mrs Agatha Christie, but thinking no doubt of *Odysseus*, he says of Homer—'Homer more than any other has taught the rest of us the art of *framing lies in the right way*. I mean the use of paralogism. Whenever, if A is or happens a consequent B is or happens, men's notion is that if the B is the A also is—but that is a false conclusion. Accordingly if A is untrue, but there is

something else, B, that on the assumption of its truth follows as its consequent, then the right thing is to present us with the B. Just because we know the truth of the consequent, we are in our own minds led on to the erroneous inference of the truth of the antecedent.'

There you are, then; there is your recipe for detective fiction: the art of framing lies. From beginning to end of your book, it is your whole aim and object to lead the reader up the garden; to induce him to believe a lie. To believe the real murderer to be innocent, to believe some harmless person to be guilty; to believe the detective to be right where he is wrong and mistaken when he is right; to believe the false alibi to be sound, the present absent, the dead alive and the living dead; to believe, in short, anything and everything but the truth. […]

This brings us to the consideration of the characters, concerning which Aristotle takes a very twentieth-century point of view. He says that they must be *good*. This, I suppose, must be taken relatively, to mean that they should, even the meanest and wickedest of them, be not merely monsters and caricatures like the personages in a low farce, but endued with some sort of human dignity, so that we are enabled to take them seriously. They must also be *appropriate*: a female, he says, must not be represented as clever. […] Thirdly, the characters must be *like the reality* (*to homoion*). Scholars differ about what Aristotle means by this word. Some think it means 'conformable to tradition'; that the villain should be easily recognizable as villainous by his green eyes, his moustache, and his manner of ejaculating 'Ha!' and the detective by his eccentricities, his pipe and his dressing-gown, after the more ancient models. But I do not agree with them, and believe that the word means, as we say to-day, 'realistic', i.e. with some moderate approximation in speech and behaviour to such men and women as we see about us. For elsewhere Aristotle takes the modern, realistic view, as when he says, for instance, that the plot ought not to turn on the detection and punishment of a hopelessly bad man who is villainous in all directions at once—forger, murderer, adulterer, thief,—like the bad baron in an Adelphi melodrama; but rather on that of an intermediate kind of person—a decent man with a bad kink in him—which is the kind of villain most approved by the best modern writers in this kind. For the more the villain resembles an ordinary man, the more shall we feel pity and horror at his crime and the greater will be our surprise at his detection. So, too, as regards the innocent suspects and the police; in treating all such

characters a certain resemblance to real life is on the whole to be desired. Lastly, and most important and difficult of all, the characters must be *consistent* from first to last. Even though at the end we are to feel surprise on discovering the identity of the criminal, we ought not to feel incredulity; we should rather be able to say to ourselves: ‘Yes, I can see *now* that from the beginning this man had it in him to commit murder, had I only had the wits to interpret the indications furnished by the author.’

A NOTE ON METRE

In several places Aristotle refers to particular verse metres. The metre of Greek poetry works on a different principle from that of English verse: whereas in English it is the stress that determines the metre, in Greek the metre depends on the length of the syllables. In spite of this, the differences between different metrical patterns exhibit a considerable resemblance in the two languages, so that it is not inappropriate to illustrate the metres for English readers with examples drawn from English poets and translators.

Hexameter is the metre of the Homeric epics. Each line has six units, or feet, which in most cases can be either dactyls (- ˘ ˘, i.e. long/short/short) or spondees (- -, i.e. long long). A typical line would be - - | - ˘ ˘ | - ˘ ˘ | - - | - ˘ ˘ | - -. Here is an English version of some lines of the Iliad, by A. H. Clough:

> So beseeching he said, and was heard of Phoebus Apollo
> Who from Olympus' heights' descending came full of anger.

Elegaic couplet consists of a hexameter followed by a pentameter, that is to say a five-foot line consisting of two parts, the first consisting of two feet, which may be dactyls or spondees, followed by one syllable and a pause, and the second consisting of two dactyls followed by a single syllable. Again A. H. Clough provides a good example in English at the beginning of his *Amours de Voyage*:

> Over the great windy waters, and over the clear crested summits
> Unto the sun and the sky, and unto the perfecter earth.

Iambic trimeter is the standard metre for speeches in tragedy. The basic foot is the iamb (˘ -), a short followed by a long. A line in tragic dialogue will consist of six iambs, with other feet allowed as substitutes in certain places. The Greek verse corresponds to the modern Alexandrine. Here is a translation of an exchange between Orestes and his sister in the recognition scene of Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris*:

IPH: What name was given you by the man who you begat?
OR: If truth were told, none but Unhappy is my name.

Trochaic tetrameter is a four-foot line based on the trochee (- ˘), a long followed by a short., as in the mnemonic ‘poky trochee makes me jokey’. The standard foot is a pair of trochees (with substitution allowed); the final foot is usually short of a syllable. The metre was popular in scurrilous verses and in comedy.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

PLATO, *REPUBLIC*

Ouranos … upon him: according to the primitive myth (Hesiod, *Theogony* 137 ff., 453 ff.) Kronos castrated his father Ouranos and swallowed his children.

a pig: the victim which had to be offered by everyone seeking to be initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

and he begged all the Acheans … generals of the host: *Iliad* 1.15–16.

dithyramb: a choral lyric in honour of the god Dionysus.

Sophron and Xenarchus: father and son, Sicilian writers of prose comic skits in the latter half of the fifth century BC.

Socratic dialogues: elsewhere Aristotle often quotes Socratic utterances in Plato's dialogues as if they were Socrates' own words: here he shows an awareness that the dialogues involve creative writing. The point he is making is that there is no Greek word corresponding to our word 'prose' for a genre that includes both skits and dialogues.

or any other metre: similarly, there is no Greek word corresponding to our word ‘verse’ to cover all poems irrespective of their particular metre. Aristotle’s overall conclusion is that it is content, not form, that settles whether something is poetry.

Empedocles: fifth-century Sicilian thinker who composed two volumes of natural philosophy in hexameter verse.

nomes: instrumental melodies to which texts could be improvised.

Polygnotus: was the most famous wall-painter of fifth-century Greece. Nothing is known for certain about the other two artists. Henceforth, no comment will be attached to names of persons known only from Aristotle’s references.

Deiliad: the *Iliad* is an epic about Ilium (Troy); the *Deiliad*, therefore, will be an epic about Deilos (‘The Coward’).

Timotheus and Philoxenus: Timotheus of Miletus (*c*.450–*c*.360) wrote an account of the battle of Salamis in irregular verse; his contemporary Philoxenus wrote a dithyramb in which the Cyclops sang a solo to the lyre.

the Dorians: one of the three main branches of the Greek race, who occupied the Peloponnese and counted among their cities Megara (on the Gulf of Corinth) and several Sicilian colonies. Their dialect, Doric, differed from the Attic dialect spoken in Athens.

Chionides and Magnes: the earliest Attic comic poets, active about 475 BC.

from childhood: it is no accident that the word ‘play’ designates both childish pretending and dramatic performance.

‘this is so-and-so’: perhaps Aristotle has in mind not simply the recognition of the sitter of a portrait, but also the identification of a divine or mythical subject of a statue.

Margites and similar poems: modern scholars contest the accuracy of Aristotle’s chonrological sketch. The *Margites* is a lost burlesque dubiously attributed to Homer.

phallic singing: in many Greek religious fertility festivals an icon of the male organ of generation was carried in procession.

magistrate: at Athens a city official, the archon, chose and funded plays for performance at the annual festival of Dionysus.

Crates: a fifth-century poet who wrote six plays, now lost. He won prizes in the Dionysia in 450 and later years.

purification: the Greek word *katharsis*, which occurs only here in the *Poetics*, is not defined by Aristotle and its meaning is much controverted. See Introduction, p. xxv.

obvious to everyone: in fact the Greek word corresponding to ‘music-making’ is ambiguous: it may mean either the composition or the performance of music.

totally lacking in it: the speciality of Zeuxis (late fifth century) was the representation of female beauty.

taken place: the Greek text is here uncertain.

proper names: a proper name stands for a particular individual, and both ‘Alcibiades’ and ‘Oedipus’ are, for Aristotle, proper names of actual people. Despite this, he tells us, the dramatist, unlike the historian, does not wish to give us information about a historic individual, but to convey general truths about human nature.

Alcibiades: a fifth-century Athenian politician whose erratic career is recorded in Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War.

Agathon’s Antheus: Agathon was a distinguished dramatic poet who won his first victory in a dramatic competition in 416 BC; the banquet he gave in celebration provides the setting for Plato’s *Symposium*. His plays, all now lost, are often quoted by Aristotle.

defective stories: the OCT text has ‘simple stories’, but emendation seems necessary.

pity and fear: Aristotle’s reasons for singling out these emotions are discussed in the Introduction, p. xxvi.

reversal or a discovery or both: the Greek words *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* are here given a technical meaning which Aristotle goes on to explain in later paragraphs.

opposite effect: in Sophocles' tragedy *King Oedipus*, Oedipus, at the beginning of the play, enjoys prosperity and reputation. Previously he has killed a stranger in a scuffle, and married a bride without due diligence. The discovery that the man he killed was his father and the woman he married was his mother leads to the overturning of his fortune, as he is banished from his kingdom and blinds himself in shame and remorse. See Introduction, p. xxii.

Danaus: in Greek mythology Danaus was the king of Argos, and was forced to consent to the marriage of his fifty daughters to their fifty Egyptian cousins. He gave each daughter a dagger with which to kill her husband on their wedding night. All did so except one, who spared her husband Lynceus; an act of disobedience for which she was put on trial by her father. The lost tragedy referred to by Aristotle clearly told a somewhat different story.

recognize Orestes: in Euripides' tragedy *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, whose plot Aristotle summarizes later at 1455b3.

errs in some way: the Greek word *hamartia* can cover both cognitive and moral error.

Thyestes: the uncle of Agamemnon, who was tricked into eating the flesh of his sons, and married a woman who was, unknown to him, his own daughter.

Alcmaeon … Telephus: Alcmaeon killed his mother Eriphyle in obedience to a command of his deceased father, who had been tricked by her into taking part in a fatal expedition. Meleager, a hunter in love with Atalanta, killed his brothers in a quarrel over her, whereupon his mother Althaia caused his death. Telephus, son of Heracles and king of Mysia, was wounded by Achilles while the Greek warriors were on their way to Troy; Euripides wrote a play about the subsequent history of his wound. The other characters in this list have been identified in previous notes.

Orestes and Aegisthus: Orestes was the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. During the siege of Troy Aegisthus seduced Clytemnestra and joined with her in murdering Agamemnon on his return from the war. Orestes, with the help of his sister Electra, murdered Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in revenge.

Medea kill her children: in Euripides' tragedy, Medea, enraged by the desertion of her husband Jason, kills their children in revenge.

Haemon and Creon in Antigone: there is in fact plenty of suffering in Sophocles' tragedy of that name. Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, is betrothed to Haemon, the son of Creon, king of Thebes. For an act of disobedience she is buried alive in a cave. Haemon goes to the cave and discovers that she has hanged herself; when he is found by Creon he attempts to stab him, but misses and kills himself.

recognizes him in time: in a lost play by Euripides, Merope, the wife of Cresphontes, recognized her son when on the point of killing him in his sleep.

hand her over to the enemy: nothing is known of this play, and the episode here described does not figure in the surviving mythology of Helle, who fell off the ram with the golden fleece and was drowned in the sea now named after her, the Hellespont. Aristotle, in this passage, seems to be having second thoughts about his earlier condemnation of happy endings.

moral character: translates the Greek word *ethos* from which our ‘ethics’ is derived. Here the word refers principally to the moral status of individual characters in a tragedy, but also to the ‘moral’ of the story—its ethical message.

should be good: that is, better than us (48a1) but not perfect (53a8). The context shows that Aristotle has in mind the moral, not the social, status of the characters.

fundamental choice: the Greek word *prohairesis* represents a key concept in Aristotle's ethical system, that of the choice of a way of life.

Menelaus in Orestes: in Euripides' tragedy of this name, the protagonist is being tried by the citizens of Argos for the murder of his mother and her lover. His uncle Menelaus, dropping in on the way home from Troy to Sparta, is too cowardly to try to save him from the death penalty.

Melanippe: the heroine of Euripides' lost play *Melanippe the Wise*, apparently too clever by half.

not at all like her later self: the later self is the heroine of *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (frequently quoted in the *Poetics*). Another Euripidean tragedy, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, shows her being sacrificed by her father Agamemnon on his way to Troy.

explication: the Greek word *lysis* is often rendered ‘denouement’, but that is too exotic and technical a rendering.

in the Medea: in Euripides' play of that name, Medea escapes in the Sun's chariot. In Greek staging, divinities appeared literally in a machine, an apparatus above the characters on stage.

in the Iliad: in Book Two of the *Iliad* the Greeks are about to abandon the siege of Troy and to sail away, but they are prevented by the goddess Athena.

paradigm of stubbornness: the Greek text is uncertain here; I accept an emendation of Lobel.

Tyro: Tyro bore two sons to the sea-god Poseidon and abandoned them in a boat—she identified them in later life by recognizing the boat.

bath scene: Odysseus, returning to Ithaca in disguise, is recognized by his scar while being bathed by his nurse Euryclea (*Odyssey* 19.386 ff.). Later he shows the same scar to some swineherds as a proof of his identity. Aristotle's other references in this paragraph are obscure.

in Sophocles' Tereus: Tereus, the king of Thrace, lusted after Philomela, raped her, and then cut out her tongue so that she could not reveal what had happened; however, she depicted the crime in a tapestry that she sent to her sister.

Orestes has come: in Aeschylus' *Choephorae* ('Libation-Bearers') Orestes returns from exile to avenge his father's death, and dedicates a lock of hair on his tomb. His sister Electra recognizes the hair (and a nearby footprint) as strikingly similar to her own.

on the latter: the disappearance of the three plays just mentioned by Aristotle makes it impossible to identify the events he is referring to.

until the end: the Greek text of this and the next paragraph is uncertain, and so are the plots of the lost plays.

plays set in the underworld: all the titles in this list figure among the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, but all are lost except for Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, which is about the torments inflicted by Zeus on the Titan in punishment for giving humans fire and the arts.

Sisyphus: according to Greek mythology Sisyphus was the most cunning of men. He tricked the gods of the underworld into letting him return to earth after death. In punishment, on his return, he was made to roll uphill a stone which perpetually rolled back downhill just before reaching the summit.

Protagoras: a fifth-century sophist who was one of the first Greek grammarians.

not a syllable: the manuscript readings are faulty here: a ‘not’ has to be interpolated.

men … and de: these Greek particles express nuances that are often expressed in English merely by tone of voice. Aristotle’s definition seems quite inappropriate, and is bafflingly repeated a few lines later: the text must undoubtedly be corrupt.

amphi, peri, and so on: here Aristotle gives two prepositions to illustrate the definition of a conjunction—further evidence that the text is corrupt.

noun: the Greek word *onoma* covers all nouns and adjectives as well as proper names.

provide examples: in English as in Greek the plural form of a noun is an inflection of the singular form. In the other cases the Greek language achieves by inflections the results that in English are more commonly managed by attaching a preposition to a noun or an auxiliary to a verb.

Hermocaicoxanthus: this word, otherwise unknown, appears to be a fusion of the names of three rivers.

a case of analogy: as the examples show, Aristotle uses ‘metaphor’ broadly to cover many different kinds of transference of meaning.

one kind of stopping: the generic term ‘Stop’ is transferred (i.e. used to refer to) a particular mode of stopping, namely being moored.

bowl of Ares: at this point one would expect a definition of euphemism which occurred in the earlier list between metaphor and coinage. Editors conjecture a lacuna in the manuscripts.

word for vision: the famous line is a fragment of Empedocles.

five in upsilon: Aristotle’s list is very incomplete, and editors conjecture a lacuna.

bronze upon his fellow: the allusion is to the medical use of a cupping-glass.

mixing his Hellebore: it is impossible to render in English these (parodied) Homeric effects of lengthening a vowel. Perhaps an example from Shakespeare will help. ‘Now is it Rome indeed and room enough.’

noisy shore: again, Aristotle’s point can only be made in English by using examples from English dramatists. Compare ‘the multitudinous seas incarnadine’ with ‘redden the many seas’.

elevate the style: English, as a non-inflected language, is less hospitable to changes of word order than Greek. However, several English poets have used this device to good effect. Cf. the last two lines of Arthur Hugh Clough's *Actaeon* about Diana: 'She, the liquid stream in, her limbs carelessly reclining, | The flowing waters collected grateful about her.'

any single outcome: in September 480 the Greek navies defeated the Persian forces at Salamis, and on the same day Greek colonists from Syracuse and Acragas routed the Carthaginians at Himera in Sicily.

The Trial at Arms… Women of Troy: some of these titles are creations of Aristotle's imagination. Others were actually dramatized by tragedians, such as Euripides' *Women of Troy* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.

the latter for dancing, and the former for action: on these, see the Note on Metre, p. 89.

in the first place: my translation renders one possible reconstruction of a corrupt Greek text.

problems and solutions: this difficult chapter is probably an abbreviation of the lost six books of Aristotle's *Homeric Problems*.

is intrinsic: this sentence translates a reconstruction of a defective Greek text.

is ambiguous: this paragraph sets out to remove apparent contradictions in passages of the *Iliad*. The detailed examples given do not admit of illuminating translation into other languages.

went to Sparta: in the fourth book of the *Odyssey* Odysseus' son Telemachus pays a visit to Sparta. Critics found it odd that there was no mention in the book of Icarius, his maternal grandfather.

is not possible: this translates a reconstruction of a defective Greek text.

Aegeus in Euripides: Aegeus, king of Athens, offers asylum to Medea in Euripides' play of that name.

Mynniscus… Pindarus too: Mynniscus acted in Aeschylus' tragedies; nothing is known of the other two actors.

Musaeus: a mythical Greek poet, pupil of Orpheus.

Linus: the subject of various myths, according to one of which he was killed by Heracles with his own lyre.

Livius Andronicus: a third-century BC writer who translated the *Odyssey* into Latin verse.

Solon… Plato: Solon was a leading Athenian statesman of the sixth century BC. In addition to reforming the city's constitution he put many of his moral and political ideas into verse. The legend of Atlantis is mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus*.

Gyges' Ring: Plato, in the second book of his *Republic*, makes use of the legend of Gyges, who by means of a magic ring that made him invisible became king of Lydia.

peizing: ‘weighing’.

formidine poenae than virtutis amore: ‘more by fear of punishment than by love of virtue’.

hoc opus, hic labor est: ‘this is the task, here is the effort’ (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.129).

indulgere genio: to follow one’s fancy.

Menenius Agrippa: the story, recorded in Livy, is adapted in Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, I. i.

Nathan the Prophet: in 2 Samuel 12: 1–7.

Psalm of Mercy: Psalm 51.

Addison's Cato: Addison's tragedy, produced in 1713, dealt with the suicide of the Roman republican in protest at the dictatorship of Julius Caesar.

SAYERS, ‘ARISTOTLE ON DETECTIVE FICTION’

Trent’s Last Case… The Hound of the Baskervilles: the former is a classic detective story by E. C. Bentley, published in 1913, the latter a 1902 novel by Arthur Conan Doyle, featuring Sherlock Holmes.

Ulysses: James Joyce’s novel, first published in 1922.

Father Knox: Ronald A. Knox (1888–1957), Oxford wit, Roman Catholic convert, and Bible translator, was also a writer of detective stories such as *The Three Taps*.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Action, conduct	*praxis*	
Art	*technē*	includes crafts and skills
Capacity	*dunamis*	also ‘faculty’, ‘capability’
Character	*hexis*	see also ‘moral character’
Choice	*prohairesis*	
Complication	*desis*	
Depraved	*mochtheros*	
Discovery	*anagnorēsis*	alternative translation: ‘recognition’
Emotion	*pathos*	
Error	*amartia*	see note on p. 93
Explication	*lusis*	
Happiness	*eudaimonia*	
Ideas	*dianoia*	see Introduction, p. xxi
Knowledge	*epistēmē*	
Making	*poiesis*	see Introduction, p. xi
Moral character	*ēthos*	
Noble	*kalon*	also ‘beautiful’
Pain	*lupe*	includes all kinds of distress, e.g. thirst
Passion	*pathos*	
Pleasure	*hēdonē*	
Plot	*systema tōn pragmatōn*	
Purification	*katharsis*	see Introduction, p. xxv

Reason	*logos*	also ‘word’
Representation	*mimēsis*	alternative translation ‘imitation’: see p. xv
Reversal	*peripetia*	alternative translation ‘overturning’
Story	*muthos*	alternative translation ‘plot’; but see p. xix
Suffering	*pathos*	
Task	*ergon*	also ‘work’
Virtue	*arēte*	also ‘excellence’
Wicked	*ponēros*	

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