

**English Literary Criticism and Theory (NBBAN126 K3)**  
**Introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory (NBBAN177K3)**  
**English Literary Criticism and Theory Seminar (NBBAN127G2)**  
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08.09

Jonathan Barnes's *Aristotle* (1982) is a brief, accessible overview of Aristotle's life and works. In a crowded field, Abraham Edel's *Aristotle and His Philosophy* (1982) and John M. Rist's *Mind of Aristotle* (1989) stand out as good basic introductions to Aristotle's biography and works. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, edited by Barnes (1995), contains chapters on important phases of Aristotle's philosophical project, including a survey of his life and work by Barnes.

On the *Poetics*, Stephen Halliwell's *Aristotle's "Poetics"* (1986) is the authoritative contemporary interpretation. Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle's "Poetics": The Argument* (1957), provides a detailed commentary on the text, and his *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry* (1986) is a useful comparative study. D. W. Lucas's *Aristotle—"Poetics"* (1968) offers significant commentary as well as the Kassel edition of the Greek text. Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Philosophy* (1986) contains an influential modification of the argument about catharsis. Aristotle's *"Poetics" and English Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Elder Olson (1965), gathers views from the eighteenth century through the 1960s, highlighting the work of the Chicago Critics, or "Neo-Aristotelians," who promoted a formal method in literary study during the mid-twentieth century. Its last chapter, "Rhetoric and Poetic in the Philosophy of Aristotle," by Richard McKeon, a Chicago Critic, offers an illuminating discrimination of poetic and rhetorical approaches. McKeon's "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," in *Critics and Criticism: Essays in Method* (ed. R. S. Crane, 1952), is an important text on imitation. *Essays on Aristotle's "Poetics"*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (1992), is an excellent contemporary collection by philosophers and scholars of Aristotle, clarifying concepts such as mimesis, catharsis, and comedy.

On the *Rhetoric*, W. M. A. Grimaldi's *Aristotle, "Rhetoric": A Commentary* (1980) is a useful exposition. *Essays on Aristotle's "Rhetoric"* (1996), edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty as a companion to her volume on the *Poetics*, provides an excellent range of contemporary interpretations and reevaluations of the text. Alexander Nehamas's "Pity and Fear in the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*," in Aristotle's *"Rhetoric"*, *Philosophical Essays* (ed. David J. Furley and Nehamas, 1994), cogently compares Aristotle's treatment of emotion in both texts and, in a provocative argument, claims that catharsis refers to the internal resolution of a tragic plot itself rather than to the response of the audience.

The *"Poetics" of Aristotle and the "Tractatus Coislinianus": A Bibliography from about 900 till 1996*, compiled by Omert J. Schrier (1998), testifies to the massive literature relating to the *Poetics*. Aristotle's *"Rhetoric"*: *Five Centuries of Philological Research*, compiled by Keith V. Erickson (1975), covers the many studies of the *Rhetoric*. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* contains an excellent bibliography on all of Aristotle's work, with individual sections on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. Both Janko's edition of the *Poetics* and Kennedy's of the *Rhetoric* include selective bibliographies on their respective texts. The Rorty collections on the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* also include good selective bibliographies.

Aristotle

### Poetics<sup>1</sup>

[1, 1447a] Our topic is poetry in itself and its kinds, and what potential each has; how plots should be constructed if the composition is to turn out well;

1. Translated by Richard Janko, who sometimes adds clarifying words or phrases in square brackets and includes the Greek in parentheses. Also in square brackets in the text are the traditional chapter divisions inserted by Renaissance editors and

the Bekker numbers used almost universally in citing Aristotle's works; they refer to the page numbers and columns of an 1831 edition by Immanuel Bekker.

also, from how many parts it is [constituted], and of what sort they are; and likewise all other aspects of the same enquiry. Let us first begin, following the natural [order], from first [principles].

Epic and tragic composition, and indeed comedy, dithyrambic composition,<sup>2</sup> and most sorts of music for wind and stringed instruments are all, [considered] as a whole, representations.<sup>3</sup> They differ from one another in three ways, by using for the representation (i) different media, (ii) different objects, or (iii) a manner that is different and not the same.

Some people use colours and forms for representations, making images of many objects (some by art, and some by practice), and others do so with sound; so too all the arts we mentioned produce a representation using rhythm, speech, and melody, but use these either separately or mixed. E.g., the art of [playing] the oboe and lyre, and any other arts that have the same potential (e.g. that of [playing] the pan-pipes), use melody and rhythm alone, but the art of dancers [uses] rhythm by itself without melody; for they too can represent characters, sufferings and actions, by means of rhythms given form.

But the art of representation that uses unaccompanied words or verses [1447b] (whether it mixes these together or uses one single class of verse-form) has to the present day no name. For we have no common name for the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and the Socratic dialogues,<sup>4</sup> and would not have one even if someone were to compose the representation in [iambic] trimeters, elegiacs<sup>5</sup> or some other such verse. But people attach the word "poet" to the verse-form, and name some "elegiac poets" and other "epic poets," terming them poets not according to [whether they compose a] representation but indiscriminately, according to [their use of] verse. Thus if someone brings out a work of medicine or natural science in verse, they normally call him a poet; but there is nothing in common between Homer and Empedocles<sup>6</sup> except the verse-form. For this reason it is right to call the former a poet, but the latter a natural scientist rather than a poet. Likewise, if someone produced a representation by intermingling all the verse-forms, just as Chaeremon<sup>7</sup> composed his *Centaure* (a recitation which mixes all the verse-forms), he must still be termed a poet. This, then, is how we should define these matters.

Some arts use all the media we have mentioned (i.e. rhythm, song and verse), like the composition of dithyrambic poems, that of nomes,<sup>8</sup> and tragedy and comedy; they differ because the former use all the media at the same time, the latter [use them only] in certain parts. So these are what I mean

2. Greek choral poetry originally sung in honor of Dionysus, the god of wine worshipped in an ecstatic cult.  
3. From the Greek *mimēsis*, translated as "representation" or "imitation."

4. The philosophical works of PLATO (ca. 427–ca. 327 B.C.E.), which are written as dialogues featuring his teacher, Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.), and one or more interlocutors. "Mimes": imitative performances usually featuring short scenes from daily life. Sophron of Syracuse (5th c. B.C.E.) wrote mimes in rhythmic prose; his son Xenarchus also wrote mimes.

5. A verse form consisting of couplets whose first line is in dactylic hexameter (i.e., a 6-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short-short), the

meter of epic, and whose second line replaces the 3d and 6th foot with one long syllable. "Iambic trimeters": the verse form of most dialogue and set speeches in tragedies (a 3-foot line based on the pattern short-long).

6. Pre-Socratic Greek natural philosopher (ca. 493–433 B.C.E.), who wrote in epic meter (dactylic hexameter). Homer (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.), Greek epic poet to whom is attributed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; the ancient Greeks also credited him with a number of lost shorter epics, including the comic *Mages*.

7. Greek tragedian (mid-4th c. B.C.E.).  
8. Originally, melodies (for lyre or flute) created to accompany epic texts; later, choral compositions.

representation.

[2, 1448a] Since those who represent people in action, these people are necessarily either good or inferior: For characters almost always follow from these [qualities] alone; everyone differs in character because of vice and virtue. So they are either (i) better than we are, or (ii) worse, or (iii) such [as we are], just as the painters [represent them]; for Polygnotus used to make images of superior persons, Pauson of worse ones, and Dionysius<sup>9</sup> of those like [us].

Clearly each of the [kinds of] representation we mentioned will contain these differences, and will vary by representing objects which vary in this manner. For these divergences can arise in dancing and in playing the oboe and lyre. They can also arise in speeches and unaccompanied verse: e.g. (i) Homer [represents] better persons, (ii) Cleophon [represents] ones like [us], and (iii) Hegemon of Thasos, who was the first to compose parodies, and Nicochares<sup>1</sup> who composed the *Deiliad*, [represent] worse ones. [They can arise] likewise in dithyrambs and nomes: for just as Timotheus and Philoxenus [represented] Cyclopes,<sup>2</sup> [so] one may represent [people in different ways]. Tragedy too is distinguished from comedy by precisely this difference; comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are better.

[3] Again, a third difference among these [kinds] is the manner in which one can represent each of these things. For one can use the same media to represent the very same things, sometimes (a) by narrating (either (i) becoming another [person], as Homer does, or (ii) remaining the same person and not changing), or (b) by representing everyone as in action and activity. Representation, then, has these three points of difference, as we said at the beginning, its media, its objects and its manner. Consequently, in one respect Sophocles is the same sort of representational artist as Homer, in that both represent good people, but in another he is like Aristophanes,<sup>3</sup> since both represent men in action and doing [things].

This is why, some say, their works are called "dramas," because they represent men "doing" (*drōmias*). For this reason too the Dorians<sup>4</sup> lay claim to both tragedy and comedy. The Megarians<sup>5</sup> here allege that comedy arose during the time of their democracy, and the Megarians in Sicily claim it; for Epicharmus was from there, though he was not much prior to Chionides and Magnes.<sup>6</sup> Some of the Dorians in the Peloponnese lay claim to tragedy. They produce the names [of comedy and drama] as an indication [of their origins]: they say that they call villages *kōmai* but the Athenians call them *dēmoi*, on the assumption that comedians were so called not from their rev-

9. Painter from Colophon. Polygnotus (ca. 500–ca. 440 B.C.E.), one of the first great Greek painters. Pauson (late 5th c. B.C.E.), Athenian caricaturist.

1. Athenian comic poet (active ca. 390 B.C.E.), whose *Deiliad* (*deilos* means "cowardly") parodied heroic epic. Cleophon (4th c. B.C.E.), Athenian tragic poet. Hegemon (5th c. B.C.E.), poet whose parodies won competitions in Athens.

2. Mythical one-eyed giants. Timotheus of Miletus (ca. 360 B.C.E.) and Philoxenus of Cythera (ca. 435–ca. 380 B.C.E.) were both Greek dithyrambic poets.

3. Greatest poet of Greek Old Comedy (450–385

B.C.E.). Sophocles (ca. 496–406 B.C.E.), great Greek tragedian.

4. A people (probably originally from southwest Macedonia) that invaded Greece ca. 1100–1000 B.C.E., reaching south into the Peloponnese.

5. Residents of a Dorian city on the Isthmus of Corinth (west of Athens); it was a democracy in the 6th century B.C.E.

6. Aristotle names three early comic poets: Epicharmus was Sicilian (active early 5th c. B.C.E.) and wrote in Doric Greek, while Chionides (active ca. 485 B.C.E.) and Magnes (active ca. 470 B.C.E.) were Athenian.

euing (*komazēin*), but because they wandered around the villages, ejected in disgrace from the town. [1448b] They also say that they term "doing" *dran*, but that the Athenians term it *prattein*.

Anyway, as for the points of difference in representation, and how many and what they are, let this account suffice.

[4] Two causes seem to have generated the art of poetry as a whole, and these are natural ones.

(i) Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation.

Also (ii) everyone delights in representations. An indication of this is what happens in fact: we delight in looking at the most detailed images of things which in themselves we see with pain, e.g. the shapes of the most despised wild animals even when dead. The cause of this is that learning is most pleasant, not only for philosophers but for others likewise (but they share in it to a small extent). For this reason they delight in seeing images, because it comes about that they learn as they observe, and infer what each thing is, e.g. that this person [represents] that one. For if one has not seen the thing [that is represented] before, [its image] will not produce pleasure as a representation, but because of its accomplishment, colour, or some other such cause.

Since by nature we are given to representation, melody and rhythm (that verses are parts of rhythms is obvious), from the beginning those by nature most disposed towards these generated poetry from their improvisations, developing it little by little. Poetry was split up according to their particular characters; the grander people represented fine actions, i.e. those of fine persons; the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones, at first composing invectives, just as the others composed hymns and praise-poems. We do not know of any composition of this sort by anyone before Homer, but there were probably many [who composed invectives]. Beginning with Homer [such compositions] do exist, e.g. his *Margites* etc. In these the iambic verse-form arrived too, as is appropriate. This is why it is now called "iambic", because they used to lampoon (*iambizein*) each other in this verse-form. Thus some of the ancients became composers of heroic poems, others of lampoons.

Just as Homer was the greatest composer of serious poetry (not that he alone composed well, but because he alone composed dramatic representations), so too he was first to indicate the form of comedy, by dramatising not an invective but the laughable. For his *Margites* stands in the same relation to comedies as do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tragedies. [1449a] When tragedy and comedy appeared, people were attracted to each [kind of] composition according to their own particular natures. Some became composers of comedies instead of lampoons, but others presented tragedies instead of epics, because comedy and tragedy are greater and more honourable in their forms than are lampoon and epic. To consider whether tragedy is now fully [developed] in its elements or not, as judged both in and of itself and in relation to its audiences, is a different topic.

Anyway, arising from an improvisatory beginning (both tragedy and comedy—tragedy from the leaders of the dithyramb, and comedy from the leaders of the phallic processions which even now continue as a custom in many of

our cities), [tragedy] grew little by little, as [the poets] developed whatever [new part] of it had appeared; and, passing through many changes, tragedy came to a halt, since it had attained its own nature.

(i) Aeschylus<sup>7</sup> was first to increase the number of its actors from one to two; he reduced the [songs] of the chorus, and made speech play the main role. Sophocles [brought in] three actors and scenery.

(ii) Again, as for its magnitude, [starting] from trivial plots and laughable diction, because it had changed from a satyric [composition],<sup>8</sup> [tragedy only] became grand at a late date. Its verse-form altered from the tetrameter<sup>9</sup> to iambic verse. For at first [poets] used the tetrameter, because the composition was satyric and mainly danced; but when [spoken] diction came in, nature itself found the proper verse-form. The iambic is the verse most suited to speech; and indication of this is that in [everyday] speech with each other we use mostly iambic [rhythms], but rarely hexameters, and [only] when we depart from the intonations of [everyday] speech.

(iii) Again, as for the number of its episodes,<sup>1</sup> and how each of its other [parts] is said to have been elaborated, let them pass as described; it would probably be a major undertaking to go through their particulars.

[5] Comedy is, as we said, a representation of people who are rather inferior—not, however, with respect to every [kind of] vice, but the laughable is [only] a part of what is ugly. For the laughable is a sort of error and ugliness that is not painful and destructive, just as, evidently, a laughable mask is something ugly and distorted without pain.

The transformations of tragedy, and [the poets] who brought them about, have not been forgotten; but comedy was disregarded from the beginning, because it was not taken seriously. [1449b] For the magistrate granted a chorus of comic performers at a late date—they had been volunteers. The record of those termed its poets begins from [a time] when comedy already possessed some of its forms. It is unknown who introduced masks, prologues, a multiplicity of actors, etc. As for the composing of plots, Epicharmus and Phormis<sup>2</sup> [introduced it]. In the beginning it came from Sicily, and, of the poets at Athens, Crates<sup>3</sup> was the first to relinquish the form of the lampoon and compose generalised stories, i.e. plots.

Epic poetry follows tragedy insofar as it is a representation of serious people which uses speech in verse; but they differ in that [epic] has a single verse-form, and is narrative. Again, with respect to length, tragedy attempts as far as possible to keep within one revolution of the sun or [only] to exceed this a little, but epic is unbounded in time; it does differ in this respect, even though [the poets] at first composed in the same way in tragedies as in epics. As for their parts, some are the same, others are particular to tragedy. For this reason, whoever knows about good and inferior tragedies knows about

7. The earliest of the 3 great Greek tragedians (525–456 B.C.E.).

8. That is, like the satyr plays that formed part of the spring festival of Dionysus in early-5th-century B.C.E. Athens. Each of the poets competing wrote three tragedies and one satyr play; the latter presented grotesque versions of ancient legends, with the chorus dressed as satyrs (half-man, half-goat, and wearing a phallus).

9. That is, trochaic tetrameter (a 4-foot line based on the syllabic pattern long-short); though occa-

epics too. Tragedy possesses all [the parts] that epic has, but those that it possesses are not all in epic.

[6] We will discuss representational art in hexameters, and comedy, later. Now let us discuss tragedy, taking up the definition of its essence that results from what we have said.

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play]; [represented] by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis<sup>4</sup> of such emotions.

By “embellished speech,” I mean that which has rhythm and melody, i.e. song; by “with its elements separately,” I mean that some [parts of it] are accomplished only by means of spoken verses, and others again by means of song.

Since people acting produce the representation, first (i) the ornament of spectacle will necessarily be a part of tragedy; and then (ii) song and (iii) diction, for these are the media in which they produce the representation. By “diction” I mean the construction of the [spoken] verses itself; by “song” I mean that of which the meaning is entirely obvious.

Since [tragedy] is a representation of an action, and is enacted by people acting, these people are necessarily of a certain sort according to their character and their reasoning. For it is because of these that we say that actions are of a certain sort, [1450a] and it is according to people’s actions that they all succeed or fail. So (iv) the plot is the representation of the action; by “plot” here, I mean the construction of the incidents. By (v) the “characters,” I mean that according to which we say that the people in action are of a certain sort. By (vi) “reasoning,” I mean the way in which they use speech to demonstrate something or indeed to make some general statement.

So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts, according to which tragedy is of a certain sort. These are plot, characters, diction, reasoning, spectacle and song. The media in which [the poets] make the representation comprise two parts [i.e. diction and song], the manner in which they make the representation, one [i.e. spectacle], and the objects which they represent, three [i.e. plot, character and reasoning]; there are no others except these. Not a few of them, one might say, use these elements; for they may have instances of spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning likewise.

But the most important of these is the structure of the incidents. For (i) tragedy is a representation not of human beings but of action and life. Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions. So [the actors] do not act in order to represent the characters, but they include the characters for the sake of their actions. Consequently the incidents, i.e. the plot, are the end of tragedy, and the end is most important of all.

(ii) Again, without action a tragedy cannot exist, but without characters it may. For the tragedies of most recent [poets] lack character, and in general there are many such poets. E.g. too among the painters, how Zeuxis<sup>5</sup> relates

4. A much-debated Greek term, related to a verb meaning “to cleanse” or “purify”; usually left untranslated and understood as ‘purgation’, ‘it can

also mean “clarification.”

5. Greek painter from Heraclea in southern Italy; he was in Athens ca. 400 B.C.E.

to Polygnotus—Polygnotus is a good character-painter, but Zeus's painting contains no character at all.

(iii) Again, if [a poet] puts in sequence speeches full of character, well-composed in diction and reasoning, he will not achieve what was [agreed to be] the function of tragedy; a tragedy that employs these less adequately, but has a plot (i.e. structure of incidents), will achieve it much more.

(iv) In addition, the most important things with which a tragedy enthralls [us] are parts of plot—reversals and recognitions.

(v) A further indication is that people who try their hand at composing can be proficient in the diction and characters before they are able to structure the incidents; e.g. too almost all the early poets.

So plot is the origin and as it were the soul of tragedy, and the characters are secondary. It is very similar [1.450b] in the case of painting too: if someone daubed [a surface] with the finest pigments indiscriminately, he would not give the same enjoyment as if he had sketched an image in black and white. Tragedy is a representation of an action, and for the sake of the action above all [a representation] of the people who are acting.

Reasoning comes third, i.e. being able to say what is possible and appropriate, which is its function in the case of the speeches of civic life and rhetoric. The old [poets] made people speak like citizens, but the recent ones make them speak like rhetoricians. Character is that which reveals decision, of whatever sort; this is why those speeches in which the speaker decides or avoids nothing at all do not have character. Reasoning, on the other hand, is that with which people demonstrate that something is or is not, or make some universal statement.

Diction is fourth. By "diction" I mean, as we said earlier, communication by means of language, which has the same potential in the case of both verse and [prose] speeches.

Of the remaining [parts], song is the most important of the embellishments. Spectacle is something enthralling, but is very artless and least particular to the art of poetic composition. The potential of tragedy exists even without a performance and actors; besides, the designer's art is more essential for the accomplishment of spectacular [effects] than is the poets'.

[7] Now that these definitions have been given, let us next discuss what sort of structure of the incidents there should be, since this is the first and most important [part] of tragedy. We have laid down that tragedy is the representation of a complete i.e. whole action which has some magnitude (for there can be a whole with no magnitude). A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned [i.e. beginning, middle and conclusion].

Further, to be fine both an animal and every thing which is constructed from some [parts] should not only have these [parts] in order, but also possess a magnitude that is not random. For fineness lies in magnitude and

order. For this reason a fine animal can be neither very small, for observation becomes confused when it approaches an imperceptible instant of time; nor [can it be] very large; for [1.451a] observation cannot happen at the same time, but its unity and wholeness vanish from the observers' view, e.g. if there were an animal a thousand miles long. Consequently, just as in the case of bodies and of animals these should have magnitude, but [only] a magnitude that is easily seen as a whole, so too in the case of plots these should have length, but [only] a length that is easily memorable.

As for the limit on their length, one limit relates to performances and the perception [of them]; not to the art [itself]. If the performance of a hundred tragedies were required [at one tragic competition], they would be performed "against the clock," as the saying goes! But as for the limit according to the nature of the thing [itself], the larger the plot is, the finer it is because of its magnitude, so long as the whole is still clear. To give a simple definition, in whatever magnitude a change from misfortune to good fortune, or from good fortune to misfortune, can come about by a sequence of events in accordance with probability or necessity—this is an adequate definition of its magnitude.

[8] A plot is not unified, as some suppose, if it concerns one single person. An indefinitely large number of things happens to one person, in some of which there is no unity. So too the actions of one person are many, but do not turn into a single action. For this reason, it seems, all those poets who composed a *Heracleid*, a *Theseid*<sup>6</sup> or similar poems are in error. They suppose that, because Heracles was a single person, his story too must be a single story. But, just as Homer is superior in other respects, it seems that he saw this clearly as well (whether by art or by nature). In composing the *Odyssey*, he did not put into his poem everything that happened to *Odysseus*,<sup>7</sup> e.g. that he was wounded on Parnassus and pretended to be insane during recruitment; whether one of these things happened did not make it necessary or probable that the other would happen. But he constructed the *Odyssey* around a single action of the kind we are discussing, and the *Iliad* similarly.

Therefore, just as in the other representational arts a single representation is of a single [thing], so too the plot, since it is a representation of action, ought to represent a single action, and a whole one at that; and its parts (the incidents) ought to be so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed. Something which, whether it is present or not present, explains nothing [else], is no part of the whole.

[9] It is also obvious from what we have said that it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen, i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity. For [1.451b] the historian and the poet do not differ according to whether they write in verse or without verse—the writings of Herodotus<sup>8</sup> could be put into verse, but they would be no less a sort of history in verse than they are without verses. But the difference is that the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen. For this reason poetry is a more philosophical and more serious thing than history; poetry tends to speak of

6. In ancient Greece, there were several epic *Heracleids* and *Theseids*—poems depicting, respectively, the heroes Heracles and Theseus.

7. The wily king of Ithaca whose efforts to return home to Greece after the Trojan War are chronic-

led in the *Odyssey*.

8. Greek historian (ca. 484–425 B.C.E.), chiefly of the Persian Wars; sometimes called "the father of history."



universals, history of particulars. A universal is the sort of thing that a certain kind of person may well say or do in accordance with probability or necessity—this is what poetry aims at, although it assigns names [to the people]. A particular is what Alcibiades<sup>9</sup> did or what he suffered.

In the case of comedy this has already become clear. When [comic poets] have composed a plot according to probability, only then do they supply the names at random; they do not, like the composers of lampoons, compose [poems] about particular individuals. In the case of tragedy [the poets] keep to actual names. The reason is that what is possible is believable; we do not believe that what has never happened is possible, but things which have happened are obviously possible—they would not have happened, if they were impossible. Nonetheless, even among tragedies some have only one or two well-known names, and the rest made up; and some have not one, e.g. Agathon's *Antheus*. In this [drama] the incidents and the names alike are made up, and it is no less delightful. Consequently one must not seek to keep entirely to the traditional stories which tragedies are about. In fact it is ridiculous to seek to do so; since even the well-known [incidents] are known only to a few people, but even so everyone enjoys them.

So it is clear from these arguments that a poet must be a composer of plots rather than of verses, insofar as he is a poet according to representation, and represents actions. So even if it turns out that he is representing things that happened, he is no less a poet; for there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen according to probability, i.e. that are possible, which is why he can make a poetic composition about them.

Among simple plots and actions, episodic [tragedies] are the worst. By "episodic" I mean a plot in which there is neither probability nor necessity that the episodes follow one another. Such [tragedies] are composed by inferior poets because of themselves, but by good ones because of the actors. For in composing competition-pieces, they extend the plot beyond its potential and [1452a] are often compelled to distort the sequence.

The representation is not only of a complete action but also of terrifying and pitiable [incidents]. These arise to a very great or a considerable extent when they happen contrary to expectation but because of one another. For they will be more amazing in this way than if [they happened] on their own, i.e. at random, since the most amazing even among random events are those which appear to have happened as it were on purpose, e.g. the way the statue of Mitys at Argos<sup>2</sup> killed the man who was the cause of Mitys' death, by falling on him as he looked at it. Such things do not seem to happen at random. Consequently plots of this kind are necessarily finer.

[10] Among plots, some are simple and some are complex; for the actions, of which plots are representations, are evidently of these kinds. By "simple," I mean an action which is, as we have defined it, continuous in its course and single, where the transformation comes about without reversal or recognition. By "complex," I mean an action as a result of which the transformation is accompanied by a recognition, a reversal or both. These should

arise from the actual structure of the plot, so it happens that they arise either by necessity or by probability as a result of the preceding events. It makes a great difference whether these [events] happen because of those or [only] after those.

[11] A reversal is a change of the actions to their opposite, as we said, and that, as we are arguing, in accordance with probability or necessity. E.g. in the *Oedipus*,<sup>3</sup> the man who comes to bring delight to Oedipus, and to rid him of his terror about his mother, does the opposite by revealing who Oedipus is; and in the *Lynceus*,<sup>4</sup> Lynceus is being led to his death, and Danaus follows to kill him, but it comes about as a result of the preceding actions that Danaus is killed and Lynceus is rescued.

A recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity, among people defined in relation to good fortune or misfortune. A recognition is finest when it happens at the same time as a reversal, as does the one in the *Oedipus*. There are indeed other [kinds of] recognition. For it can happen in the manner stated regarding inanimate objects and random events; and one can recognise whether someone has done something or not done it. But the sort that most belongs to the plot, i.e. most belongs to the action, is that which we have mentioned: for such a recognition and reversal [1452b] will contain pity or terror (tragedy is considered to be a representation of actions of this sort), and in addition misfortune and good fortune will come about in the case of such events.

Since recognition is a recognition of people, some recognitions are by one person only of the other, when the identity of one of them is clear; but sometimes there must be a recognition of both persons. E.g. Iphigeneia is recognised by Orestes<sup>5</sup> as a result of her sending the letter, but it requires another recognition for him [to be recognised] by Iphigeneia. These, then, reversal and recognition, are two parts of plot. A third is suffering. Of these, we have discussed reversal and recognition. Suffering is a destructive or painful action, e.g. deaths in full view, agonies, woundings etc.

[12] Regarding the parts of tragedy, we stated earlier which ones should be used as elements. The quantitative parts, i.e. the separate parts into which it is divided, are as follows: (i) prologue, (ii) episode, (iii) exit and (iv) choral [part], with this divided into (a) processional and (b) stationary [song]—these are shared by all [dramas], and [songs sung] from the stage, i.e. dirges—these are particular [to some].

(i) A prologue is a whole part of a tragedy that is before the processional [song] of the chorus.

(ii) An episode is a whole part of a tragedy that is between whole choral songs.

(iii) An exit is a whole part of a tragedy after which there is no song of the chorus.

3. *Oedipus Rex* (ca. 430 B.C.E.), by Sophocles—a play to which Aristotle frequently refers as a model for his definition of tragedy. Unknowingly, Oedipus kills his father, Laius; takes his father's place as king of Thebes; and marries his mother, Jocasta. When he learns that he has not escaped the fate foretold, he gouges out his eyes and banishes himself, hence undergoing a reversal from king to outcast.

4. Lost tragedy by the orator and tragic poet Theodectes (ca. 375–334 B.C.E.), about the daughters of King Danaus of Argos, who ordered them to kill their husbands (all obeyed except Hypermestra, whose husband was Lynceus).

5. In *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (ca. 413 B.C.E.), by Euripides (ca. 485–ca. 406 B.C.E.), the youngest of the 3 great Greek tragedians.

9. Athenian politician and general (ca. 450–404 B.C.E.).

1. Innovative Athenian tragedian (d. ca. 401 B.C.E.); less than 40 lines of his works remain.

