ARISTOTLE

Poetics

'The plot is the source and the soul of tragedy'

In his near-contemporary account of classical Greek tragedy, Aristotle examines the dramatic elements of plot, character, language and spectacle that combine to produce pity and fear in the audience, and asks why we derive pleasure from this apparently painful process. Taking examples from the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the *Poetics* introduced into literary criticism such central concepts as *mimesis* ('imitation'), *hamartia* ('error') and *katharsis* ('purification'). Aristotle explains how the most effective tragedies rely on complication and resolution, recognition and reversals, while centring on characters of heroic stature, idealized yet true to life. One of the most powerful, perceptive and influential works of criticism in Western literary history, the *Poetics* has informed serious thinking about drama ever since.

Malcolm Heath's lucid translation makes the *Poetics* fully accessible to the modern reader. It is accompanied by an extended introduction, which discusses the key concepts in detail, and includes suggestions for further reading.

Translated with an introduction and notes by MALCOLM HEATH

PENGUIN CLASSICS

ARISTOTLE
Poetics

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MALCOLM HEATH

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Poetics

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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2. POETRY AS A SPECIES OF IMITATION

Epic poetry and the composition of tragedy, as well as comedy and
the arts of dithyrambic poetry and (for the most part) of music for
pipe or lyre, are all (taken together) *imitations*.[1] They can be differen-
tiated from each other in three respects: in respect of their different
media of imitation, or different *objects*, or a different *mode* (i.e. a differ-
ent manner).

2.1 *Medium*

Some people use the medium of colour and shape to produce imita-
tions of various objects by making visual images (some through art,
some through practice); others do this by means of the voice.[2] Sim-
ilarly in the case of the arts I have mentioned: in all of them the
medium of imitation is rhythm, language and melody, but these may

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

47b The art which uses language unaccompanied, either in prose or in verse (either combining verse-forms with each other or using a single kind of verse), remains without a name to the present day. We have no general term referring to the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and Socratic dialogues,[3] nor to any imitation that one might produce using iambic trimeters, elegiac couplets or any other such verse-form. Admittedly people attach 'poetry' to the name of the verse-form, and thus refer to 'elegiac poets' and 'hexameter poets'; i.e. they do not call people 'poets' because they produce imitations, but indiscriminately on the basis of their use of verse. In fact, even if someone publishes a medical or scientific text in verse, people are in the habit of applying the same term. But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except the form of verse they use; so it would be fair to call the former a poet, but the latter a natural scientist rather than a poet.[4] On the same principle, even if someone should produce an imitation by combining all the verse-forms (as Chaeremon composed his *Centaur*, which is a rhapsody combining all the verse-forms)[5] he should still be termed a poet. So this is the way distinctions are to be drawn in this area.

There are also some arts which use all the media mentioned above (i.e. rhythm, melody and verse), e.g. dithyrambic and nomic poetry,[6] tragedy and comedy; these differ in that the former use them all simultaneously, the latter in distinct parts.

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

2.2 *Object*

Those who imitate, imitate agents; and these must be either admir- 2
able or inferior. (Character almost always corresponds to just these *48a*
two categories, since everyone is differentiated in character by
defect or excellence.) Alternatively they must be better people than
we are, or worse, or of the same sort (compare painters: Polygnotus
portrayed better people, Pauson worse people, Dionysius people
similar to us).[7] So it is clear that each of the kinds of imitation men-
tioned above will exhibit these differences, and will be distinguished
by the imitation of distinct objects in this way. These dissimilarities
are possible in dance and in music for pipe or lyre, and also in con-
nection with language and unaccompanied verse (for example,
Homer imitates better people; Cleophon people similar to us; He-
gemon of Thasos, who invented parodies, or Nicochares, the author
of the *Deiliad*, worse people);[8] similarly in connection with dithy-
rambs and nomes (one could imitate as Timotheus and Philoxenus
did the Cyclopes).[9] The very same difference distinguishes tragedy
and comedy from each other; the latter aims to imitate people worse
than our contemporaries, the former better.

2.3 *Mode*

A third difference between them is the mode in which one may imi- 3
tate each of these objects. It is possible to imitate the same objects in
the same medium sometimes by narrating (either using a different
persona, as in Homer's poetry,[10] or as the same person without vari-
ation), or else with all the imitators as agents and engaged in activity.

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

since both imitate agents and people doing things.[11] This is the reason – some say – for the term 'drama': i.e. that the poets imitate people doing things. It is in consequence of this too that the Dorians lay claim to tragedy and comedy. The Megarians lay claim to comedy – both those on the mainland (who allege that it arose in the period of their democracy), and those in Sicily (that being the birthplace of the poet Epicharmus, who was much earlier than Chionides and Magnes); and some of the Peloponnesians lay claim to tragedy. They use the names as evidence. They say that they call outlying villages *kômai*, while Athenians call them *dêmoi*, the assumption being that comedians were so-called not from the revel or *kômos*, but because they toured the villages when expelled from the *48b* town in disgrace. And they say that they use the term *dran* for 'do', the Athenians *prattein*.

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

3. THE ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY OF POETRY

3.1 *Origins*

4 In general, two causes seem likely to have given rise to the art of poetry, both of them natural.[12]

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

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

Given, then, that imitation is natural to us, and also melody and
rhythm (it being obvious that verse-forms are segments of
rhythm),[13] from the beginning those who had the strongest natural
inclination towards these things generated poetry out of improvised
activities by a process of gradual innovation.

3.2 Early history

Poetry bifurcated in accordance with the corresponding kinds of
character: more serious-minded people imitated fine actions, i.e.
those of fine persons; more trivial people imitated those of inferior
persons (the latter at first composing invectives, while the others
composed hymns and encomia). We are not in a position to identify a
poem of the latter kind[14] by any of the poets who preceded Homer,
although they are likely to have been numerous; but beginning with
Homer we can do so (e.g. his *Margites* and similar poems). Because
of its suitability, the iambic verse-form developed in these poems;
indeed, the reason it is now called 'iambic' is that they wrote lam-
poons or *iamboi* against each other in that verse-form. And so some
of the ancients became composers of heroic poetry, others of lam-
poons. But just as Homer was the outstanding poet of the serious
kind, since he did not just compose well but also made his imitations
dramatic,[15] so too he was the first to adumbrate the form of comedy;
what he composed was not an invective, but a dramatization of the
laughable. His *Margites* stands in the same relation to comedy as the

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

3.3 *Tragedy*

This is not the place for a detailed investigation of whether or not tragedy is now sufficiently developed with respect to its formal constituents (judged both in its own right and in relation to theatrical performances). But originally it developed from improvisations. (This is true of tragedy, and also of comedy: the former arose from the leaders of the dithyramb, the latter from the leaders of the phallic songs which are still customary even now in many cities.)[16] Then tragedy was gradually enhanced as people developed each new aspect of it that came to light. After undergoing many transformations tragedy came to rest, because it had attained its natural state.

The number of actors was increased from one to two by Aeschylus, who also reduced the choral parts and made the spoken word play the leading role; the third actor and scene-painting were introduced by Sophocles. In addition, the magnitude increased from short plots; and in place of comic diction, as a consequence of a change from the satyric style,[17] tragedy acquired dignity at a late stage, and the iambic verse-form was adopted instead of the trochaic tetrameter. (They used tetrameters at first because the composition was satyric in manner, and more akin to dance. But when speech was introduced nature itself found the appropriate form of verse, iambic being the verse-form closest to speech. There is evidence of this: we speak iambics in conversation with each other very often, but rarely dactylic hexameters – and only when we depart from the normal conversational tone.)[18] As for the number of episodes and other such features, the way each of them is said to have been elab-

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

3.4 *Comedy*

Comedy is (as we have said) an imitation of inferior people – not, 5
however, with respect to every kind of defect: the laughable is a spe-
cies of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that
does not involve pain or destruction; for example, a comic mask is
ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain.[19]

The transformations which tragedy has undergone, and those re-
sponsible for them, have not been forgotten; but, because it was not
taken seriously, little attention was paid to comedy at first. Indeed, it 49b
was relatively late that the archon first granted a comic chorus;[20]
before that the performers were volunteers. So comedy already had
some of its features before there is any mention of those identified as
comic poets, and it is not known who introduced masks, prologues,
the number of actors and so forth. But plot-construction came ori-
ginally from Sicily; among Athenian poets it was Crates who first
abandoned the form of a lampoon and began to construct universal-
ized stories and plots.[21]

3.5 *Epic*

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

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

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

4. TRAGEDY: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Definition*

6 We shall discuss the art of imitation in hexameter verse and comedy later;[22] as for tragedy, let us resume the discussion by stating the definition of its essence on the basis of what has already been said.

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification[23] of such emotions.

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

4.2 *Component parts*

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

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

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

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

4.3 *The primacy of plot*

Virtually all tragedians, one might say, use these formal elements; for in fact every drama alike has spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning.[24] But the most important of them is the structure of the events:

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

(ii) Furthermore, there could not be a tragedy without action, but there could be one without character. The tragedies of most modern poets lack character, and in general there are many such poets. Compare, among painters, the relation between Zeuxis and Polygnotus: the latter is good at depicting character, but Zeuxis' painting has no character.[25]

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

(iv) Additionally, the most important devices by which tragedy sways emotion are parts of the plot, i.e. reversals and recognitions.[26]

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

4.4 The ranking completed

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

Third is reasoning. This is the ability to say what is implicit in a situation and appropriate to it, which in prose is the function of the arts of statesmanship and of rhetoric. Older poets used to make people speak like statesmen; contemporary poets make them speak rhetorically.[27] Character is the kind of thing which discloses the nature of a choice; for this reason speeches in which there is nothing at all which the speaker chooses or avoids do not possess character. Reasoning refers to the means by which people argue that

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

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

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

5. PLOT: BASIC CONCEPTS

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

5.1 *Completeness*

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

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

5.2 *Magnitude*

Any beautiful object, whether a living organism or any other entity composed of parts, must not only possess those parts in proper order, but its *magnitude* also should not be arbitrary; beauty consists in magnitude as well as order. For this reason no organism could be beautiful if it is excessively small (since observation becomes confused as it comes close to having no perceptible duration in time) or 51a excessively large (since the observation is then not simultaneous, and the observers find that the sense of unity and wholeness is lost from their observation, e.g. if there were an animal a thousand miles long). So just as in the case of physical objects and living organisms, they should possess a certain magnitude, and this should be such as can readily be taken in at one view, so in the case of plots: they should have a certain length, and this should be such as can readily be held in memory.

The definition of length which is determined by theatrical performances and perception is not relevant to the art of poetry; if it were necessary to perform a hundred tragedies they would time the performances by the clock, as they say used to be done on other occasions.[28] But the definition which agrees with the actual nature of the matter is that invariably the greater the plot is (up to the limits of simultaneous perspicuity) the more beautiful it is with respect to magnitude; or, to state a straightforward definition, 'the magnitude in which a series of events occurring sequentially in accordance with probability or necessity gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune', is an adequate definition of magnitude.

5.3 Unity

A plot is not (as some think) unified because it is concerned with a 8
single person. An indeterminately large number of things happen to
any one person, not all of which constitute a unity; likewise a single
individual performs many actions, and they do not make up a single
action. So it is clear that a mistake has been made by all those poets
who have composed a *Heracleid* or *Theseid*, or poems of that kind, on
the assumption that, just because Heracles was one person, the plot
too is bound to be unified. Just as Homer excels in other respects, he
seems to have seen this point clearly as well, whether through art or
instinct. When he composed the *Odyssey* he did not include every-
thing which happened to Odysseus (e.g. the wounding on Parnassus
and the pretence of madness during the mobilization: the occur-
rence of either of these events did not make the occurrence of the
other necessary or probable);[29] instead, he constructed the *Odyssey*
about a single action of the kind we are discussing. The same is true
of the *Iliad*.

5.4 Determinate structure

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

5.5 Universality

9 It is also clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened, but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or

51b necessity. The historian and the poet are not distinguished by their use of verse or prose; it would be possible to turn the works of Herodotus into verse, and it would be a history in verse just as much as in prose. The distinction is this: the one says what has happened, the other the kind of thing that would happen.[30]

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

In the case of comedy this is in fact clear. The poets construct the plot on the basis of probabilities, and then supply names of their own choosing; they do not write about a particular individual, as the lampoonists do. In the case of tragedy they do keep to actual names. The reason for this is that what is possible is plausible; we are disinclined to believe that what has not happened is possible, but it is obvious that what has happened is possible – because it would not have happened if it were not. To be sure, even in tragedy in some cases only one or two of the names are familiar, while the rest are invented, and in some none at all, e.g. in Agathon's *Antheus*;[31] in this play both the events and the names are invented, but it gives no less pleasure. So one need not try at all costs to keep to the traditional stories which are the subjects of tragedy; in fact, it would be absurd to do so, since even what is familiar is familiar only to a few, and yet gives pleasure to everyone.

So it is clear from these points that the poet must be a maker[32] of

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

5.6 *Defective plots*

Of simple plots[33] and actions, the episodic ones are the worst. By an *episodic* plot I mean one in which the sequence of episodes is neither necessary nor probable. Second-rate poets compose plots of this kind of their own accord; good poets do so on account of the actors – in writing pieces for competitive display[34] they draw out the plot beyond its potential, and are often forced to distort the sequence.   *52a*

6. PLOT: SPECIES AND COMPONENTS

6.1 *Astonishment*

The imitation is not just of a complete action, but also of events that evoke fear and pity. These effects occur above all when things come about contrary to expectation but because of one another. This will be more astonishing than if they come about spontaneously or by chance, since even chance events are found most astonishing when they appear to have happened as if for a purpose – as, for example, the statue of Mitys in Argos killed the man who was responsible for Mitys' death by falling on top of him as he was looking at it.[35] Things like that are not thought to occur at random. So inevitably plots of this kind will be better.

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6.2 *Simple and complex plots*

10 Some plots are simple, others complex, since the actions of which
the plots are imitations are themselves also of these two kinds. By a
simple action I mean one which is, in the sense defined, continuous
and unified, and in which the change of fortune comes about with-
out reversal or recognition. By *complex*, I mean one in which the
change of fortune involves reversal or recognition or both. These
must arise from the actual structure of the plot, so that they come
about as a result of what has happened before, out of necessity or in
accordance with probability. There is an important difference be-
tween a set of events happening *because* of certain other events and
after certain other events.

6.3 *Reversal*

11 A *reversal* is a change to the opposite in the actions being performed,
as stated – and this, as we have been saying, in accordance with prob-
ability or necessity. For example, in the *Oedipus* someone came to
give Oedipus good news and free him from his fear with regard to
his mother, but by disclosing Oedipus' identity he brought about
the opposite result;[36] and in the *Lynceus*, Lynceus himself was being
led off to be killed, with Danaus following to kill him, but it came
about as a consequence of preceding events that the latter was killed
and Lynceus was saved.[37]

6.4 *Recognition*

Recognition, as in fact the term indicates, is a change from ignorance
to knowledge, disclosing either a close relationship[38] or enmity, on
the part of people marked out for good or bad fortune. Recognition

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

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

Since the recognition is a recognition of some person or persons, some involve the recognition of one person only on the part of the other, when it is clear who the other is; but sometimes there must be a recognition on both sides (e.g. Iphigeneia is recognized by Orestes from the sending of the letter, but the recognition of Orestes by Iphigeneia had to be different).[39]

6.5 *Suffering*

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

6.6 *Quantitative parts of tragedy*

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

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

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

We have already mentioned the component parts of tragedy which should be regarded as its formal elements. In quantitative terms, the separate parts into which it is divided are these.[40]

7. THE BEST KINDS OF TRAGIC PLOT

7.1 *First introduction*

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

7.2 *First deduction*

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

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

We are left, therefore, with the person intermediate between these. This is the sort of person who is not outstanding in moral excellence or justice; on the other hand, the change to bad fortune which he undergoes is not due to any moral defect or depravity, but to an error[41] of some kind. He is one of those people who are held in great esteem and enjoy great good fortune, like Oedipus, Thyestes, and distinguished men from that kind of family.

It follows that a well-formed plot will be simple[42] rather than (as some people say) double, and that it must involve a change not *to* good fortune *from* bad fortune, but (on the contrary) *from* good fortune *to* bad fortune – and this must be due not to depravity but to a serious error on the part of someone of the kind specified (or better than that, rather than worse). There is evidence of this in practice. At first poets used to pick out stories at random; but nowadays the best tragedies are constructed around a few households, e.g. about Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus and any others whose lot it has been to experience something terrible – or to perform some terrible action.[43]

So the best tragedy, in artistic terms, is based on this structure. This is why those who criticize Euripides for doing this in his tragedies, most of which end in bad fortune, are making the same mistake;[44] for this is, as has been stated, correct. There is very powerful evidence for this. On stage and in performance people recognize that plays of this kind (provided that they are successfully executed) are the most tragic, and Euripides, even if his technique is

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

Second-best is the structure which some say comes first – that which has a double structure like the *Odyssey*, and which ends with the opposite outcome for better and worse people.[45] It is thought to come first because of the weakness of audiences; the poets follow the audiences' lead and compose whatever is to their taste. But this is not the pleasure which comes from tragedy; it is more characteristic of comedy. In comedy even people who are the bitterest enemies in the story, like Orestes and Aegisthus, go off reconciled in the end, and no one gets killed by anybody.[46]

7.3 *Second introduction*

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

7.4 *Second deduction*

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

Necessarily, we are concerned with interactions between people who are closely connected[47] with each other, or between enemies, or between neutrals. If enemy acts on enemy, there is nothing pitiable either in the action itself or in its imminence, except in respect of the actual suffering in itself. Likewise with neutrals. What one should look for are situations in which sufferings arise within close relationships, e.g. brother kills brother, son father, mother son, or son mother – or is on the verge of killing them, or does something else of the same kind.

Now, one cannot undo traditional stories (I mean, for example, Clytaemnestra's death at Orestes' hands, or Eriphyle's at Alcmeon's);[48] but one has to discover for oneself how to use even the traditional stories well. Let us state more clearly what this involves. It is possible for the action to come about in the way that the old poets used to do it, with people acting in full knowledge and awareness; this is in fact how Euripides portrayed Medea killing her children.[49] It is also possible for the action to be performed, but for the agents to do the terrible deed in ignorance and only then to recognize the close connection, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus*. (This is outside the play: examples in the tragedy itself are Astydamas' *Alcmeon* or Telegonus in the *Odysseus Wounded*.)[50] A third possibility besides these is for someone to be on the verge of performing some irreparable deed through ignorance, and for the recognition to pre-empt the act. Besides these there is no other possibility: necessarily the agents must either act or not act, either knowingly or in ignorance.[51]

Of these, being on the verge of acting wittingly and not doing so is worst; this is disgusting, and is not tragic since there is no suffering. So no one composes in this way, or only rarely (e.g. Haemon and *54a* Creon in the *Antigone*).[52] Performing the action is second; but it is better if the action is performed in ignorance and followed by a recognition – there is nothing disgusting in this, and the recognition has great emotional impact. But the last case is best; I mean, for example, in the *Cresphontes* Merope is on the verge of killing her son but does not do it, but instead recognizes him;[53] the same happens

with sister and brother in the *Iphigeneia*;[54] and in the *Helle* the son recognizes his mother when on the verge of handing her over.[55]

For this reason, as I said some time ago,[56] tragedies are concerned with a limited number of families. Although their search was guided by chance rather than art, poets discovered how to produce this kind of effect in plots; so they are forced to turn to just those households in which this kind of suffering has come about.

8. OTHER ASPECTS OF TRAGEDY

8.1 *Character*

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

(i) First and foremost, *goodness*. As was said earlier, speech or action will possess character if it discloses the nature of a deliberate choice; the character is good if the choice is good. This is possible in each class of person: there is such a thing as a good woman and a good slave, even though one of these is perhaps deficient and the other generally speaking inferior.[57]

(ii) Secondly, *appropriateness*: it is possible for the character to be courageous, but for this to be an inappropriate way for a woman to display courage or cleverness.[58]

(iii) Thirdly, *likeness*: this is not the same as making character good and appropriate, as has already been stated.[59]

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

An example of unnecessary badness of character is Menelaus in the *Orestes*;[60] of impropriety and inappropriateness, Odysseus'

lament in the *Scylla*[61] and Melanippe's speech.[62] An example of inconsistency is the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*:[63] when she pleads for her life to be spared she is not at all like her later self – but in characterization, just as much as in the structure of events, one ought always to look for what is necessary or probable: it should be necessary or probable that this kind of person says or does this kind of thing, and it should be necessary or probable that this happens after that.

(Clearly, therefore, the resolutions of plots should also come about from the plot itself, and not by means of a theatrical device, as *54b* in the *Medea*, or the events concerned with the launching of the ships in the *Iliad*.[64] A theatrical device may be used for things outside the play – whether prior events which are beyond human knowledge, or subsequent events which need prediction and narration – since we grant that the gods can see everything. But there should be nothing irrational in the events themselves; or, failing that, it should be outside the play, as for example in Sophocles' *Oedipus*.)[65]

Since tragedy is an imitation of people better than we are, one should imitate good portrait-painters. In rendering the individual form, they paint people as they are, but make them better-looking. In the same way the poet who is imitating people who are irascible or lazy or who have other traits of character of that sort should portray them as having these characteristics, but also as decent people. For example, Homer portrayed Achilles as both a good man and a paradigm of obstinacy.[66]

One should observe these points closely, and in addition those corresponding to the perceptions that are necessary concomitants of the art of poetry. It is possible to make many mistakes with respect to these. But they have been discussed in sufficient detail in my published works.[67]

8.2 *Kinds of recognition*

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

(i) First of all, the least artistic kind (and the one which people use most, because of their lack of ingenuity) is that by means of tokens. Some of these are congenital (e.g. 'the spear the earth-born bear',[68] or stars such as Carcinus used in his *Thyestes*),[69] and some are acquired; of the latter, some are physical characteristics (e.g. scars), others are external (e.g. necklaces, or the use of the boat in the *Tyro*).[70] It is possible to make better or worse use of these. For example, Odysseus is recognized by means of the scar both by the nurse and by the swineherds, but in different ways. Recognitions that are used only for confirmation are less artistic (so too all recognitions of that kind); recognitions which arise out of a reversal, as in the bath-scene, are better.[71]

(ii) Second are those which are contrived by the poet; for that reason they are inartistic. For example, Orestes in the *Iphigeneia* revealed his own identity; Iphigeneia's identity is revealed by the letter, but Orestes declares in person what the poet (instead of the plot) requires. This brings it close to the error mentioned above: it would have been possible actually to bring tokens with him.[72] There is also the 'voice of the shuttle' in Sophocles' *Tereus*.[73]

(iii) The third is by means of memory, when someone grasps the sig-
55a nificance of something that he sees. This is how it is in Dicaeo-genes' *Cyprians*, where he sees the painting and bursts into tears, and in the tale told to Alcinous, where Odysseus listens to the lyre-player, is reminded of his past and weeps; recognition results in both cases.[74]

(iv) Fourth is that which arises from inference. For example, in the *Choephori*: 'someone similar has come; no one is similar except Orestes; so he has come'.[75] There is also the recognition which Polyidus the sophist suggested for Iphigeneia; he said that it was

probable for Orestes to infer that his sister had been sacrificed, and so it was now his turn to be sacrificed. Also in Theodectes' *Tydeus*, that he came to find a son, but is perishing himself. And the recognition in the *Sons of Phineus*; when the women saw the place they inferred that it was their fate to die there, since that was where they had been exposed.[76]

(v) There is also a composite kind arising from a false inference on the part of the audience. For example, in *Odysseus the False Messenger*[77] the fact that he can bend the bow and nobody else is contrived by the poet as a premise, as is his claim that he will recognize the bow which he has not seen; and although he is going to make himself known by means of the former, he actually does so by means of the latter, which involves a false inference.

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

8.3 *Visualizing the action*

When constructing plots and working them out complete with their linguistic expression, one should so far as possible visualize what is happening. By envisaging things very vividly in this way, as if one were actually present at the events themselves, one can find out what is appropriate, and inconsistencies are least likely to be overlooked. The criticism made of Carcinus provides evidence of this: Amphiaraus was coming back from the temple; this would have escaped the notice of anyone who did not see it, but it failed in performance because the audience was dissatisfied with it.[78]

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

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the emotions are the most convincing; someone who is distressed or angry acts out distress and irritation most authentically. (This is why the art of poetry belongs to people who are naturally gifted or mad; of these, the former are adaptable, and the latter are not in their right mind.)[79]

8.4 Outlines and episodization

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

As an example of what I mean by considering the universal, take the *Iphigeneia*: 'A girl has been sacrificed and has disappeared without those who performed the sacrifice being aware of it. Set down in another country, where it was the custom to sacrifice foreigners to the goddess, she becomes the priestess of this rite. It subsequently happens that the priestess's brother arrives (the fact that the god ordered him to go there is outside the universal; so too the reason);[80] on his arrival he is captured, but when he is on the verge of being sacrificed he discloses his identity (either as Euripides did it, or as in Polyidus,[81] by saying – as was quite probable – that it was his lot, as well as his sister's, to be sacrificed). Escape ensues.' After that, one should supply the names and turn the story into episodes. The episodes must be appropriate – for example, in the case of Orestes the fit of madness which resulted in his capture, and the escape by means of the purification.

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

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

8.5 *Complication and resolution*

Every tragedy consists of a complication and a resolution. What is 18
outside the play, and often some of what is inside, comprises the
complication; the resolution is the rest. By *complication* I mean every-
thing from the beginning up to and including the section which
immediately precedes the change to good fortune or bad fortune; by
resolution I mean everything from the beginning of the change of
fortune to the end. Thus in Theodectes' *Lynceus* the complication
consists of events before the play, the seizure of the child and the dis-
closure of the parents; the resolution is everything from the capital
charge to the end.[82]

8.6 *Kinds of tragedy*

There are four kinds of tragedy (since that was also the number of
component parts mentioned):[83] complex tragedy, depending en-
tirely on reversal and recognition; tragedy of suffering (e.g. plays
about Ajax or Ixion); tragedy of character (e.g. *Women of Phthia* 56a
and *Peleus*); and, fourth, simple tragedy (e.g. *Daughters of Phorcys*,
Prometheus and plays set in the underworld).

By preference one should try to include all the component parts,
or failing that most of them and the most important, especially given
the captious criticisms which people make of poets nowadays. Be-
cause there have been poets good at each part, people expect indi-
vidual poets to surpass the particular excellence of every one.[84]

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

resolution are the same. Many poets are good at complication but handle the resolution badly;[85] but both should be treated with equal care.

8.7 *Tragedy and epic*

Bearing in mind what I have already said several times, one should not compose a tragedy out of a body of material which would serve for an epic — by which I mean one that contains a multiplicity of stories (for example, if one were to use the whole plot of the *Iliad*). In epic, because of its length, every part is given the appropriate magnitude; but in plays the result is quite contrary to one's expectation. There is evidence of this in the fact that everyone who has composed a *Sack of Troy* as a whole, and not piecemeal like Euripides, or a *Niobe* and not like Aeschylus, has either failed or done badly in the competition; even Agathon failed in this one respect.[86]

8.8 *Astonishment*

In reversals and in simple actions poets use astonishment to achieve their chosen aims;[87] this is tragic and agreeable. This happens when someone who is clever but bad (like Sisyphus) is deceived, or someone who is courageous but unjust is defeated. There is no violation of probability in this; as Agathon said, it is probable for many improbable things to happen.[88]

8.9 *The chorus*

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

more to do with the plot than they do with any other play; this is the reason why they sing interludes. This is a practice which Agathon was the first to start;[89] but what is the difference between singing interludes and transferring a speech or a whole episode from one play into another?

9. DICTION

9.1 *Introduction*

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

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

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

in the point Protagoras criticized (i.e. that Homer thinks he is utter-
ing a prayer but is in fact giving an order when he says 'Goddess,
sing the wrath':[90] Protagoras' point is that telling someone to do
something or not is an order). So let us set that aside as an investiga-
tion belonging to an art other than that of poetry.

9.2 *Basic concepts*

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

   (i) A *phoneme* is an indivisible vocalization – not any kind, however,
       but one which can be part of a composite vocalization; some ani-
       mal noises are indivisible, but these are not what I mean by phon-
       emes.[91] Phonemes are classified as vowels, continuants and mutes:
       (a) a *vowel* does not involve contact between the organs of speech,
           and has audible sound;
       (b) a *continuant* does involve contact between the organs of speech,
           and has audible sound: e.g. *s, r*;
       (c) a *mute* does involve contact between the organs of speech, but
           does not have sound in itself; it becomes audible when com-
           bined with a phoneme which has audible sound: e.g. *g, d*.
       Phonemes differ in the shape of the mouth, in the point of con-
       tact, in the presence or absence of aspiration, in length or brevity,
       and in acute, grave or intermediate pitch. Detailed discussion of
       these differences belongs to the study of verse-forms.

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

   (iii) A *connective*[92] is:

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

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

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

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

(v) A *noun*[93] is a composite significant vocalization which does not express tense, no part of which is significant in its own right. (In nouns comprising two parts we do not treat either part as significant in its own right: e.g. the element *-dorus* in the name 'Theodorus' does not signify.)[94]

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

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

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

9.3 *Classification of nouns*

21 Nouns are classed as simple (by which I mean those not com-
pounded from significant parts, e.g. 'earth') or double. Double nouns
may be composed of a significant and a non-signifying element
(although within the noun itself there is no distinction between
significant and non-signifying elements), or of two significant ele-
ments.[95] One may also have triple, quadruple or even multiplex nouns
(e.g. most of those from Marseilles, such as 'Hermocaïcoxanthus').[96]

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

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

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

(i) By a transfer from genus to species I mean (e.g.) 'Here stands my
ship'; lying at anchor is one kind of standing.[97]

(ii) From species to genus: 'Odysseus has in truth performed ten
thousand noble deeds'; ten thousand is a large number, and is used
in place of 'many'.[98]

(iii) Species to species: e.g. 'drawing off the life with bronze' and 'cut-
ting off water with edged bronze'; here 'drawing off' means cut-
ting, and 'cutting' means drawing off – each is a kind of removal.[99]

(iv) By analogy I mean cases where B stands in a similar relation to A
as D does to C; one can then mention D instead of B, and *vice
versa*. Sometimes the thing to which the noun replaced stands in
relation is expressed; I mean (e.g.) a cup stands in a similar relation

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to Dionysus as a shield does to Ares; so one may call a cup the 'shield of Dionysus', or a shield the 'cup of Ares'.[100] Or old age is to life as evening is to the day; so one may speak of evening as the old age of the day (as Empedocles does),[101] and of old age as the evening of life, or life's twilight. In some cases there is no existing noun for one term of the analogy, but it can nevertheless be expressed. For example scattering seed is 'sowing', but there is no noun for the scattering of fire from the sun; but this stands in a similar relation to the sun as sowing does to seed; hence the expression 'sowing the god-created fire'.[102] There is another way of using analogical metaphor: one may refer to something using the transferred noun, and negate some of its proper attributes; e.g. one might call a shield not 'the cup of Ares' but 'the wineless cup'.

An *ornamental* noun is . . .[103]

A *coined* noun is one that is not in use by anyone, but is posited by the poet himself. There seems to be a few nouns of this kind (e.g. 'sproutages' for horns and 'invocator' for priest).[104]

As for lengthening and shortening, a noun is *lengthened* if it has a 58a longer vowel than usual or an extra syllable; a noun is *shortened* if something has been removed. Examples of lengthening are *poléos* (for *poleôs*, 'of a city') and *Pêlêiadeô* (for *Pêleidou*, 'of Peleus' son'); of shortening, e.g. *kri* (for *krithê*, 'barley'), *dô* (for *dôma*, 'house') and 'from two eyes single *ops*' (for *opsis*, 'sight').[105]

An *adapted* noun is one in which part of the word is kept unchanged, and part added; e.g. 'by the rightward breast' (for 'right').[106]

Nouns themselves may be masculine, feminine or neuter. Masculine nouns are those ending in *n*, *r* and *s* (and its compounds, of which there are two, *ps* and *ks*). Feminine nouns are those ending in those vowels which are invariably long, i.e. in *ê* and *ô*, and (among the vowels which are capable of being lengthened) in *a*.[107] (So the classes of masculine and feminine nouns turn out to be equal in number, since *ps* and *ks* are simply compound forms of *s*.) No noun ends in a mute or in a short vowel; only three end in *i* (i.e. *meli*,

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

9.4 *Qualities of poetic style*

22   The most important quality in diction is clarity, provided there is no loss of dignity. The clearest diction is that based on current words; but that lacks dignity (as can be seen from the poetry of Cleophon, and that of Sthenelus).[108] By contrast, diction is distinguished and out of the ordinary when it makes use of exotic expressions – by which I mean non-standard words, metaphor, lengthening, and anything contrary to current usage. However, if one used nothing else the result would be a riddle or gibberish – a riddle if it were made up entirely of metaphors, gibberish if it were made up entirely of non-standard words. (The essence of a riddle is that it states facts by means of a combination of impossibilities; this cannot be done by putting other kinds of word together, but it is possible using metaphor; e.g. 'I saw a man welding bronze upon a man with fire',[109] and such like. And what is composed of non-standard words is gibberish.) So what is needed is some kind of mixture of these two things: one of them will make the diction out of the ordinary and avoid a loss of dignity (i.e. non-standard words, metaphor, ornament and the other categories I mentioned earlier), while current usage will contribute clarity.

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

ing to Marathon' and 'not mixing his hellebore'.¹¹⁰ Admittedly, ob-
trusive use of this style is absurd; but moderation is equally necessary
in all aspects of diction; using metaphors, non-standard words and
the other categories in an inappropriate and deliberately absurd way
would produce the same effect. The difference that appropriateness
makes in the case of epic poetry can be observed if one inserts the
ordinary words into the verse. Equally in the case of non-standard
words, metaphors and the other kinds, the truth of what I am saying
is obvious if one substitutes current words. For example, Aeschylus
and Euripides composed identical lines of iambic verse; but the
change of a single word – a non-standard word in place of a current
one – made one line seem excellent, and the other trivial by com-
parison. Aeschylus wrote, in his *Philoctetes*, 'the canker that eats up
my foot's flesh'; Euripides substituted 'feasts on' for 'eats up'.¹¹¹ Also
in 'a scant and strengthless and unseemly man' one could substitute
current words: 'a little, weak, ugly man'. And in 'setting down an un-
comely chair and scant table': 'setting down a second-rate chair and
little table'. And in 'the sounding sea-shore': 'the shouting sea-
shore'.¹¹² Ariphrades, too, ridiculed the tragedians for using expres-
sions that nobody would use in conversation, e.g. 'the house with-
out' (for 'outside the house'), 'of thine', 'Achilles round about' (for   *59a*
'around Achilles'), etc. Things of this sort all make diction out of the
ordinary because they are not part of current usage. Ariphrades
failed to understand this.¹¹³

It is important to use all the things I have mentioned appropri-
ately, including compound and non-standard words; but the most im-
portant thing is to be good at using metaphor. This is the one thing
that cannot be learnt from someone else, and is a sign of natural
talent; for the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving
similarities. Compound words are most appropriate in dithyramb,
non-standard words in heroic verse, and metaphor in iambics. In
heroic verse all the things I have mentioned have their use; but in
iambic verse, because of its close resemblance to ordinary speech,¹¹⁴
the most appropriate words are the ones which could also be used in

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

10. EPIC

10.1 *Plot*

Tragedy and imitation in action has been adequately covered in
23 what has already been said. As for the art of imitation in narrative verse, it is clear that the plots ought (as in tragedy) to be constructed dramatically; that is, they should be concerned with a unified action, whole and complete, possessing a beginning, middle parts and an end, so that (like a living organism) the unified whole can effect its characteristic pleasure. They should not be organized in the same way as histories, in which one has to describe not a single action, but a single period of time, i.e. all the events that occurred during that period involving one or more people, each of which has an arbitrary relation to the others. The naval engagement at Salamis and the battle against the Carthaginians in Sicily occurred simultaneously without in any way tending towards the same end;[115] in exactly the same way one thing may follow another in succession over a period of time without their producing a single result. But perhaps the majority of poets compose in this way.

So (as we have already said) Homer's brilliance is evident in this respect as well, in comparison with other poets. He did not even try to treat the war as a whole, although it does have a beginning and an end. Had he done so, the plot would have been excessively large and difficult to take in at one view – or, if it had been moderate in magnitude, it would have been over-complicated in its variety. Instead, he has taken one part and used many others as episodes (e.g. the catalogue of ships,[116] and other episodes which he uses to diversify his

composition). The other poets write about a single person, a single *59b* period of time, or a single action of many parts – e.g. the poet of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*.[117] This means that only one tragedy can be made out of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or at most two, but many out of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad* (more than eight, e.g. *Adjudication of Arms, Philoctetes, Neoptolemus, Eurypylus, Beggary, Spartan Women, Sack of Troy, Putting to Sea*; also *Sinon* and *Trojan Women*).

10.2 *Kinds and parts of epic*

Epic must also have the same kinds as tragedy; it is either simple or *24* complex, or based on character or on suffering.[118] The component parts, except for lyric poetry and spectacle, are also the same; it too needs reversals, recognitions and sufferings, and the reasoning and diction should be of high quality. Homer was the first to use all of these elements in a completely satisfactory way. Each of his two poems has a different structure; the *Iliad* is simple and based on suffering, the *Odyssey* is complex (recognition pervades it) and based on character. In addition, he excels everyone in diction and reasoning.

10.3 *Differences between tragedy and epic*

Epic is differentiated in the length of its plot-structure and in its verse-form. The stated definition of length is adequate; one must be able to take in the beginning and the end in one view. This would be the case if the structures were shorter than those of the ancient epics, and matched the number of tragedies presented at one sitting.[119] Epic has an important distinctive resource for extending its length. In tragedy it is not possible to imitate many parts of the action being carried on simultaneously, but only the one on stage involving the actors. But in epic, because it is narrative, it is possible

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

As for the verse-form, experience has proved the appropriateness of the heroic verse. If one were to compose a narrative imitation in some other verse-form, or a combination of them, it would seem unsuitable. Heroic verse is the most stately and grandiose form of verse; this is why it is particularly receptive to non-standard words and metaphors (for narrative imitation departs further from the norm than other kinds). Iambic verse and the trochaic tetrameter *60a* express movement (the latter having a dance-like quality, and the former being suited to action). It would be still more peculiar if one mixed them, as Chaeremon did.[120] For this reason no one has composed a long structure in any verse-form other than the heroic; as we have said, nature itself teaches people to choose what is appropriate to it.

10.4 *Quasi-dramatic epic*

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

10.5 *Astonishment and irrationalities*

While it is true that astonishment is an effect which should be sought in tragedy, the irrational (which is the most important source of astonishment) is more feasible in epic, because one is not looking at the agent. The pursuit of Hector would seem preposterous on stage, with the others standing by and taking no part in the pursuit while Achilles shakes his head to restrain them; but in epic it escapes notice.[121] Astonishment gives pleasure; evidence of this is the fact that everyone exaggerates when passing on news, on the assumption that they are giving pleasure.

Homer, in particular, taught other poets the right way to tell falsehoods. This is the false inference. In cases where the existence or occurrence of *A* implies the existence or occurrence of *B*, people imagine that if *B* is the case then *A* also exists or occurs – which is fallacious. So if *A* is false, but its existence would entail the existence or occurrence of *B*, one should add *B*; then, on the basis of its knowledge that *B* is true, our mind falsely infers the reality of *A* as well. An example of this can be found in the bath-scene.[122]

Probable impossibilities are preferable to implausible possibilities. Stories should not be constructed from irrational parts; so far as possible they should contain nothing irrational – or, failing that, it should be outside the narration (like Oedipus' ignorance of the manner of Laius' death)[123] and not in the play itself (like the report of the Pythian Games in the *Electra*, or the man who comes from Tegea to Mysia without speaking in the *Mysians*).[124] Saying that the plot would have been ruined otherwise is absurd; plots should not be constructed like that in the first place. But if one does posit an irrationality and it seems more or less rational, even an oddity is possible;[125] the irrationalities involved in Odysseus' being put ashore in the *Odyssey* would be manifestly intolerable if a second-rate poet *60b* had composed them, but as it is the poet conceals the absurdity with other good qualities, and makes it a source of pleasure.[126]

10.6 *Diction*

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

II. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

II.I *Principles*

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

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

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

(iii) In addition, correctness is not the same thing in ethics and poetry, nor in any other art and poetry. Error in poetry is of two kinds, one intrinsic, the other incidental. If someone has chosen to imitate accurately but failed to do so because of incompetence, the fault is intrinsic; but if he has chosen not to do so correctly (e.g. to show a horse with both right legs thrown forward) the error is in respect to the particular art (e.g. in respect to medicine or some other art), not in respect to the art of poetry itself.[127]

II.2 *Applications*

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

(i) First, those with regard to the art of poetry itself. If impossibilities
have been included in a poem, that is an error; but it is correct if it
attains the end of the art itself (the end has been stated above): i.e.
if it makes either this or some other part have greater impact. An
example is the pursuit of Hector.[128] If, however, it is possible for
the end to be achieved as well or better without contravening the
art concerned with those matters, then the error is not correct;
there should if possible be no error at all.

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

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

(iv) If it is neither true nor as it ought to be, one might reply that this
is what people say; e.g. stories about the gods: it may be that
talking like that is neither an idealization nor the truth, and
perhaps Xenophanes was right;[129] but at any rate, that is what *61a*
people say.

(v) Other things, though not idealizations, may perhaps reflect the
way things used to be; e.g. the passage about the weapons, 'their
spears stood upright on the butt-end' – that was the norm then
(as it is even now among the Illyrians).[130]

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

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

(vii) Other problems should be solved with an eye to diction. For example a non-standard word may provide the solution to 'first the mules' (perhaps he does not mean mules but sentinels),[131] Dolon being 'ugly in appearance' (not physically deformed but facially disfigured, since Cretans call facial beauty 'beauty of appearance'),[132] and 'mix the wine stronger' (not undiluted, as for drunkards, but faster).[133] Other things are said metaphorically, e.g. 'all the gods and men slept through the night', while at the same time he says 'when he looked out over the Trojan plain . . . the sound of pipes and pan-pipes'; 'all' is said metaphorically for 'many', since all is a lot.[134] Also 'alone with no share' is metaphorical, the best known instance being unique.[135]

(viii) With reference to pronunciation, as in Hippias of Thasos' solution to 'we grant him achievement of glory' and 'part is rotted by rain'.[136]

(ix) Punctuation provides the solution to some problems; e.g. Empedocles: 'at once mortal things were born that before were immortal, and things unmixed formerly mixed'.[137]

(x) So does ambiguity; e.g. 'more of the night has passed' – 'more' is ambiguous.[138]

(xi) Other problems can be solved with reference to linguistic usage. We call diluted wine 'wine'; hence the phrase 'greaves of new-forged tin'. We call people who work iron 'bronze-smiths'; hence Ganymede is said to pour wine for Zeus, although the gods do not drink wine (this could also be metaphorical).[139]

(xii) Whenever a word seems to imply a contradiction, one should consider the number of meanings it could bear in the context; e.g. in 'by it was the bronze spear stayed' – how many different possible ways are there for it to be stopped there, in one way or another, however one might best take it?[140] (This is the exact
61b   opposite of what Glaucon describes,[141] when he says that some people make unreasonable prior assumptions and then, although

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the adverse verdict is one they have reached by themselves, they make inferences from it and if anything contradicts their own ideas they criticize the poet as if *he* had expressed *their* opinion. This is what has occurred in the case of Icarius.[142] People assume that he is a Spartan, and that Telemachus' not meeting him when he went to Sparta is therefore odd. But perhaps the Cephallenians are right when they say that Odysseus married from among them, and that his name is Icadius not Icarius. So probably the problem is based on a misconception.)

11.3 *Conclusion*

In general:

(i) Impossibilities should be referred to poetic effect, or idealization of the truth, or opinion. With regard to poetic effect, a plausible impossibility is preferable to what is implausible but possible. Again, it is impossible for people to be as Zeuxis painted them, but that is an idealization of the truth; one should surpass the model.[143]

(ii) Irrationalities should be referred to what people say: that is one solution, and also sometimes that it is not irrational, since it is probable that improbable things will happen.[144]

(iii) Contradictory utterances should be subjected to the same scrutiny as refutations in arguments (i.e. is the same thing said, with reference to the same thing, and in the same sense?), to establish whether the poet contradicts either what he says himself or what a reasonable person would assume.[145]

(iv) An objection, either to irrationality or to depravity, is correct when there is no necessity and the poet makes no use of the irrationality (as Euripides fails to use Aegeus) or of the wickedness (as that of Menelaus in the *Orestes*).[146]

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

something is impossible, irrational, harmful, contradictory, or contrary to correctness in the art. Solutions should be sought from those enumerated; there are twelve of them.[147]

12. COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF EPIC AND TRAGEDY

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

12.1 *The case against tragedy*

If the less vulgar art is superior, and in all cases what is addressed to a superior audience is less vulgar, then it is perfectly clear that the art which imitates indiscriminately is vulgar. Assuming that the audience is incapable of grasping what the performer does not supply in person, they engage in a great deal of movement (as second-rate pipers spin round if they have to imitate throwing a discus, and drag the chorus-leader about if they have to play the *Scylla*).[148] Tragedy is like that. This is in fact the opinion which older actors held about those who came after them; Mynniscus used to call Callippides
62a 'monkey' because of his excesses, and Pindarus was viewed in much the same way.[149] The whole art of tragedy stands in the same relation to epic as these do to the others. So it is argued that epic is addressed to decent audiences who do not need gestures, while tragedy is addressed to second-rate audiences; if, then, tragedy is vulgar, clearly it must be inferior.

12.2 *Reply*

(i) First of all, this is not a criticism of the art of poetry but of the art of performance. A rhapsode performing epic poetry can make exaggerated use of gestures (like Sosistratus); so can a singer (this is what Mnasitheus of Opus used to do).[150]

(ii) Next, not all movement is to be disparaged (any more than all dance is), but only that of inferior persons. This is the objection that used to be made against Callippides, and is made now against others, on the grounds that the women they imitate are not respectable.[151]

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

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

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

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

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

(vii) Also the epic poets' imitation is less unified (an indication of this is that more than one tragedy comes from any given imitation). So if they treat a unified plot, either the exposition is brief and appears curtailed, or else it adheres to the length of that verse-form and is diluted.[152] (I mean, for example, if it comprises a number of actions. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have many parts of this kind, which possess magnitude in their own right; and yet the construction of these poems could not be improved upon, and they are an imitation of a single action to the greatest possible degree.)

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

13. CONCLUSION

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

NOTES TO THE
TRANSLATION

1. For 'imitation' (*mimêsis*) see Introduction §2. The dithyramb was a kind of lyric poetry performed by a chorus. Pipe (*aulos*) and lyre (*kithara*) were the two most common forms of Greek wind and string instrument; the addition of the pan-pipes (*syrinx*) below implies a more general concept of instrumental music.

2. The reference is to the mimicry of, for example, animal noises (cf. Plato, *Republic*, 397a, *Laws*, 669c–d).

3. Sophron and his son Xenarchus worked in Syracuse in the late fifth century; their sketches of everyday life, and the philosophical dialogues of Plato and Xenophon (and others whose works have not survived), are cited as examples of imitation in prose.

4. The fifth-century philosopher Empedocles expounded his theories of nature in hexameter verse. Aristotle greatly admired the artistic quality of his work: fragment 70 (from *On Poets*) comments on his 'Homeric' mastery of poetic language, and especially his use of metaphor; he is cited several times in the *Poetics* (57b13f., 24, 58a5, 61a24f.). The present point is therefore not evaluative, but intended to define a restricted technical usage for the term 'poetry'.

5. A fourth-century tragic poet; little is known about his *Centaur* (see also 60a2), apparently a piece for recitation ('rhapsody') in a variety of metres.

6. The nome, like the dithyramb (n.1), was a kind of choral lyric.

7. All fifth-century painters. Polygnotus (cf. 50a27f. and n. 25) is famous; little is known of the other two, but at *Politics*, 1340a35–8 Pauson's work is described as less suitable for young people to view than that of Polygnotus.

8. Cleophon may be the fourth-century tragic poet of that name; on his style cf. 58a18–21. Hegemon wrote epic burlesques in the late fifth century; Nicochares' *Deiliad* (derived from *deilos*, 'cowardly', by analogy with *Iliad*) also suggests epic burlesque.

9. For dithyramb and nome cf. 47b26 (n. 6). Timotheus (cf. 54a30f. and n. 61) was a lyric poet of the late fifth and early fourth centuries noted for musical and stylistic innovations; his poem is presumably mentioned as an example

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of a serious treatment of the Cyclops Polyphemus, since the portrayal of Polyphemus by Philoxenus of Cythera was said to be a caricature of the tyrant Dionysius I, whose mistress the poet had seduced. But the text here is uncertain, and we cannot be quite sure what point Aristotle is making.

10. For Homer's quasi-dramatic style, making extensive use of direct speech, cf. 48b34–8, 60a5–11. Aristotle's classification of modes is an adaptation of Plato's (*Republic*, 392d–4c); unlike Aristotle, Plato regarded the dramatic mode with disfavour.

11. The verb for 'do' here is *dran*, whence 'drama'. The Dorian claim to have invented tragedy and comedy assumes (as becomes clear at the end of the following digression) that *dran* implies an origin among speakers of the Doric dialect; Aristotle is rightly sceptical of this assumption, and of the alleged derivation of 'comedy' from *kômê* ('village'). The democracy of the city of Megara in mainland Greece is dated to the sixth century BC; the Megarians in Sicily are the colonists at Megara Hyblaea. Epicharmus (from another Sicilian city, Syracuse) worked in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, not really 'much earlier' than the Athenian comic poets Chionides and Magnes (active from the 480s and 470s).

12. The 'two causes' are probably the human instincts for (a) imitation and (b) melody and rhythm (48b20f.). Many interpreters try to identify two distinct causes related to imitation; but this would not explain poetry as imitation *in verse*. The human instinct for rhythm and melody is also recognized by Plato (*Laws*, 653d–654a).

13. A rhythm can in principle be continued indefinitely; a verse-form such as the dactylic hexameter is a defined segment of that potentially infinite rhythmic continuum. Cf. *Rhetoric*, 1408b29.

14. That is, one imitating inferior agents. The *Margites* was not an invective, but a burlesque narrative about a hero of wide-ranging incompetence (he 'knew many things, but knew them all badly'). The attribution of the poem to Homer makes it antedate the earliest extant lampoons (those of the seventh-century poet Archilochus); but Aristotle reasonably infers that there must have been earlier lampoonists whose poems had not been preserved.

15. For Homer's quasi-dramatic style cf. 48a21f. (n. 10), 60a5–11.

16. The assumption is that a chorus-leader singing a solo response to the choral parts was the first step towards an actor wholly separate from the chorus. The number of actors was subsequently increased to two and three

(49a16–19); but it remained the custom in Greek theatre for a limited number of actors to play all the roles.

17. Satyr-plays were mythological burlesques with a chorus of satyrs (idle, drunken and lascivious followers of Dionysus, with a mixture of human and animal features), written and produced by tragic dramatists as a regular part of the tragic competition. Aristotle infers that they preserve characteristics of tragedy's pre-dramatic choral antecedents (cf. 49a10–13 and n. 16) which had disappeared in the evolution of tragedy proper. The text of this whole sentence is extremely uncertain.

18. On the characteristics of iambic verse cf. 59a10–13, 59b34–8, *Rhetoric*, 1404a29–33.

19. By contrast tragedy evokes fear and pity, emotions which Aristotle defines as responses to painful and destructive harm (*Rhetoric*, 1382a21f., 1385b13f.; cf. 52b11f. below). A mask like that of the blinded Oedipus, distorted by agonizing wounds, fulfils the function of tragedy, but would be out of place in comedy.

20. The archon chose the poets to compete in an Athenian dramatic festival, and assigned a wealthy citizen to each to finance the production-costs (especially the costume and training of the chorus). The earliest official comic competition in Athens was in 486 BC.

21. By 'universalized' Aristotle means constructed in accordance with necessity or probability; cf. chapter 9 below. Crates was an Athenian comic dramatist active from *c.* 450 BC.

22. By imitation in hexameter verse Aristotle means epic; his discussion begins in chapter 23. The promised discussion of comedy is not included in the extant *Poetics*; it was probably contained in a lost second book.

23. *Katharsis*: see Introduction §8.

24. The text and interpretation of this sentence are extremely uncertain.

25. For Polygnotus cf. 48a5f. (n. 7); he is cited as an example of painters good at portraying character at *Politics*, 1340a37f. Zeuxis, a painter active in the late fifth and early fourth centuries, reappears at 61b12f. to illustrate idealization in portraiture.

26. For reversals and recognitions see chapter 11.

27. Statesmanship forms judgements on the right conduct of public affairs; statesmen may express these judgements using natural eloquence, or exploiting the systematized persuasive techniques of rhetoric. Speech expressive of character and moral choice (*prohairesis*) is contrasted with speech based on reasoning at *Rhetoric*, 1417a16–28.

28. Litigants in the Athenian courts were allocated a limited time for their speeches, measured by a water-clock. But the last part of this sentence has never been satisfactorily explained.

29. As a young man Odysseus was wounded by a boar during a hunt; later he tried to avoid joining the Greek expedition against Troy by pretending to be insane. There is no causal relationship between these two events. The wounding is, in fact, recounted in *Odyssey*, 19.393–466, to explain the scar which establishes Odysseus' identity (see 54b26–30 and n. 71); but it is not part of the poem's plot, which is Aristotle's current concern.

30. For Aristotle's view of history cf. 59a21–9.

31. Agathon was a prominent Athenian tragic poet of the late fifth century (Plato's *Symposium* is set at a party celebrating his first victory, in 416 BC); cf. 56a18f., 24f., 29f. His *Antheus* is otherwise unknown.

32. The same word (*poiêtês*) means both 'poet' and 'maker'. Aristotle's point (here as in chapter 1) is that writing in verse is not sufficient to identify a poet; the poet is an imitator of action, and therefore a maker of plots.

33. 'Simple' is defined in chapter 10.

34. Greek dramatic festivals were competitive events, and there had been a competition between the leading actors (separate from that between the dramatists) since 449 BC. Aristotle comments on the contemporary dominance of actors over poets at *Rhetoric*, 1403b33.

35. An Argive named Mitys is mentioned in a speech falsely attributed to Demosthenes (59.33); nothing more is known about the incident referred to here.

36. At Sophocles, *Oedipus*, 924ff. a messenger brings the good (934) news that Oedipus has succeeded to the Corinthian throne on the death of his supposed father; when he learns that Oedipus is reluctant to return to Corinth for fear of committing incest with his mother, he is eager to allay that fear too (1002ff.); but in doing so he sets in train the sequence of events which leads to the discovery of Oedipus' parricide and incest.

37. For the *Lynceus*, by Aristotle's friend Theodectes, see 55b29–32 (n. 82).

38. *Philia*: see Introduction, §7. As Aristotle goes on to say, this is not the only kind of recognition; but its close bearing on good and bad fortune makes it particularly effective in tragedy.

39. For the recognitions in Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* see 54a7, 54b31–6 (n. 72), 55a18f., 55b3–12.

40. For this section see Introduction, n.10.

41. *Hamartia*: see Introduction §7.

42. Referring to the *outcome*; this does not contradict the statement that the *structure* of the plot should be complex rather than (in a different sense) simple (52a12–18, 52b31f.).

43. Alcmeon, like Orestes, avenged his father's death by killing his mother (cf. 53b24f., 33); Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother in ignorance of their identity; likewise Meleager and Telephus killed their uncles; Thyestes unwittingly ate his children's flesh (served to him at a feast by his brother Atreus in revenge for the seduction of the latter's wife) and committed incest with his own daughter.

44. That is, Euripides' critics make the same mistake as the advocates of the double outcome mentioned in the previous paragraph.

45. Odysseus triumphs, the wicked suitors are killed (cf. 55b22f.).

46. In tragedy Orestes kills Aegisthus to avenge his father's death. The fourth-century comic poet Alexis wrote an *Orestes*, but we do not know whether Aristotle is alluding to the plot of that (or some similar) play or suggesting a hypothetical extreme.

47. *Philoi*: cf. n. 38 and Introduction §7.

48. Both cases of matricide (cf. n. 43).

49. In Euripides' *Medea*, Medea punishes the infidelity of her husband Jason by killing their children.

50. Astydamas was a leading tragic dramatist in the mid fourth century; it is not known how he contrived to keep Alcmeon (cf. 53a20 and n. 43, 53b24) in ignorance of his mother's identity. In *Odysseus Wounded*, a lost play by Sophocles, Telegonus was Odysseus' son by Circe; having never seen his father, he did not recognize him when they fought.

51. One possibility (knowing and not acting) has been overlooked in the foregoing enumeration, although it is included (somewhat dismissively) in the following ranking. It does appear in the Arabic translation (after the reference to Medea at 53b29); but 'third possibility' at 53b34 suggests that this may be a later addition by a reader who has noticed the omission.

52. Sophocles, *Antigone*, 1231–7: the distraught Haemon tries to stab his father Creon, and then in remorse kills himself.

53. The *Cresphontes* is a lost play by Euripides. When Merope's husband was murdered she managed to smuggle their baby son Cresphontes to safety; many years later she tries to kill the stranger who comes to claim the reward for killing Cresphontes, but discovers before it is too late that the stranger is Cresphontes himself, returning in disguise to avenge his father's death.

54. See the summary of the story at 55b3–12.

55. Nothing is known of this play; and while Helle's family (including Athamas, Phrixus and Ino) was fertile in tragic events, none of the attested stories corresponds to the incident Aristotle describes here.

56. In chapter 13 (53a18–22).

57. For Aristotle's views on whether and in what sense slaves and women can be 'good' cf. especially *Politics*, 1.13 (1259b18–60b24).

58. The character should display the right kind of goodness; a good woman should be courageous, but not in the same way as a man (cf. *Politics*, 1260a20–24, 1277b20–25; 'a man would be regarded as a coward if he were courageous in the same way that a woman is courageous'). 'Cleverness' looks forward to the example of Melanippe below (54a31 and n. 62).

59. The reference is obscure; Aristotle probably means 'like us' (the pre-condition of fear at 53a4–6, and cf. 48a4–14). See Introduction §9.

60. In Euripides' *Orestes* Menelaus' failure to support his nephew Orestes violates the obligations owed to a *philos* (see Introduction §7); the example recurs at 61b21.

61. A dithyramb (also mentioned at 61b32) by Timotheus (48a15 and n. 9) which portrayed Odysseus lamenting the loss of his comrades, eaten by the monster Scylla (cf. *Odyssey*, 12.234–59).

62. The reference is to Euripides' lost *Melanippe the Wise*. Melanippe gave birth to twins by the god Poseidon, and exposed them; when the babies were found being suckled by a cow Melanippe's father, assuming that the cow had given birth to them, decided to have them destroyed as unnatural monsters. Melanippe tried to prevent this by arguing that the cow could not have given birth to human children; her speech included advanced cosmo-logical and theological arguments, thus displaying a cleverness inappropriate in a woman (cf. n. 58).

63. In Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Aulis* Iphigeneia's first reaction on learning that she is to be sacrificed to Artemis to secure the Greek army's passage to Troy is to plead for her life (1211–52); but later she patriotically embraces her fate (1368–1401).

64. 'Resolution' is defined in chapter 18 (55b24–32); cf. 56a9f. for poor technique in resolutions. 'Theatrical device' renders *mēkhanē*; literally, this was a crane used in the Greek theatre for the appearance of a god who might conclude the play by outlining subsequent events or (less appropri-ately, in Aristotle's view) by imposing an arbitrary resolution on the plot. The two examples are Euripides' *Medea*, in which Medea's escape from Corinth after the killing of her children (see 53b29 and n. 49) is contrived by

means of a supernatural chariot, and *Iliad*, 2.109–210, where Agamemnon proposes abandoning the siege of Troy in an oblique attempt to stimulate the army's fighting spirit; but the army, taking the proposal at face value, accepts it with enthusiasm, and the goddess Athene has to intervene to resolve the crisis which ensues.

65. Referring to Oedipus' ignorance of the circumstances of Laius' death (see 60a30).

66. The text of this sentence is uncertain.

67. No one knows what this paragraph means. By 'published works' Aristotle presumably means his *On Poets*.

68. The 'earth-born' were the men who sprang from the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus; their descendants had a birth-mark in the shape of a spearhead. In one version of the story, Creon recognized Maeon, son of Haemon and Antigone, by this mark; but we do not know the source of the line which Aristotle quotes.

69. Carcinus was a tragic poet of the early fourth century (cf. 55a26–9). We do not know anything about the plot of this play; for Thyestes see 53a21 (n. 43); the star-shaped birthmark was a characteristic of his family (the descendants of Pelops).

70. Tyro set her twin sons by Poseidon adrift in a small boat; in Sophocles' (lost) *Tyro* the boat served as a recognition-token.

71. In the bath-scene (*Odyssey*, 19.386–475; cf. 60a25f. and n.122) the Nurse penetrates Odysseus' disguise when she observes his scar (cf. 51a26 and n. 29). This is an unplanned consequence of Odysseus' own request (19.343–8) that his feet be washed by one of the older female servants, and is thus linked to a reversal. But in *Odyssey*, 21.188–224 Odysseus simply declares his identity to the herdsmen Eumaeus and Philoetius, and shows them the scar by way of confirmation.

72. In Euripides' *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (see 52b6–8 and n. 39) Iphigeneia's identity is revealed when she asks one of the two strangers to deliver a message addressed to her brother Orestes (769–94); Orestes then declares himself, confirming his identity by displaying knowledge of their home (808–26). Aristotle's point is that he could equally well have brought some physical recognition-token with him.

73. Tereus was married to Procne, and raped her sister Philomela. To keep his crime secret he cut out her tongue, but she wove a tapestry showing what had happened; this picture was the 'voice of the shuttle'.

74. Dicaeogenes was a late fifth-century tragedian; nothing is known of his

Cyprians. In *Odyssey*, 8.485–586 Odysseus weeps on hearing a song about the fall of Troy; this prompts his host Alcinous to enquire about his identity, and Odysseus's reply (*Odyssey*, 9–12) is the tale told to Alcinous.

75. In Aeschylus' *Choephori*, 166–211 Electra finds a lock of hair and a footprint at her father's tomb, and infers Orestes' presence from their similarity to her own. Despite this example, Aristotle is not thinking primarily of recognition through reasoning from signs, but (as the following examples make clearer) situations in which one character's reasoning discloses his or her identity to another. As with recognition through memory, a character's spontaneous response to the situation provides a clue by means of which their identity can be inferred.

76. Nothing more is known of Polyidus; his suggestion is mentioned again at 55b1of. For Theodectes cf. 52a27–9 (n. 37), 55b29–32 (n. 82); nothing more is known about his *Tydeus*. The *Sons of Phineus* is also unknown.

77. Unknown. Aristotle's account is very cryptic. Presumably Odysseus on his homecoming concealed his identity by bringing a false report of his own death; the audience is led to expect him to establish his identity by stringing the bow (which no one but Odysseus could do), but instead he is accepted simply because he recognizes the bow (which anyone who had seen or heard a report of it might do). For the exploitation of false inference by poets see also 60a18–26.

78. For Carcinus cf. n. 69; we have no further information about the mistake referred to here.

79. To imitate convincingly the poet must be able to project himself into the emotions of the subjects. This is made easier by the versatility of a genius or by the madman's weak grasp on his own identity; more generally, acting out the part with gestures may help. This was evidently a well-established view of a poet's method of work; Aristophanes has fun with it (*Thesmophoriazusae*, 156–8).

80. The universal here seems to be more abstract than in chapter 9. There universality rested on the necessary or probable connection between events; here it designates the barest outline of a story, which only becomes a plot with causally connected events when the outline is turned into episodes. The text of this parenthesis is uncertain.

81. Cf. 55a6–8 (n. 76).

82. Danaus ordered his daughters to kill their husbands; Hypermestra alone disobeyed, sparing her husband Lynceus; she bore his son, presumably keeping him and the child secret. In Theodectes' play the child must have been

found and his parentage revealed; Danaus condemned Lynceus to death but somehow (cf. 52a27–9 and n. 37) this led to a reversal, and it was Danaus who died; Lynceus survived. But the text here is uncertain, and our limited knowledge of the play's plot makes it impossible to reconstruct Aristotle's words with complete confidence.

83. A perplexing statement: there has been no mention of *four* parts of tragedy before now. To add to the confusion, the name of the fourth kind has been lost in the Greek text; the conjectural text translated here makes the passage consistent with the cross-reference at 59b7–9 (another widely accepted conjecture makes the fourth kind the 'tragedy of spectacle'). The examples do little to cast light on Aristotle's meaning.

84. The obscurity of the preceding paragraph casts a shadow over this one as well. Presumably poets with a special talent for the depiction of character were criticized for failing to depict suffering as effectively as poets who specialized in that kind of tragedy, and *vice versa*.

85. For faulty resolutions cf. 54a37–b2.

86. The *Sack of Troy* was the title of an epic poem and of several lost tragedies; Euripides' *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* both deal with events drawn from this larger story. The reference to *Niobe* is perplexing, since there was no epic on that subject; Aristotle perhaps wrote something different, but the text cannot be corrected with any confidence. We do not know what failure of Agathon (cf. n. 31) Aristotle is referring to.

87. The text and interpretation here are uncertain.

88. For Agathon cf. n. 31; and cf.61b15 for the principle stated here.

89. Instead of composing choral lyrics in the traditional way, the poet could simply mark the points at which the chorus should perform and leave it to the producer to choose the songs to be sung in these interludes. In comedy we can observe this being done sporadically by Aristophanes in his later work at the beginning of the fourth century, and consistently by Menander at the end of the fourth century.

90. *Iliad*, 1.1 Protagoras of Abdera was a leading fifth-century sophist.

91. The difference is that animal noises cannot be compounded into syllables.

92. The text is in a hopeless muddle here, and Aristotle's definitions of connective and conjunction cannot be restored with any confidence. The reconstruction adopted here counts as 'connectives' (a) the particles, much used in Greek, which convey a nuance (e.g. adding emphasis, or highlighting an antithesis) without changing the structure of the utterance, and (b)

prepositions which link significant words together ('stab *in* the dark'), and possibly also co-ordinating conjunctions ('fog *and* confusion'); Aristotle's 'conjunctions' are then words which signal the articulation of complex utterances ('*since* the text is obscure, we can only guess', 'we must do *what* we can').

93. Aristotle's term applies to any signifying word which does not express tense, including adjectives and pronouns. But in the discussion of style in chapter 22, where verbs are also included, the term has reverted to its broader non-technical sense, 'word'.

94. The element -*dorus* derives from the word for 'gift'.

95. For example, 'outcome' contains a non-signifying element (the connective 'out': 57a6–10), while 'homecoming' comprises two significant elements; but in both cases it is the whole compound word which we treat as significant, not its separate components (cf. 57a12–14).

96. The Hermus, Caïcus and Xanthus are all rivers in the region of Phocaea, the city from which Marseilles was originally founded; the less extravagant compound Hermocaïcus is attested as a personal name at one of the colonies of Marseilles. The text here is uncertain.

97. *Oydssey*, 1.185.

98. *Iliad*, 2.272.

99. Empedocles fragments 138 and 143; the first quotation refers to a man being killed with a bronze weapon, the second to water being drawn off in a bronze bowl or bucket.

100. Timotheus fragment 21 Page (*PMG* 797).

101. Empedocles fragment 152; but the text here is uncertain, and we cannot be sure which phrase is being attributed to Empedocles.

102. Source unknown.

103. The discussion of ornamental nouns has dropped out of the Greek text; Aristotle has in mind the poetic use of epithets (as in '*rosy-fingered* dawn').

104. The source of 'sproutages' is unknown; 'invocator' (*arêtêr*) is Homeric.

105. All these examples are epic forms: *Pêlêiadeô* occurs in the first line of the *Iliad*. The quotation illustrating *ops* is Empedocles fragment 88.

106. *Iliad*, 5.393; Homer uses a comparative (*dexiteros*) in place of the standard *dexios*.

107. In Greek *ps* and *ks* are each written with a single letter. Different letters are used for the long and short forms of the vowels *e* and *o*; the other vowels have a single letter for both forms.

108. For Cleophon cf. 48a12 (n.8). Sthenelus was a tragic poet of the fifth

century; his style was mocked by Aristophanes (fragment 158 Kassel-Austin).

109. This riddle describes a doctor applying a heated bronze cup to a wound to draw blood; the cup would be kept in place by suction as it cooled.

110. Eucleides is unknown. The two quotations grotesquely exaggerate a metrical freedom found in epic poetry. Epichares was an Athenian politician at the end of the fifth century; hellebore was used in the treatment of insanity.

111. Aeschylus fragment 253; Euripides fragment 792.

112. These three examples are from the *Odyssey* (9.515, 20.259) and *Iliad* (17.265).

113. Nothing is known of Ariphrades. I have omitted one more than normally untranslatable example from the foregoing list of poetic usages.

114. Cf. 49a24–8 (n. 18), 59b34–8.

115. The victories over the Persians at Salamis and over the Carthaginians at Himera in Sicily were said to have happened on the same day (Herodotus, *Histories* 7.166). For the contrast between poetry and history cf. chapter 9 (51a38–b7).

116. *Iliad*, 2.484–779; the catalogue relates to the beginning of the war rather than its tenth year, in which the *Iliad* is set.

117. The *Cypria* recounted the antecedents of the Trojan War; the *Little Iliad* took up the story from the end of the *Iliad*.

118. Cf. 55b32–56a3 and n. 83.

119. That is, three tragedies, amounting to 4,000–5,000 lines; by contrast, the *Iliad* is over 15,000 lines long and the *Odyssey* over 12,000.

120. Cf. 47b21f. (n. 5).

121. See *Iliad*, 22.131–207, cited again at 60b26. Cf. 55a22–9 for the care that dramatists have to take over what is seen on stage.

122. Cf. 54b26–30 (n. 71), and compare the discussion of false inference at 55a12–16. If the stranger is Odysseus, he will have a scar; but his having a scar does not (as the Nurse assumes) entail that he is Odysseus. Some think the reference is to the way the disguised Odysseus deceives Penelope just before the bath-scene (*Odyssey*, 19.213–60): if the stranger saw Odysseus, he will be able to describe him; but his ability to describe Odysseus does not entail that he saw him.

123. Cf. 54b7f.

124. Sophocles, *Electra*, 680–763 is a false report of Orestes' death in a chariot race at the Pythian games; the irrationality in question is an anachronism

(since the Pythian games were founded much later). Aeschylus and Sophocles both wrote a play entitled *Mysians*, concerned with Telephus; because of the blood-guilt incurred by the killing of his uncle (53a21 and n. 43), he could speak to no one in the course of his lengthy journey.

125. The text and interpretation are uncertain.

126. In *Odyssey*, 13.116–25 the Phaeacians put the sleeping Odysseus ashore in Ithaca without his waking up. This implausible eventuality is contrived to enhance his homecoming (it makes possible the striking scene in which Odysseus is at first uncertain where he is, and then learns from Athene that he has arrived home); Homer distracts us from the implausibility by (for example) switching our attention to a discussion between Zeus and Poseidon.

127. The text in this paragraph is damaged, and Aristotle's argument cannot be reconstructed with complete certainty.

128. Cf. 60a14–17 (n. 121).

129. Xenophanes, a poet and philosopher active in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, was critical of anthropomorphic theology, and objected strongly to the immoralities of the gods as portrayed in poetry. Compare the arguments in Plato, *Republic*, 2 (377d–383c).

130. *Iliad*, 10.152f. The objection is to an unfamiliar way of keeping spears at the ready.

131. *Iliad*, 1.50. The objection is to the triviality of the god Apollo paying attention to animals when he inflicts a plague on the Greek army; Aristotle's solution turns on a similarity between Greek words for 'mule' (*oureus*) and 'sentinel' (*ouros*).

132. *Iliad*, 10.316. The objection arises because Homer also describes Dolon as 'fleet of foot'.

133. *Iliad*, 9.203. Greeks drank wine diluted; Achilles' instruction seems to turn a serious meeting into a drunken party.

134. Aristotle means to quote *Iliad*, 10.1f. (the wording of which is slightly different in our manuscripts of Homer). How can everyone have been asleep if Zeus heard music (*Iliad*, 10.11–13)?

135. *Iliad*, 18.489, *Odyssey*, 5.275. Taken literally, Homer states that the Bear is the only constellation which never sets ('alone with no share of the baths of Ocean'); this is false, but the Bear is the best-known of those constellations which never set.

136. Hippias is unknown (this is not the famous sophist, Hippias of Elis). In *Iliad*, 2.15 Hippias changes the accent to make 'we grant' into the imperative 'grant'; this avoids attributing a lie directly to Zeus. (In our manuscripts

of Homer the phrase in question occurs at 21.297 but not at 2.15, where the reading is 'sorrow is in store for the Trojans'.) In *Iliad*, 23.328 a different reading of the letters gives 'not rotted' instead of 'rotted'.

137. Empedocles (see 47b18 and n. 4) fragment 35.14f. Were the things 'unmixed formerly' or 'formerly mixed'?

138. *Iliad*, 10.252; the line may mean the majority of the night, i.e two-thirds, or more than two-thirds – which in context creates a contradiction.

139. The examples are from *Iliad*, 21.592 (the 'tin' armour must be an alloy of tin, which can be called 'tin' in the same way that diluted wine is called 'wine') and *Iliad*, 20.234 (Ganymede poured nectar for the gods).

140. *Iliad*, 20.272. A spear penetrates two layers of bronze, and is stopped by a layer of gold; but the gold (being for display) would be the outer layer.

141. Glaucon is unknown. The text here is uncertain, and it may be wrong to connect Glaucon to what follows.

142. If it is assumed that Penelope's father Icarius was a Spartan, it is odd that his grandson Telemachus does not meet him when he visits Sparta in *Odyssey*, 4; but the *Odyssey* does not say that he was a Spartan.

143. For Zeuxis cf. 50a26–8 (n. 25). The text of this sentence is uncertain.

144. Compare the remark attributed to Agathon at 56a23–5 (n. 88).

145. For example, Aristotle says that the best kind of tragic plot is 'complex rather than simple' (52b31f.) and that it is 'simple' (53a12f.); but 'simple' refers in one case to the structure of the plot and in the other to its outcome (n.42), so there is no contradiction.

146. In Euripides' *Medea*, 663 Aegeus' arrival has no necessary or probable connection with what precedes it; it is a coincidence, contrived to furnish Medea with an offer of asylum. For Menelaus' wickedness cf. 54a28f. (n. 60).

147. At first sight there seem to be at least thirteen. The approach adopted above (treating non-standard words and metaphors as variants of a single solution based on the kinds of departure from current usage listed in chapter 21) is perhaps the least arbitrary of the many that have been proposed.

148. For Timotheus' *Scylla* cf. 54a30f. (n. 61).

149. Mynniscus performed in Aeschylus' later plays (in the 460s) and was still active in 422 BC, when he won the actors' competition; Callippides (mentioned again at 62a9–11; cf. Xenophon, *Symposium*, 3.11) won a prize in 418 BC. Nothing is known about Pindarus.

150. Sosistratus and Mnasitheus are unknown.

151. For Callippides cf. 61b34–6 (n. 149). The objection is that his style of

acting robbed female roles of the restraint and self-control to be looked for in respectable women.

152. See 59b31–60a5 for the association between the dactylic hexameter and extended narration. A unified plot must subsume a lot of actions to achieve the length appropriate to heroic verse (cf. 56a10–19); even Homer's poetry, which is excellently constructed (59a30–37), is diluted as a result of this, so *a fortiori* other inferior epics will be open to the same criticism.