

Translation

Ch. 1

To discuss the art of poetry in general, as well as the potential of each of its types; to explain the unity of plot required for successful poetic composition; also to analyse the number and nature of the component parts of poetry; and to deal similarly with the other questions which belong to this same method of enquiry – these are my proposed topics, beginning in the natural way from first principles.

Now, epic and tragic poetry, as well as comedy and dithyramb (and most music for the pipe or lyre), are all, taken as a whole, kinds of mimesis. But they differ from one another in three respects: namely, in the *media* or the *objects* or the *mode* of mimesis. For just as there are people who produce mimetic images of many things in the media of colours and shapes (some relying on a skilled art, some on practice), and others who use the medium of the voice, so in the case of all the arts mentioned above mimesis is effected in the media of rhythm, language and melody.

But these can be employed separately or in combination, as follows:

- (a) the arts of the pipe and lyre (and any other arts with a similar potential, such as that of the pan-pipes) use melody and rhythm alone;
- (b) the art of dancing presents mimesis in the medium of rhythm without melody (for dancers, through the rhythms which shape their movements, engage in the mimesis of character, emotions and actions);
- (c) *the art which employs language alone, or language in metrical form (whether in a combination of metres or just one kind), is still without a name. For we have no common name for the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus and

Socratic dialogues, nor for any mimetic work which might be written in iambic trimeters or elegiac couplets or something else of this kind. It is of course true that people attach the verbal idea of 'poetry' (*poiein*) to the name of the metre, and so call these writers 'elegiac poets' (*elegopoioi*), 'epic poets' (*epopoioi*), and so on; but the categories refer not to their status as poets in virtue of mimesis, but to the metre they have in common: since, if a work of medicine or natural philosophy is written in metre, people still use these same descriptions. But Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except their metre; and so, while one must call the former a poet, the latter should be called a natural philosopher rather than a poet. A corollary is that even if someone should produce a mimesis in a mixture of all the metres (as Chairemon did in his mixed rhapsody, *Centaur*), he too must be called a poet. So let distinctions of these kinds be drawn in these matters.

- (d) Finally, there are some poetic arts which employ all the stated media (that is, rhythm, melody and metre), such as dithyramb, nome, tragedy and comedy: they differ, though, in that some use all throughout, some only in parts. These, then, are the distinctions between the arts as regards the media of their mimesis.

Ch. 2

Since mimetic artists portray people in action, and since these people must be either good or bad (for men's characters practically always conform to these categories alone*), they can portray people better than ourselves, worse than ourselves, or on the same level. The same is true in painting: Polygnotus portrayed men who are superior, Pauson worse, and Dionysius on the same level. And it is evident that each of the stated types of mimesis will exhibit these differences, and will thus be distinguishable according to the variations in the objects which it represents. For such differences are possible in dancing, and in music for the pipe and lyre, as well as in the arts which use language alone or language in metre: for instance, Homer represented superior men, Cleophon men like us, Hegemon of Thasos (the first writer of parodies) and Nicochares (author of the *Deiliad*) inferior men. The same principle applies in

dithyramb and the nome, *as one sees ... and from the possibility of portraying the Cyclopes in the manner of Timotheus and Philoxenus. This very distinction also separates tragedy from comedy: the latter tends to represent men worse than present humanity, the former better.

Ch. 3

Beside the two already cited, there is a third distinction: namely, the mode in which the various objects are represented. For it is possible to use the same media to offer a mimesis of the same objects in any one of three ways: first, by alternation between narrative and dramatic impersonation (as in Homeric poetry); second, by employing the voice of narrative without variation; third, by a wholly dramatic presentation of the agents.

So then, as indicated at the outset, mimesis can be distinguished in these three respects: by its *media*, its *objects*, and its *modes*. Consequently, in one respect Sophocles uses the same mimesis as Homer, for in both cases the objects are good men; while in another respect, Sophocles and Aristophanes are parallel, since both use the mimetic mode of dramatic enactment.

It is because of this that some people derive the term *drama* itself from the enactive mimesis of agents (*drôntas*). And for this reason, the Dorians even lay claim to both tragedy and comedy: in the case of the latter, the Megarians here on the mainland claim that it was invented during their democratic period, while the Megarians in Sicily think it theirs because the poet Epicharmus, who greatly predated the Athenians Chionides and Magnes, came from there; and as for comedy, some of the Dorians in the Peloponnese lay claim to it. The Dorians regard the terminology as evidence, since they assert that their own name for rural districts is *kômai*, while the Athenians call them 'demes'; and they suppose that the name for comic actors, *kômôdoi*, was derived not from revelling (*kômazein*) but from the fact that, when barred as unrespectable from the town, they toured through the villages (*kômai*). Similarly, the Dorians say that their verb for activity is *dran*, while the Athenians use *prattein*.

So then, let these remarks suffice to cover the number and nature of the mimetic distinctions.

Ch. 4

Poetry in general can be seen to owe its existence to two causes, and these are rooted in nature. First, there is man's natural propensity, from childhood onwards, to engage in mimetic activity (and this distinguishes man from other creatures, that he is thoroughly mimetic and through mimesis takes his first steps in understanding). Second, there is the pleasure which all men take in mimetic objects.

An indication of the latter can be observed in practice: for we take pleasure in contemplating the most precise images of things whose sight in itself causes us pain – such as the appearance of the basest animals, or of corpses. Here too the explanation lies in the fact that great pleasure is derived from exercising the understanding, not just for philosophers but in the same way for all men, though their capacity for it may be limited. It is for this reason that men enjoy looking at images, because what happens is that, as they contemplate them, they apply their understanding and reasoning to each element (identifying this as an image of such-and-such a man, for instance). Since, if it happens that one has no previous familiarity with the sight, then the object will not give pleasure *qua* mimetic object but because of its craftsmanship, or colour, or for some other such reason.

Given, then, that mimetic activity comes naturally to us – together with melody and rhythm (for it is evident that metres are species of rhythm) – it was originally those with a special natural capacity who, through a slow and gradual process, brought poetry into being by their improvisations. And poetry was split into two types according to the poets' own characters: the more dignified made noble actions and noble agents the object of their mimesis; while lighter poets took the actions of base men and began by composing invectives, just as the other group produced hymns and encomia. Now, we cannot cite an invective by any individual poet before Homer's time, though it is likely there were many such poets; their known history starts with Homer, with his *Margites* and other such works. It was appropriate that in these works the iambic metre came to find its place – and this is why it is called 'iambic' now, because it was in

this metre that they abused one another (in the manner called *iambizein*).

Of the old poets, some composed in epic hexameters, others in iambs. Just as Homer was the supreme poet of serious subjects (for he was unique both in the quality and in the *dramatic* nature of his poetry), similarly he was the first to reveal the form of comedy, by producing dramatic poetry which dealt not with invective but with the ridiculous. For the *Margites* stands in the same relation to later comedies as do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tragedies. And when the possibility of tragedy and comedy had been glimpsed, men aspired to either type of poetry according to their personal capacities; so some became poets of comedy instead of iambic verses, while others abandoned epic for tragedy, because the latter's forms were greater than, and superior to, epic's.

To consider whether tragedy is by now sufficiently developed in its types – judging it both in itself and in relation to audiences – is a separate matter. At any rate, having come into being from an improvisational origin (which is true of both tragedy and comedy, the first starting from the leaders of the dithyramb, the second from the leaders of the phallic songs which are still customary in many cities), tragedy was gradually enhanced as poets made progress with the potential which they could see in the genre. And when it had gone through many changes, tragedy ceased to evolve, since it had attained its natural fulfilment.

It was Aeschylus who first increased the number of actors from one to two, reduced the choral parts, and gave speech the leading role; the third actor and scene-painting came with Sophocles. A further aspect of change concerns scale: after a period of slight plots and humorous diction, it was only at a late stage that tragedy attained dignity by departing from the style of satyr-plays, and that the iambic metre replaced the trochaic tetrameter. To begin with, poets used the tetrameter because the poetry had more of the tone of a satyr-play and of dance; and it was only when speech was brought in that the nature of the genre found its appropriate metre (the iambic is the most colloquial of metres, as we see from the fact that we frequently produce the rhythm of iambic lines in our conversation, while we rarely produce hexameters and only by departing from the register of ordinary speech).

There were further developments concerning the number of

episodes, and we shall take as read the other particular elaborations which are said to have been effected, since it would be a large task to give a thorough account of every detail.

Ch. 5

Comedy, as I earlier said, is a mimesis of men who are inferior, but not in a way which involves complete evil: the comic is one species of the shameful. For the comic is constituted by a fault and a mark of shame, but lacking in pain or destruction: to take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and misshapen, but does not express pain. Now, while the stages of tragedy's development, and those responsible for them, have been preserved, comedy's have not been, because it was not originally given serious attention: the archon first granted a comic chorus at quite a late date; before that, the performers were volunteers. The first recorded comic poets belong to the era when the genre already possessed some established forms. We are simply ignorant about such matters as who invented masks, or introduced prologues, or increased the number of actors, and other such details. But as for the use of poetic plot-structures, that originally came from Sicily; and of Athenian poets Crates was the first to abandon the iambic concept and to compose generalised stories and plots.

Epic conforms with tragedy insofar as it is a mimesis, in spoken metre, of ethically serious subjects; but it differs by virtue of using *only* spoken verse and of being in the narrative mode. There is also a difference of scale: whereas tragedy strives as far as possible to limit itself to a single day, epic is distinctive by its lack of a temporal limit, although in the early days poets of tragedy were as free in this respect as those of epic. The parts of epic are all common to tragedy, but the latter has some peculiar to itself. Consequently, whoever knows the difference between a good and a bad tragedy knows the same for epic too; for epic's attributes all belong to tragedy as well, though not all of tragedy's are shared by epic.

Ch. 6

I shall discuss epic mimesis and comedy later. But let us deal with tragedy by taking up the definition of its essential nature

which arises out of what has so far been said.

Tragedy, then, is a representation of an action which is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude – in language which is garnished in various forms in its different parts – in the mode of dramatic enactment, not narrative – and through the arousal of pity and fear effecting the *katharsis* of such emotions.

By 'garnished' language I mean with rhythm and melody; and by the 'various forms' I mean that some parts use spoken metre, and others use lyric song. Since the mimesis is enacted by agents, we can deduce that one element of tragedy must be the adornment of visual spectacle, while others are lyric poetry and verbal style, for it is in these that the mimesis is presented. By 'style' I mean the composition of the spoken metres; the meaning of 'lyric poetry' is entirely evident.

Since tragedy is a representation of an action, and is enacted by agents, who must be characterised in both their character and their thought (for it is through these that we can also judge the qualities of their actions, and it is in their actions that all men either succeed or fail), we have the plot-structure as the mimesis of the action (for by this term 'plot-structure' I mean the organisation of the events) while characterisation is what allows us to judge the nature of the agents, and 'thought' represents the parts in which by their speech they put forward arguments or make statements.

So then, tragedy as a whole must have six elements which make it what it is: they are plot-structure, character, style, thought, spectacle, lyric poetry. Two of these are the media, one the mode, and three the objects, of the mimesis – and that embraces everything. *Many poets have exploited these parts in order to produce certain types of play [...].

The most important of these elements is the structure of events, because tragedy is a representation not of people as such but of actions and life, *and both happiness and unhappiness rest on action. The goal is a certain activity, not a qualitative state; and while men do have certain qualities by virtue of their character, it is in their actions that they achieve, or fail to achieve, happiness. It is not, therefore, the function of the agents' actions to allow the portrayal of their characters; it is, rather, for the sake of their actions that characterisation is included. So, the events and the plot-structure are the goal of tragedy, and the goal is what matters most of all.

Besides, without action you would not have a tragedy, but one without character would be feasible, for the tragedies of most recent poets are lacking in characterisation, and in general there are many such poets. Compare, among painters, the difference between Zeuxis and Polygnotus: while Polygnotus is a fine portrayer of character, Zeuxis' art has no characterisation. Furthermore, if a poet strings together speeches to illustrate character, even allowing he composes them well in style and thought, he will not achieve the stated aim of tragedy. Much more effective will be a play with a plot and structure of events, even if it is deficient in style and thought.

In addition to these considerations, tragedy's greatest means of emotional power are components of the plot-structure: namely, reversals and recognitions. Moreover, it is symptomatic that poetic novices can achieve precision in style and characterisation before they acquire it in plot-construction – as was the case with virtually all the early poets. And so, the plot-structure is the first principle and, so to speak, the soul of tragedy, while characterisation is the element of second importance. (An analogous point holds for painting: a random distribution of the most attractive colours would never yield as much pleasure as a definite image without colour.) Tragedy is a mimesis of action, and only for the sake of this is it mimesis of the agents themselves.

Third in importance is thought: this is the capacity to produce pertinent and appropriate arguments, which is the task in prose speeches of the arts of politics and rhetoric. The older poets used to make their characters speak in a political vein, whereas modern poets do so in a rhetorical vein. Character is the element which reveals the nature of a moral choice, in cases where it is not anyway clear what a person is choosing or avoiding (and so speeches in which the speaker chooses or avoids nothing at all do not possess character); while thought arises in passages where people show that something is or is not the case, or present some universal proposition.

The fourth element is style: as previously said, I mean by this term the verbal expression achieved through the choice of words, which has the same force whether in verse or in prose. Of the remaining elements, lyric poetry is the most important of garnishings, while spectacle is emotionally powerful but is the least integral of all to the poet's art: for the potential of tragedy

does not depend upon public performance and actors; and, besides, the art of the mask-maker carries more weight than the poet's as regards the elaboration of visual effects.

Ch. 7

Given these definitions, my next topic is to prescribe the form which the structure of events ought to take, since this is the first and foremost component of tragedy. We have already laid down that tragedy is a representation of an action which is complete, whole and of a certain magnitude (for something can be whole but of no magnitude).

By 'whole' I mean possessing a beginning, middle and end. By 'beginning' I mean that which does not have a necessary connection with a preceding event, but which can itself give rise naturally to some further fact or occurrence. An 'end', by contrast, is something which naturally occurs after a preceding event, whether by necessity or as a general rule, but need not be followed by anything else. The 'middle' involves causal connections with both what precedes and what ensues. Consequently, well designed plot-structures ought not to begin or finish at arbitrary points, but to follow the principles indicated.

Moreover, any beautiful object, whether a living creature or any other structure of parts, must possess not only ordered arrangement but also an appropriate scale (for beauty is grounded in both size and order). A creature could not be beautiful if it is either too small – for perception of it is practically instantaneous and so cannot be experienced – or too great, for contemplation of it cannot be a single experience, and it is not possible to derive a sense of unity and wholeness from our perception of it (imagine an animal a thousand miles long). Just, therefore, as a beautiful body or creature must have some size, but one which allows it to be perceived all together, so plot-structures should be of a length which can be easily held in the memory.

An artistic definition of length cannot be related to dramatic competitions and the spectators' concentration. For if a hundred tragedies had to compete, they would measure them by the water-clock (as people say they once did). The limit which accords with the true nature of the matter is this: beauty of size

favours as large a structure as possible, provided that coherence is maintained. A concise definition is to say that the sufficient limit of a poem's scale is the scope required for a probable or necessary succession of events which produce a transformation either from affliction to prosperity, or the reverse.

Ch. 8

A plot-structure does not possess unity (as some believe) by virtue of centring on an individual. For just as a particular thing may have many random properties, some of which do not combine to make a single entity, so a particular character may perform many actions which do not yield a single 'action'. Consequently, all those poets who have written a *Heracleid* or *Theseid*, or the like, are evidently at fault: they believe that because Heracles was a single individual, a plot-structure about him ought thereby to have unity. As in other respects, Homer is exceptional by the fineness of his insight into this point, whether we regard this as an acquired ability or a natural endowment of his: although composing an *Odyssey*, he did not include everything that happened to the hero (such as his wounding on Parnassus or his pretence of madness at the levy – events which involved no necessary or probable connection with one another). Instead, he constructed the *Odyssey* around a single action of the kind I mean, and likewise with the *Iliad*.

So then, just as in the other mimetic arts a unitary mimesis is a representation of a unitary object, so the plot-structure, as the mimesis of action, should be a representation of a unitary and complete action; and its parts, consisting of the events, should be so constructed that the displacement or removal of any one of them will disturb and disjoint the work's wholeness. For anything whose presence or absence has no clear effect cannot be counted an integral part of the whole.

Ch. 9

It is a further clear implication of what has been said that the poet's task is to speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which *could* occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity. For it is not the use or absence of metre which distinguishes poet and historian (one

could put Herodotus' work into verse, but it would be no less a sort of history with it than without it): the difference lies in the fact that the one speaks of events which have occurred, the other of the sort of events which could occur.

It is for this reason that poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. A 'universal' comprises the *kind* of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain *kind* of character – something which poetry aims at *despite* its addition of particular names. A 'particular', by contrast, is (for example) what Alcibiades did or experienced.

This point has become clear in the case of comedy, where it is only after constructing a plot in terms of probable events that they give the characters ordinary names, so diverging from the iambic poets' practice of writing about individuals. In tragedy, on the other hand, the poets hold to the actual names. (The reason for this is that people are ready to believe in what is possible; and while we may not yet believe in the possibility of things that have not already happened, actual events are evidently possible, otherwise they would not have occurred.) Even so, there are some tragedies in which one or two of the familiar names are kept, while others are due to the poet; and some plays in which all are new, as in Agathon's *Antheus*: for in this play both the events and the names are equally the poet's work, yet the pleasure it gives is just as great. So, fidelity to the traditional plots which are the subject of tragedies is not to be sought at all costs. Indeed, to do this is absurd, since even familiar material is familiar only to a minority, but it can still afford pleasure to all.

It is clear, then, from what has been said that the poet should be a maker of plot-structures rather than of verses, in so far as his status as poet depends on mimesis, and the object of his mimesis is actions. And he is just as much a poet even if the material of his poetry comprises actual events, since there is no reason why *some* historical events should not be in conformity with probability, and it is with respect to probability that the poet can make his poetry from them.

*Of simple plot-structures and actions the worst are episodic. I call an 'episodic' plot-structure one in which the episodes follow in a succession which is neither probable nor necessary. Such plays are produced by bad poets through their own fault, and by

good poets because of their actors: for in composing declamatory set-pieces, and straining the plot-structure to excess, they are often compelled to distort the dramatic sequence.

Since tragic mimesis portrays not just a whole action, but events which are fearful and pitiful, this can best be achieved when things occur contrary to expectation yet still on account of one another. A sense of wonder will be more likely to be aroused in this way than as a result of the arbitrary or fortuitous, since even chance events make the greatest impact of wonder when they *appear* to have a purpose (as in the case where Mitys's statue at Argos fell on Mitys's murderer and killed him, while he was looking at it: such things do not *seem* to happen without reason). So then, plot-structures which embody this principle must be superior.

Ch. 10

Plot-structures can be divided into the simple and the complex, for the actions which they represent consist naturally of these types. By a 'simple' action I mean one which is, as earlier defined, continuous and unitary, but whose transformation occurs without reversal or recognition. A 'complex' action is one whose transformation involves recognition or reversal, or both. Reversal and recognition should arise from the intrinsic structure of the plot, so that what results follows by either necessity or probability from the preceding events: for it makes a great difference whether things happen because of one another, or only *after* one another.

Ch. 11

Reversal, as indicated, is a complete swing in the direction of the action; but this, as we insist, must conform to probability or necessity. Take, for example, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*,¹ where the person comes to bring Oedipus happiness, and intends to free him from his fear about his mother; but he produces the opposite effect, by revealing Oedipus' identity. And in *Lynceus* the one person is led off to die, while Danaus follows to kill him;

¹ OT 924ff.

yet it comes about that the latter's death and the former's rescue result from the chain of events.

Recognition, as the very name shows, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, bringing the characters into either a close bond, or enmity, with one another, and concerning matters which bear on their prosperity or affliction. The finest recognition occurs in direct conjunction with reversal – as with the one in the *Oedipus*. There are, of course, other kinds of recognition, for recognition can relate to inanimate or fortuitous objects, or reveal that someone has, or has not, committed a deed. But the type I have mentioned is the one which is most integral to the plot-structure and its action: for such a combination of recognition and reversal will produce pity or fear (and it is events of this kind that tragedy, on our definition, is a mimesis of), since both affliction and prosperity will hinge on such circumstances. And since recognition involves people, there are cases where one person's recognition by another takes place (when this other's own identity is clear), and cases where the recognition must be reciprocal: for instance, Iphigeneia was recognised by Orestes through the sending of the letter, but another means of recognition was needed for Iphigeneia's identification of *him*.²

Well then, reversal and recognition form two components of the plot-structure; the third is suffering. To the definitions of reversal and recognition already given we can add that of suffering: a destructive or painful action, such as visible deaths, torments, woundings, and other things of the same kind.

Ch. 12

Having earlier given the parts of tragedy which determine its qualities, the quantitative divisions of the genre can be listed as: prologue, episode, *exodos*, choral unit. The latter can be divided into the choral entry (*parodos*) and the choral ode (*stasimon*), which are common to all plays, while actors' songs and lyric exchanges (*kommoi*) are peculiar to only certain plays.

The prologue is the entire portion of a tragedy preceding the choral entry. An episode is an entire portion of a tragedy lying

² Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 727-841.

between complete choral odes. The *exodos* is the entire portion of a tragedy which follows the final choral ode. Of the choral elements, the *parodos* is the first entire choral utterance; a *stasimon* is a choral song in a metre other than anapaestic or trochaic; while a *kommós* is a lamentation shared between chorus and actors.

The parts of tragedy which determine its qualities were given earlier, while those above are the divisions of a quantitative analysis.

Ch. 13

It follows on from my earlier argument that I should define what ought to be aimed at and avoided in plot-construction, as well as the source of tragedy's effect. Since, then, the structure of the finest tragedy should be complex, not simple, and, moreover, should portray fearful and pitiful events (for this is the distinctive feature of this type of mimesis), it is to begin with clear that:

- (a) good men should not be shown passing from prosperity to affliction, for this is neither fearful nor pitiful but repulsive;
- (b) wicked men should not be shown passing from affliction to prosperity, for this is the most untragic of all possible cases and is entirely defective (it is neither moving nor pitiful nor fearful);
- (c) the extremely evil man should not fall from prosperity to affliction, for such a plot-structure might move us, but would not arouse pity or fear, since pity is felt towards one whose affliction is undeserved, fear towards one who is like ourselves (so what happens in such a case will be neither pitiful nor fearful).

We are left, then, with the figure who falls between these types. Such a man is one who is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and one who falls into affliction not because of evil and wickedness, but because of a certain fallibility (*hamartia*). He will belong to the class of those who enjoy great esteem and prosperity, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and outstanding men from such families.

It is imperative that a fine plot-structure be single and not

double (as some assert), and involve a change from prosperity to affliction (rather than the reverse) caused not by wickedness but by a great fallibility on the part of the sort of agent stipulated, or one who is better, not worse, than indicated. Actual practice tends to confirm my thesis. For in the beginning the poets' choice of stories was arbitrary, whereas now the finest tragedies are constructed around a few families – Alcmaeon, for example, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and others who have suffered or committed terrible deeds.

This, then, is the plot-pattern for the tragedy which best fulfils the standards of poetic art. Those who fault Euripides for following this, and for ending many of his plays with affliction, make the same mistake as mentioned above. For such an ending is legitimate, as argued, and the greatest confirmation is that such plays make the most tragic impression in acted competition (provided they are staged effectively), and Euripides, whatever other faults of organisation he may have, at least makes the most tragic impression of all poets.

The second-best pattern (which some hold to be the best) is the kind which involves a double structure (like the *Odyssey*) and contrasting outcomes for good and bad characters. It is the weakness of audiences which produces the view of this type's superiority; poets are led to give the spectators what they want. But this is not the proper pleasure to be derived from tragedy – more like that of comedy: for in that genre people who are outright foes in the plot (say, Orestes and Aegisthus) go off as friends at the end, and nobody is killed.

Ch. 14

The effect of fear and pity can arise from theatrical spectacle, but it can also arise from the intrinsic structure of events, and it is this which matters more and is the task of a superior poet. For the plot-structure ought to be so composed that, even without seeing a performance, anyone who hears the events which occur will experience terror and pity as a result of the outcome; this is what someone would feel while hearing the plot of the *Oedipus*. To produce this effect through spectacle is not part of the poet's art, and calls for material resources; while those who use spectacle to produce an effect not of the fearful but only of the sensational fall quite outside the sphere of tragedy: for it is not

every pleasure, but the appropriate one, which should be sought from tragedy. And since the poet ought to provide the pleasure which derives from pity and fear by means of mimesis, it is evident that this ought to be embodied in the events of the plot.

Let us, then, take up the question of what sort of circumstances make an impression of terror or pity. These are the only possibilities: such actions must involve dealings between those who are bonded by kinship or friendship; or between enemies; or between those who are neither. Well, if enemy faces enemy, neither the deed nor the prospect of it will be pitiful (except for the intrinsic potential of visible suffering); and the same is true of those whose relations are neutral. What must be sought are cases where suffering befalls bonded relations – when brother kills brother (or is about to, or to do something similar), son kills father, mother kills son, or son kills mother. Now, one cannot alter traditional plots (I mean, Clytemnestra's death at Orestes' hands, or Eriphyle's at Alcmaeon's) but the individual poet should find ways of handling even these to good effect.

I should explain more clearly what I mean by 'to good effect'. It is possible

- (a) for the deed to be done with full knowledge and understanding, as the old poets used to arrange it, and in the way that Euripides too made Medea kill her children;
- (b) for the deed to be done, but by agents who do not know the terrible thing they are doing, and who then later recognise their bond-relationship to the other, as with Sophocles' *Oedipus* (that is an instance where the deed occurs outside the drama, but Astydamos' *Alcmaeon*, and Telegonus in *Odysseus Wounded*, supply examples within the play itself);
- (c) alternatively, for one who is on the point of committing an incurable deed in ignorance to come to a recognition before he has done it.

These are the only possibilities, for either the deed is done or it is not, and the agents must either know the facts or be ignorant of them. Of these cases, the worst is where the agent, in full knowledge, is on the point of acting, yet fails to do so: for this is repulsive and untragic (as it lacks suffering). Consequently,

poets only rarely do this (for instance, Haemon's intention against Creon in *Antigone*).¹ Not much better is for the deed to be executed in such a case. A superior arrangement is where the agent acts in ignorance, and discovers the truth after acting: for here there is nothing repulsive, and the recognition produces a powerful effect. But the best case is the last I have listed – for example, where Merope is about to kill her son in the *Cresphontes*, but does not do so because she recognises him; likewise with sister and brother in *Iphigeneia*,² and in the *Helle*, where the son, on the point of handing her over, recognises his mother. Hence, as said before, tragedies concentrate on a few families. Luck not art led poets to find how to achieve such an effect in their plots; so they have to turn to the families in which such sufferings have occurred.

Enough, then, about the structure of events and the required qualities of plots.

Ch. 15

Regarding characterisation, there should be four aims:

- (a) first and foremost, that the characters be good. Characterisation will arise, as earlier explained (ch.6), where speech or action exhibits the nature of an ethical choice; and the character will be good when the choice is good. But this depends on each class of person: there can be a good woman and a good slave, even though perhaps the former is an inferior type, and the latter a wholly base one.
- (b) that the characters be appropriate. For it is *possible* to have a woman manly in character, but it is not appropriate for a woman to be so manly or clever.
- (c) likeness of character – for this is independent of making character good and appropriate, as described.
- (d) consistency of character. For even where an inconsistent person is portrayed, and such a character is presupposed, there should still be consistency in the inconsistency.

An illustration of unnecessary wickedness of character is

¹ Sophocles, *Antigone* 1231ff.

² Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (ch.11, n. 2 above).

Menelaus in *Orestes*;¹ of unbecoming and inappropriate character, the lament of Odysseus in *Scylla*, or Melanippe's speech; and of inconsistency, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (for the girl who beseeches bears no resemblance to the later girl).² In characterisation just as in plot-construction, one should always seek the principle of necessity or probability, so that a necessary or probable reason exists for a particular character's speech or action, and similarly for the sequence of events.

*It is evident that the dénouements of plot-structures should arise from the plot itself, and not, as in *Medea*, from a *deus ex machina*, or in the episode of the departure in the *Iliad*.³ But the *deus ex machina* should be used for events outside the play, whether earlier events of which a human cannot have knowledge, or future events which call for a prospective narrative; for we attribute to the gods a vision of all things. No irrational element should have a part in the events, unless outside the tragedy (as, for example, in Sophocles' *Oedipus*).

Since tragedy is a mimesis of men better than ourselves, the example set by good portrait-painters should be followed: they, while rendering the individual physique realistically, improve on their subjects' beauty. Similarly, the poet, while portraying men who are irascible or lazy or who have other such faults, ought to give them, despite such traits, goodness of character. *An example of this is Homer's presentation of Achilles as good, despite his harshness. *In addition to observing these points, the poet must guard against contraventions of the perceptions which necessarily attach to poetic art, since there are many ways of making mistakes in relation to these. But I have discussed these matters adequately in my published writings.

Ch. 16

I earlier defined the nature of recognition, but of the kinds of recognition there is, firstly, the least artistic and the one which is used most out of inadequacy: recognition through signs. These signs can be either congenital (as with [...] the starred birthmarks used by Carcinus in *Thyestes*) or acquired; and the latter can be subdivided into the physical (e.g. scars) and the external, such as necklaces or the use of the boat in *Tyro*. These

¹ Euripides, *Orestes* 356ff., 1554ff.

² Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 1211ff and 1368ff.

³ Euripides, *Medea* 1317ff; Homer, *Iliad* 2.155ff.

means can be employed either well or badly: for instance, through his scar Odysseus was recognised in different ways by his nurse and by the swineherds.¹ Those recognitions which occur for the sake of confirmation, and all similar sorts, are less artistic; while those which accompany a reversal, like the one in the washing scene of the *Odyssey*,² are superior.

The second kind are those contrived by the poet (and consequently inartistic). An example is the way in which Orestes makes himself known in *Iphigeneia*, for Iphigeneia is recognised through the letter, while Orestes himself says what the poet, but not the plot, requires:³ the result is close to the fault mentioned above, since producing tokens would be equivalent. Another instance is the voice of the shuttle in Sophocles' *Tereus*.

The third kind is recognition through memory. The experience may depend on the sight of something: for example, the case in Dicaeogenes' *Cyprians*, where the person wept on seeing the painting. Or there is the example in Odysseus' speech to Alcinous, where he heard the singer and wept at the memory.⁴ Recognition resulted in both instances.

The fourth kind of recognition results from reasoning: for example, in *Choephoroi* (someone like Electra has come, and there is no one like her other than Orestes, so it is he who has come).⁵ Also the example from Polyidus the sophist's work on Iphigeneia: he said it was plausible for Orestes to reason that he was to be sacrificed just as his sister had been. Another example in Theodectes' *Tydeus*: the character reasons that it is by coming to find his son that he is facing death. And the instance in the *Phineidai*: upon seeing the place, they reasoned that it was their destiny to die there, since it was also the place where they had been exposed.

*It is also possible to make a recognition depend on the audience's false reasoning, as in *Odysseus the False Messenger*: the fact that he alone could bend the bow is a premise contrived by the poet, as is his statement that he would recognise the bow (which he had never seen); and it is false reasoning to suppose that he will reveal himself through this.

The best of all recognitions is the type which arises from the

¹ Homer, *Odyssey* 19.386ff. and 21.205ff.

² *Odyssey* 19.392ff.

³ The same refs. as in ch.11, n.2.

⁴ *Odyssey* 8.521ff.

⁵ Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 168ff.

events themselves, where the emotional impact comes about through a probable sequence of action. There are examples in Sophocles' *Oedipus*, and in *Iphigeneia* (for it is in conformity with probability that she should want to entrust a letter).⁶ Such instances alone avoid contrived tokens.* Next best are those resulting from reasoning.

Ch. 17

A poet ought to imagine his material to the fullest possible extent while composing his plot-structures and elaborating them in language. By seeing them as vividly as possible in this way – as if present at the very occurrence of the events – he is likely to discover what is appropriate, and least likely to miss contradictions. (One can see this from the criticism brought against Carcinus: for Amphiaras was returning from the shrine, but the poet missed the point by not visualising it, and the play failed in the theatre on account of the spectators' annoyance.) So far as possible, the poet should even include gestures in the process of composition: for, assuming the same natural talent, the most convincing effect comes from those who actually put themselves in the emotions; and the truest impression of distress or anger is given by the person who experiences these feelings. Consequently, it is the imaginative man, *rather than the manic, who is the best composer of poetry: since, of these types, the former can mould their emotions, while the latter are carried away.

Whether it exists already or is his own invention, the poet should lay out the general structure of his story, and then proceed to work out episodes and enlarge it. What I mean by contemplating the general structure can be illustrated from *Iphigeneia*. A girl was sacrificed and mysteriously vanished from her sacrificers; she was planted in another land, where strangers were traditionally sacrificed to the goddess whose priesthood the girl came to hold. Subsequently, it happened that the priestess's brother came to the place (the fact that a god's oracle sent him, and the reason for this, are outside the plot). Captured on his arrival, he was on the point of being sacrificed when he caused his own recognition (whether according to Euripides' version, or,

⁶ Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 578ff.

as in Polydus', by saying – as was plausible – that it was his own as well as his sister's destiny to be sacrificed). The upshot was his rescue.

The next stage is to supply names and work out the episodes. But care must be taken to make the episodes integral – as with the fit of madness which occasions Orestes' capture, and his rescue through the purification-rite.¹ Now, in drama the episodes are concise, while epic gains extra length from them. For the main story of the *Odyssey* is short: a man is abroad for many years, is persecuted by Poseidon, and is left desolate; further, circumstances at home mean that his property is consumed by suitors, and his son is a target for conspiracy; but the man survives shipwreck to reach home again, reveals his identity to certain people, and launches an attack – his own safety is restored, and he destroys his enemies. This much is essential; the rest consists of episodes.

Ch. 18

For every tragedy there is a complication and a dénouement: the complication consists of events outside the play, and often some of those within it; the dénouement comprises the remainder. By the 'complication' I mean everything from the beginning as far as the part which immediately precedes the transformation to prosperity or affliction; and by 'dénouement' I mean the section from the start of the transformation to the end. For example, in Theodectes' *Lynceus* the complication covers the earlier events, the seizure of the baby and ..., while the dénouement runs from the accusation of murder up to the end.

There are four kinds of tragedy (*in accordance with the parts earlier enumerated):

- (a) the complex tragedy, the essence of which is reversal and recognition;
- (b) the tragedy of suffering – for example, plays about Ajax or Ixion;
- (c) the tragedy of character – for example, *Phthiotides* and *Peleus*;
- (d) the *simple tragedy, such as *Phorcides*, *Prometheus*, and all works set in Hades.

¹ Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Tauris* 281ff. and 1029ff.

Now, ideally one should strive for all these elements, but, failing that, for the best and for as many of them as possible, especially in view of the criticisms now levelled against poets: since there have been good poets in each category, people expect the individual poet to surpass the particular quality of each.

It is right to contrast and compare tragedies largely in terms of plot-structure; so comparable plays are those with the same kind of complication and dénouement. There are many who contrive the complication well, but handle the dénouement badly: precision is called for in both respects. As noted more than once, the poet must remember to avoid making a tragedy into a quasi-epic structure (by which I mean a multiple plot-structure): which would happen, for example, if one were to dramatise the entire plot of the *Iliad*. The length of this poem allows the various parts to assume an appropriate scale, but in plays the result completely defeats expectations. We can see this from the failure or poor impression of plays by poets who have handled the whole sack of Troy, rather than portions of it (like Euripides); or likewise with the story of Niobe, where they fail to follow Aeschylus' example. This fault accounted even for Agathon's one failure with his audience.

*In the case both of reversals and of simple dramatic actions, poets use wonder to achieve their aim; for the effect gained arouses the tragic emotions as well as humane sympathy. Examples of this are the outwitting of a clever man who is flawed by evil (like Sisyphus), or the worsening of one who is manly but unjust. Such things conform to probability, on Agathon's principle that probability allows for the occurrence of many *improbabilities*.

The chorus too should be handled as one of the actors; it should form an integral part of the whole and should be actively involved – not as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles. The lyrics of other poets have no more connection with their own plot-structure than with any other tragedy. Hence the practice, started by Agathon, of singing interlude-odes. Yet what is the difference between singing interlude-odes and transferring a set-speech, or a whole episode, from one work to another.

Ch. 19

Having discussed the other elements, it remains for me to discuss style and thought. The details of thought can be left to my discourses on rhetoric, since they belong more integrally to that subject. Thought pertains to all those effects which must be produced by the spoken language; its functions are demonstration, refutation, the arousal of emotions such as pity, fear, anger, and such like, and arguing for the importance or unimportance of things. (It is clear that the same basic principles underlie the achievement of effects of pity, terror, importance, probability, in the dramatic events; but the difference is that these must appear without explicit statement, whereas in the spoken language it is the speaker and his words which produce the effect. For what would be the point of a speaker, if the desired effect were evident even without his words?)

In matters of verbal style, one kind of study concerns figures of speech. Knowledge of these (for instance, the difference between a command, a prayer, a narrative, a threat, a question, an answer, and so on) belongs to the art of rhetorical delivery and to anyone with such expertise. For no serious charge can be brought against poetry on the basis of knowledge or ignorance of these matters. Why should anyone follow Protagoras in finding fault with Homer for purporting to address a prayer, but in fact delivering a command, by saying 'Sing, Goddess, of the wrath ...'?¹ According to Protagoras, to enjoin someone to do or avoid something is a command. Let this consideration be left for some other enquiry, not for poetry.

Ch. 20

Verbal style in general can be analysed into the following categories: element, syllable, connective, noun, verb, conjunction, inflection, proposition.

An element is an indivisible sound – not of any kind, but one from which a composite sound can naturally arise. (There are also indivisible animal sounds, none of which do I call an

¹ *Iliad* 1.1.

element.) Its types are: vowels, continuants, and stops. 'Vowel' means an audible sound without any contact of the tongue; 'continuant' an audible sound *with* contact (e.g. *s* and *r*), and 'stop' refers to something which involves contact but does not produce an audible sound on its own, only in conjunction with others which do produce one (examples are *g* and *d*). These sounds are distinguishable by the shape of the mouth, the points of contact, the presence or absence of an aspirate, length and shortness, and pitch-accent (acute, grave, or intermediate): detailed consideration of all these points belongs to works on metre.

A syllable is a non-significant articulate sound, combining a stop and a vowel: *gr*, for example, only makes a syllable with the addition of *a* (*gra*-). But the study of these distinctions too belongs to metric.

A connective is a non-significant sound which neither prevents nor produces a single, semantic utterance from a combination of several sounds; it is usually placed at the end or within, but not at the start, of a proposition: [...]. Alternatively, a non-significant sound which usually produces a single, semantic utterance from a combination of sounds that signify one thing.

*A conjunction is a non-significant sound which marks the beginning, end, or division of a proposition [...]. Alternatively, a non-significant sound which can be placed at various points in a proposition, but which neither prevents nor produces a single semantic utterance from a combination of several sounds.

A noun is a non-temporal compound semantic sound, whose parts do not carry their own meaning: for instance, in the name 'Theodorus' the '-dorus' element lacks meaning.

A verb is a compound semantic sound, whose parts (just as with nouns) do not carry their own meaning, but which does have a temporal sense: for example, 'man' or 'white' has no temporal significance, but 'is walking' or 'has walked' does (present and past time, respectively).

An inflection is the aspect of a noun or verb which signifies (a) differences of case, (b) differences of number ('men' or 'man'), (c) points relevant to oral delivery (e.g. a question, command). 'Did he walk?' and 'Walk!' are instances of the inflection of a verb in these categories.

A proposition is a compound semantic utterance, some of whose parts have their own significance: for example, the name

'Cleon' in 'Cleon is walking'. But not every proposition comprises verbs and nouns (e.g. the definition of man):¹ a proposition can lack a verb, but some part of it will always have its own significance. A proposition can be unitary in either of two ways: by virtue of signifying a single concept; or by virtue of connecting several elements. For example, the *Iliad* is unitary in the latter respect, but the definition of man is unitary because of its single meaning.

Ch. 21

Nouns can be divided into the categories of single (i.e. not made up of significant elements: e.g. 'earth', *gē*) and double. The latter can be subdivided into those which comprise signifying and non-signifying elements (though this does not apply to their status *within* the noun), and those which comprise only signifying elements. One could also add triple, quadruple and polysyllabic words [...].

All nouns can be distributed into the following categories: standard terms, foreign terms, metaphors, ornaments, neologisms, lengthened terms, abbreviated terms, altered terms.

By a 'standard term' I mean one in the usage of a particular group, and by 'foreign term' one borrowed from others; it is consequently obvious that the same word can be both standard and foreign, but not for the same speakers [...].

Metaphor is the transference of a term from one thing to another: whether from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy. Genus to species: e.g. 'My ship stands here' (since being moored is a type of standing). Species to genus: e.g. 'ten thousand noble deeds has Odysseus performed' (for 'ten thousand' is one type of multiplicity and stands here for the latter). Species to species [...].¹

Metaphor 'by analogy' is a case where the relation of *b* to *a* is the same as that of *d* to *c*: the poet will use *d* instead of *b*, or the reverse. Sometimes they add to the metaphor something to which it is related: for instance, the wine-cup is to Dionysus what the shield is to Ares, so the poet will call the wine-cup 'Dionysus' shield' and the shield 'Ares' wine-cup'. Again, old age is to life

¹ Ar. means a verbless phrase such as 'rational animal'.

¹ Ar. here gives two barely intelligible poetic quotations.

what the evening is to the day: so the poet will call evening 'day's old age', or, like Empedocles, call old age 'the evening of life' or 'the dusk of life'. For some analogies there is a missing term, but the metaphor will still be used. For example, scattering seed is 'sowing', while the sun's scattering of fire lacks a name; but the latter parallels the sowing of seed, hence the poet's phrase, 'sowing his divine fire'. It is possible to use this type of metaphor with a difference, by applying the borrowed term but with a denial of one of its attributes: e.g. saying not 'the wine-cup of Ares' but 'his wineless wine-cup'.

A neologism is a term without any currency but invented by the poet himself [...].

A lengthened term is one with a longer vowel than usual, or an additional syllable [...] an abbreviated term is one with something removed [...].

An altered term is one where part of the usual word is kept, and part added [...].

Nouns can also be divided into masculine, feminine and neuter [...].*

Ch. 22

Excellence of style consists in clarity without banality. Now, the greatest clarity comes from the use of standard terms, but this involves banality: examples of this are the poetry of Cleophon and Sthenelus. Grandeur and avoidance of the ordinary, by contrast, can be achieved by the use of alien language (by which I mean foreign terms, metaphor, lengthened terms, and everything which goes beyond the standard). But the result of writing entirely in such a style will be either a riddle or barbarism: where metaphors are involved, it will be a riddle, and where foreign terms, it will be barbarism. For the form of a riddle consists in speaking of realities while attaching impossibilities to them. One cannot do this with other types of language, only with metaphor: for instance, 'I saw a man using fire to weld bronze to a man',¹ and other such things. And the result of foreign words is a barbaric style. So it is some sort of *admixture* of these things which is required: then the ordinary and commonplace will be avoided (by the use of foreign terms, metaphor, ornament, and the other earlier mentioned types), while clarity will be

¹ The riddle refers to a form of the medical procedure known as 'cupping'.

preserved by the standard component.

No small contribution is made to both clarity of style and the avoidance of the ordinary by lengthenings, abbreviations and alterations of words: the divergence from standard and usual usage will produce a heightened effect, but the presence of an element of the customary will ensure clarity. Accordingly, those who criticise this type of speech, and ridicule the poet for it, find fault without good reason – for instance, Eucleides the elder, with his satirical parodies [...] purporting to show how easy it would be to write poetry if one is allowed to lengthen words according to whim. Now, conspicuous exploitation of this device is absurd, and moderation is equally needed in all elements of style: one would produce the same result by employing metaphors, foreign words, and other types inappropriately and for deliberately comic effect. (The importance of appropriateness in epic verses could be seen by introducing such words into the metre.)

Where the foreign term, metaphors, and the other types are concerned, the truth of my argument can be seen by substituting standard words. For example, Aeschylus and Euripides composed the same iambic line with just one word's difference – a foreign term for a standard: so the one verse has beauty, while the other is vulgar. In his *Philoctetes* Aeschylus wrote:

the cancer that eats the flesh of my foot,

but Euripides replaced 'eats' by 'feasts on' [...]. Again, Aeschylus satirised the tragedians for using phrases which no one would ever speak in ordinary discourse [...]. But he failed to realise that it is just because of their absence from ordinary language that all such things produce a heightened effect in poetic diction.

While it is of importance to use each of the mentioned types appropriately, including compound and foreign terms, by far the most important point is facility with metaphor. This alone is a sign of natural ability, and something one can never learn from another: for the successful use of metaphor entails the perception of similarities. Of nouns, double terms are particularly appropriate for dithyramb, foreign terms for epic verse, and metaphors for iambic lines. In epic, all the types I have mentioned have their usefulness, while in iambics, because of the close reproduction of ordinary speech, it is appropriate to

employ what one would also use in prose – namely, standard terms, metaphors and ornaments.

This brings to completion my discussion of tragedy and enacted mimesis.

Ch. 23

As for the narrative art of mimesis in spoken verse, it is evident that its plot-structures should have a dramatic coherence, just as in tragedy, and that they should concern an action which is unitary and complete (with beginning, middle and end), so that, as with a living creature, the single and entire structure may yield the pleasure which belongs to it. The corollary of this is that plots should not resemble histories, in which one need not find the exposition of a unitary action but of all the contingently connected events which happened to one or more persons in a particular period of time. For just as the battle of Salamis and the Sicilian battle against the Carthaginians occurred at the same time, but without contributing to a common end, so events can sometimes succeed one another in time without yielding any particular end.

Yet this is what probably a majority of epic poets do, and, as I earlier said (ch. 8), this is one respect in which Homer's inspired superiority is evident, because of his refusal to attempt to make a poem about the entire war (despite its clear beginning and end): such a plot would be too bulky, and could not be perceived as a unity; or, if moderate in size, would be too intricately detailed. As it is, Homer has selected a unitary portion of the war, and has used many episodes – the catalogue of ships, and others – to expand his poetry. But other poets, such as the authors of the *Cypria* and the *Little Iliad*, compose about an individual or a single period of time, or an action of many parts. Consequently, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* provide material for only one or two tragedies each, while the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad* would yield many [...].*

Ch. 24

Moreover, epic should have the same types as tragedy – the simple, the complex, the character-poem, the poem of suffering. (And epic shares all the same elements, apart from lyrics and

spectacle.) For epic has equal need of reversals, recognitions and scenes of suffering. In addition, excellence of thought and diction is called for. All of which Homer has achieved with supreme perfection. Each of his poems is a unified plot – the *Iliad* in the categories of the 'simple' and the poem of suffering, the *Odyssey* in those of the complex (using recognition throughout) and the poem of character. Furthermore, Homer has excelled all other epics in diction and thought.

Epic differs from tragedy in length of plot-structure and in metre. As for length, a sufficient definition has already been given: it should be possible to perceive the beginning and the end as a unity. This condition would be satisfied by structures which are shorter than the old epics but which match the length of the tragedies given at a single hearing. But the scope for considerable extension of length is a particular attribute of epic's. This is because tragedy will not permit the representation of many simultaneous parts of the action, but only the one on stage involving the actors; while epic, on account of its use of narrative, can include many simultaneous parts, and these, provided they are integral, enhance the poem's dignity. This lends epic an advantage in grandeur, in changes of interest for the hearer, and in variety of episodes (lack of variety soon becomes cloying and causes the rejection of tragedies).

Epic's metre, the hexameter, has been found appropriate by experience. If someone were to compose a narrative mimesis in some other metre, or in a mixture of many, the inappropriateness would be apparent. For the hexameter is the most stately and dignified of metres (hence its special openness to foreign terms and metaphors: narrative mimesis is more out-of-the-ordinary than other kinds), while the iambic trimeter and trochaic tetrameter have a greater sense of movement: the tetrameter suits dancing, the trimeter action. And a mixture of these metres, like Chairemon's, would be even more absurd. Consequently, no one has composed a long epic structure in anything other than the hexameter, but, as I said, nature herself teaches poets to choose what is appropriate for epic.

Among Homer's many other laudable attributes is his grasp – unique among epic poets – of his status as poet. For the poet himself should speak as little as possible, since when he does so he is not engaging in mimesis. Now, other epic poets participate persistently, and engage in mimesis only to a limited extent and

infrequently. But Homer, after a short preamble, at once 'brings onto stage' a man, woman or some other figure (and his agents are always fully characterised).

While the marvellous is called for in tragedy, it is epic which gives greater scope for the irrational (which is the chief cause of the marvellous), because we do not actually see the agents. The circumstances of the pursuit of Hector would be patently absurd if put on the stage, with the men standing and refraining from pursuit, and Achilles forbidding them;¹ but in epic the effect is not noticed. The marvellous gives pleasure: this can be seen from the way in which everyone exaggerates in order to gratify when recounting events.

It is above all Homer who has taught other epic poets the right way to purvey falsehoods. What is involved here is a kind of fallacy: if one thing follows from the existence or occurrence of another, people quite erroneously suppose that, where the second fact obtains, the former also must be true. If, therefore, something is false, but, were it true, something else would necessarily follow from it, the poet ought to add this second fact: because, when it knows that *this* is true, our mind fallaciously infers the existence of the first fact also. There is an instance of this in the *Odyssey's* bath scene.²

Events which are impossible but plausible should be preferred to those which are possible but implausible. Plots should not consist of parts which are irrational. So far as possible, there should be no irrational component; otherwise, it should lie outside the plot-structure, as with Oedipus' ignorance of how Laius died,³ rather than inside the drama, as with the report of the Pythian games in *Electra*,⁴ or with the silent character's arrival at Mysia from Tegea in the *Mysians*. To say that otherwise the plot-structure would be ruined is a ridiculous defence: such plot-construction should be avoided *from the start*. But even absurdity can sometimes be handled more or less reasonably. It would be obvious, if they were handled by an inferior poet, just how intolerable the absurdities regarding the disembarkation in the *Odyssey* could be: as it is, Homer uses his

other virtues to disguise the absurdity and to make it enjoyable.⁵

Verbal style should be used intensively in portions of the poem which are static and involve no characterisation or statement of thought. By contrast, characterisation and thought can be thrown into shade by an excessively brilliant style.

Ch. 25

On the subject of problems and their solutions, a clear idea of the number and types of issue can be gained from the following considerations. Since the poet, like the painter or any other image-maker, is a mimetic artist, he must in any particular instance use mimesis to portray one of three objects: the sort of things which were or are the case; the sort of things men say and think to be the case; the sort of things that should be the case. This material is presented in language which has foreign terms, metaphors, and many special elements; for we allow these to poets.

Furthermore, correct standards in poetry are not identical with those in politics or in any other particular art. Two kinds of failure are possible in poetry – one intrinsic, and the other contingent. *If a poet lacks the capacity to achieve what he sets out to portray, the failure is one of poetic art. But this is not so if the poet *intends* to portray something which is erroneous, such as a horse with its two right legs simultaneously forward, or something which is a technical mistake in medicine or any other field. So, it is from these premises that the solutions to the charges contained in problems must be found.

Firstly, points concerning poetic art itself. Suppose the poet has produced impossibilities, then granted he has erred. But poetic standards will be satisfied, provided he achieves the goal of the art (which has been earlier discussed): that is, if by these means he increases the emotional impact either of the particular part or of some other part of the work. (An example is the pursuit of Hector.)¹ If, however, the goal could be achieved better, or just as successfully, without the particular technical error, then the mistake is not acceptable: for, if possible, poetry should be altogether free of mistakes.

⁵ *Odyssey* 13.116ff.

¹ See n.1 to ch. 24.

¹ Homer, *Iliad* 22.205ff.

² 19.220ff.

³ Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 112-13.

⁴ Sophocles, *Electra* 680ff.

One must also ask whether the error concerns the poetic art or something extrinsic to it. For if, out of ignorance, a painter portrays a female deer *with* horns, this has less significance than attaches to a failure in mimesis.

Next, if the charge is one of falsehood, a possible defence is that things are being portrayed as they *should* be, just as Sophocles said that his poetic characters were as they should be, while Euripides' reflected ordinary reality. If neither category applies, then a solution may appeal to what people say, for instance in matters concerning the gods: as, while it may satisfy neither morality nor truth to say such things (and Xenophanes' criticisms may be justified), nevertheless people *do* say them.

Another possible defence is that something may be imperfect but does represent how things once were. Take the example concerning weapons ('Their spears stood upright on the butt-end');² this used to be the practice at the time, as it still is with the Illyrians. When asking whether someone has spoken or acted morally or otherwise, one should look to see not just if the deed or utterance is good or evil, but also to the identity of the agent or speaker, to the person with whom he deals, and to the occasion, means and purpose of what is done (e.g. whether the aim is to effect a greater good, or prevent a greater evil).

Other points must be resolved by consideration of style, for example by reference to a foreign term [...]. A passage may involve metaphor: for instance, 'All gods and men slept through the night', while in the same passage Homer says 'whenever Agamemnon gazed across to the Trojan plane and the din of flutes and pipes'.³ 'All' stands by metaphor for 'many', since all is a species of many [...]. Accentuation may be relevant, as with the solutions proposed by Hippias of Thasos [...] or punctuation [...] or double meaning [...] or verbal usage [...].

Whenever a word appears to entail a contradiction, one should consider how many meanings are possible in the linguistic context [...]. One should adopt the opposite procedure to the one which Glaucon describes by saying that some people make an unreasonable assumption and proceed to base their argument on acceptance of it; then, if something contradicts their own preconception, they criticise the poet as though *he* had made the

² Homer, *Iliad* 10.152.

³ *Iliad* 10.1-2 and 11-13 (both quotations garbled).

initial assumption. This has happened in the case of Icarius: people presuppose that he was a Laconian, so they find it absurd that Telemachus did not meet him when he went to Sparta.⁴ But perhaps the Cephallenians' version is correct, for they claim that Odysseus married one of theirs, and that the father was called Icadius not Icarius. It is plausible that the problem is due to a mistake.

In general, cases of impossibility should be resolved by reference to the requirements of poetry, or to a conception of the superior, or to people's beliefs. Poetic requirements make a plausible impossibility preferable to an implausible possibility ...* not such as Zeuxis painted them, but better, for the artist should surpass his model. Irrationalities should be referred to 'what people say', or shown not to be irrational (since it is likely that some things should occur contrary to likelihood). Contradictory utterances should be examined according to the same principles as verbal refutations, to see whether the sense is the same and has the same reference, and in the same way – if a poet is to be convicted of actually contradicting either himself or something which can be sensibly assumed. But it is correct to find fault with both illogicality and moral baseness, if there is no necessity for them and if the poet makes no use of the illogicality (as with Euripides and the case of Aegeus)⁵ or the baseness (as with Menelaus's in *Orestes*).⁶

The charges brought against poets fall under five headings: impossibilities, irrationalities, morally harmful elements, contradictions, and offences against the true standards of the art. The solutions should be sought from the categories discussed above.*

Ch. 26

It is reasonable to consider whether epic or tragic mimesis is the superior. If the superior is the less vulgar, and this is the one addressed to the better kind of spectators, it is unarguable that the art which consists entirely of impersonation must be vulgar: for here the performers use a great deal of physical action, as

⁴ Telemachus' visit to Sparta in *Odyssey* Bk.4.

⁵ Euripides, *Medea* 663ff.

⁶ See n.1 to ch.15.

though the audience would not appreciate the point without this emphasis (for instance, with the wheeling motion of bad pipe-players, when portraying a discus, or their hauling around of the chorus-leader, when playing Scylla's music). Now, tragedy is of this kind, and the point is similar to the opinion which earlier actors held of their successors: Mynniscus used to call Callippides an 'ape', on the grounds of his excesses, and such was also the view held of Pindarus. The relation of the whole art of tragedy to epic is analogous to that between these actors and their predecessors. So people say that epic is for good spectators who require no gestures, while tragedy is for vulgar spectators. Consequently, if tragedy is vulgar, its inferiority would be evident.

But in the first place, the charge pertains not to poetry but to acting, since it is equally possible to use excessive gestures in an epic recitation, like Sostratus, or in a singing contest, which Mnasiatheos the Opountian used to do. Secondly, it is not *all* movement (any more than all dancing) which should be rejected, but that of base types – as with the charge made against Callippides, and now made against others, of impersonating non-citizen women. Besides, tragedy, just like epic, achieves its aim even without enactment: for its qualities become apparent through a reading. Therefore, if tragedy is superior in other respects, this particular defect need not be attached to it.

Next there is the fact that tragedy possesses all epic's attributes (it can even use its metre), and in addition it has music and spectacle, which produce very vivid pleasures; so it can achieve vividness either in a reading or in performance. Furthermore, tragedy is superior by achieving the aim of its mimesis in a shorter scope: the relative compression gives greater pleasure than dilution over a long period (consider the hypothetical case of someone setting Sophocles' *Oedipus* in as many verses as the *Iliad*). Also, epic mimesis is less unified (an indication is that several tragedies can be extracted from any epic): consequently, if epic poets produce a single plot-structure, it appears incomplete because of the short exposition, or else diluted if it keeps to the length which suits the metre. What I mean by the latter is, for example, a construction of several actions, like the *Iliad*'s and *Odyssey*'s possession of many parts which are individually substantial. Yet these latter poems are constructed as well as is possible, and come as close as possible to

the mimesis of a unitary action.

Therefore, if tragedy differs in all these respects, as well as in the effect of the art (for these genres should yield no ordinary pleasure, but the one stipulated), its superiority over epic in achieving the goal of poetry should be evident.

This completes my discussion of tragedy and epic, their forms and the number and variations of their components, the reasons for success or the reverse, and objections against poetry, with their solutions.*

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Aristotle

translation and commentary

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