

**THE BOOK WAS
DRENCHED**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_160427

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

Osmania University Library

Call No 185.1
H84A

Accession No 36776

Author

Title

This book should be returned on or before the date last
marked below.

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

By the Same Author
THE DICKENS WORLD
COLERIDGE
ALL IN DUE TIME

(*Edited*)
THE NOTE-BOOKS AND PAPERS
OF GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

A Course of Eight Lectures by

HUMPHRY HOUSE

SENIOR LECTURER IN ENGLISH LITERATURE
AND FELLOW OF WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD

revised, with a preface, by

COLIN HARDIE

FELLOW AND CLASSICAL TUTOR OF
MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD



RUPERT HART-DAVIS

36 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W1

1956

Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay and Company, Ltd.,
Bungay, Suffolk

CONTENTS

PREFACE BY COLIN HARDIE	7
I. <i>Introduction</i>	11
1. Pitfalls. 2. Rewards. 3. Aristotle's life: the first stage.	
II. <i>Aristotle's Development</i>	22
1. Plato. 2. The second stage. 3. The third stage.	
III. <i>Plot (1)</i>	43
1. Construction. 2. Unity and Length. 3. Episodes.	
IV. <i>Plot (2)</i>	58
1. Probability and Necessity. 2. Conviction (<i>τὸ πιθανόν</i>).	
3. The Unities of Time and Place.	
V. <i>The Relation of Character and Plot</i>	68
VI. <i>The Tragic Action and Character</i>	82
1. "Goodness" of Character. 2. Appropriateness of Character. 3. "Likeness" of Character. 4. Consistency. 5. Hamartia. 6. Peripety. 7. Discovery.	
VII. <i>Catharsis and the Emotions</i>	100
1. Pity and Fear. 2. Catharsis.	
VIII. <i>Pleasure and Imitation</i>	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY	127

PREFACE

IN the spring and summer of 1952 Humphry House and I were fellow examiners in the Preliminary Examination of the Honours School of English at Oxford, and both of us had to set and read papers on Aristotle's *Poetics*. We were not impressed by the standard of knowledge and understanding that candidates showed, and House decided to write a course of eight lectures, which he delivered in Michaelmas Term 1952 and again, after revision, in 1953. Before the war I had lectured on the *Poetics* for Classical Moderations, and I gave House such papers as I had then written for classical societies or more formal lectures, and such advice on books and articles as my now rather out-of-date experience could suggest. For this House in his lectures gave me more than enough credit. At one time we contemplated a joint book on the *Poetics*, but this posthumous issue of his lectures was to be our only further collaboration. When his literary executor asked me what should be done with the lectures, I reread them and felt, not, I hope, merely out of partiality for the author or for some of the ideas that he had taken from me and developed, that they were well worth publishing as a sensitive and level-headed explanation and defence of Aristotle; and I willingly undertook to prepare them for the press. I had read his lectures as he rewrote them in October and November 1953, and made a few marginal notes, some of which I have now incorporated in the text where House seemed to accept them.

As a classical scholar House was qualified by a first in "Greats" and a lectureship in Classics at University College, Exeter, to tackle the *Poetics*, and as an English scholar and critic to give it actuality and life before an audience of students of English literature. One might hesitate to publish lectures which were not meant for

publication and had no revision with that end in view, if there were available to English readers of the *Poetics* any satisfactory introduction to it and discussion of its problems and value. I need add little to what House himself in the course of these lectures says, e.g. about Hamilton Fyfe's book, or L. J. Potts's *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*, on which House wrote a long letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* in February 1954. A. S. Owen's *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* is very slight and dry, and A. O. Prickard's *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* is no more than one lecture with two appendices. F. L. Lucas's *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* is brilliant and stimulating, but hardly sits close enough to the text for beginners and examinees, and is, in my opinion, misleading about catharsis. Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art* uses Aristotle as a peg on which to hang rather vague and un-Aristotelian speculations. Bywater's standard edition of the Greek text is a work of meticulous textual and linguistic scholarship, but it is not illuminated by a lively interest in the philosophical and historical significance of Aristotle's thought. Since Jaeger's book appeared in 1923, there has been a revolution in Aristotelian studies, in the attempt to reconstruct and date the fragmentary early works, to analyse and relate the complete surviving works as stages in the evolution of Aristotle's thought, and generally to conceive Aristotle's life as the development of an independent philosophy under the overwhelming shadow of Plato (see D. J. Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, for a recent account of this). The application of this new and fruitful point of view to the *Poetics* was undertaken by the Italian scholar Augusto Rostagni, first in two articles reconstructing the lost dialogue *On the Poets*, and then in an edition of the *Poetics*, of which House made considerable use. Of general works on Aristotle one may here be mentioned, W. D. (now Sir David) Ross's *Aristotle*, which gives fifteen pages (276-290) to a very concise and clear account of the *Poetics*.

House tried to see the *Poetics* in the context of Aristotle's other works, the *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* especially, but it was no part of his plan (and I could not supplement him,

having turned away from Aristotle to other studies) to get abreast of all the new work on Plato's discussions of poetry and on the *Poetics*. He wished to discuss as seriously and thoroughly as eight lectures permitted, but without a minute technical scholarship, the main problems, keeping close to the text. In a letter to me he listed some of the topics that he would have liked to develop, but had to omit or pass over summarily, namely diction, happy and unhappy endings, "paralogism"; and he proposed to "abbreviate and clarify" the introduction and the lecture on the relation between plot and character, in order to find room.

In his sober enthusiasm for Aristotle, House is perhaps a little unsympathetic to Plato, or at least to the formulations of the *Republic*; I have occasionally added a qualification or reference at such points, and I have here and there ventured to add a few brief notes where it seemed desirable: that they are mine, not his, is indicated by their square brackets. I have also modified to some extent the lecturing tone and the direct address to the audience of freshmen as "you", especially where Oxford undergraduates and the Oxford syllabus were aimed at. But they remain lectures. The frequent references to Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* are to be explained by the fact that in 1953 these works formed part of the same Oxford syllabus as the *Poetics* (along with *King Lear*, Dryden's *All for Love*, Corneille's *Polyeucte* and Racine's *Andromaque*). Bywater's translation is used throughout because it is the text used in the Oxford examination. Where Plato's *Republic* is quoted in English, I have substituted H. D. P. Lee's Penguin translation for A. D. Lindsay's, which House used. All the italics in the extracts from translations are House's.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Clarendon Press for permission to use Bywater's translation of the *Poetics*, Sir David Ross's of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Fragments*, W. Rhys Roberts's of the *Rhetoric*, the last three being volumes in the series of *The Works of Aristotle translated into English*; to Messrs. Dent for per-

mission to quote from A. E. Taylor's translation of Plato's *Laws*; to Penguin Books from Plato, *Republic*, translated by H. D. P. Lee, 1955, and Sophocles, *The Theban Plays*, translated by E. F. Watling, 1947; to Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench from E. Rohde's *Psyche*, 1925; to Messrs. Methuen from T. S. Eliot's, *The Sacred Wood*, 1920.

I have added on p. 127 a list of the works concerned with Plato and Aristotle that House mentioned in the lectures or I mention in this preface and in my notes, excluding those that are referred to only in passing.

COLIN HARDIE

Oxford, 24 August, 1955

LECTURE I
INTRODUCTION

1. *Pitfalls*

IN teaching and examining for several years past, I have been struck by the fact that a number of the more sensitive and intelligent people, reading the *Poetics* for the first time, have said that to begin with they were repelled by its method and style and by its apparently countless deficiencies and omissions, but that, as they went on with the study of it, they came more and more to see its value and wisdom, and to appreciate how often some small, rather dry phrase held, or implied, much that was of critical value. I hope this may be true of many of you also. Indeed, I think it might be counted as a symptom of insensitivity, almost, and lack of intelligence, if anyone were to claim that he had fallen in love with the *Poetics* (even in Bywater's translation) at first sight. It would imply, I think, some snobbery, an exaggerated deference to prestige, and a none-too-healthy desire to align his affections prematurely with his duty.

But after a time, I hope, you may grow into a sympathetic understanding of it. This will come about only by detailed and careful hard work.

It is a common fault to approach this work with unsympathetic grouching about what are thought to be Aristotle's omissions; and you may indeed be honestly puzzled by these—if so, you must go elsewhere. I do not propose to lecture here about what Aristotle did *not* say, or about what he might have meant if he had said something else.

And it is dangerous to jump to conclusions about what Aristotle omits. Hamilton Fyfe, in his little edition of the *Poetics*, a booklet against which I must once and for

all warn you as being shallow and misleading, giving Bywater's translation slightly modified, says: "Of 'inspiration', which for Plato is the essence of poetry, Aristotle never says a word." Now, the typical Platonic language for "inspiration" is to speak of the "madness" of the poet. And there is a quite explicit recognition of this in ch. xvii of the *Poetics*:

As far as may be, too, the poet should even act his story with the very gestures of his personages. Given the same natural qualifications, he who feels the emotions to be described will be the most convincing; distress and anger, for instance, are portrayed most truthfully by one who is feeling them at the moment. Hence it is that poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him; the former can easily assume the required mood, and the latter may be actually beside himself with emotion.

No equivalent, admittedly, occurs here of the English word "inspiration"; but that is itself a word which begs a great many questions: it implies an "inbreathing" by an external agency, a superior power: it implies a metaphysically or theologically direct source of poetic creativeness. But Aristotle, very wisely, does not, and does not want to, commit himself to this. He speaks at the psychological level, and uses a term taken over from Plato, his master, for the mysterious element, like madness, which may be involved.

It is essential to see that he does *in passing* recognise this exceedingly important aspect of poetic creation. Otherwise one may, unfairly, think him a dullard and a fool. Hamilton Fyfe blames him quite without justice.

It is also most interesting to see how, in this almost incidental passage, Aristotle slips in a valuable distinction between two classes of poet dealing with imagined characters—the man whom Bywater calls the "man with a special gift for it" and the man with "a touch of madness". This was put by Twining, a translator and editor in the late eighteenth century, as "either great natural quickness of parts, or an enthusiasm allied to madness". Here is adumbrated a most important distinction be-

tween two types of poetic character. But it is no part of Aristotle's plan to develop it.

Aristotle mentions this aspect of poetic creation *in passing*, and merely adumbrates this distinction, not because he is a dullard and a fool, but because he is writing primarily about the formal aspects of poetry, not about the psychology of creation. He is instructing his pupils how to write Tragedy or Epic, so far as it can be taught: inspiration cannot be taught, and by the "art" of poetry is meant a consistent body of principles and rules for its composition rather than the capacity to apply them. It is remarkable that, as his subject is poetic form, he should have made this distinction between types of poetic character at all, and so carefully.

I mention this at the very beginning to warn you against the easy assumption that Aristotle has omitted all the matters that in a modern critical treatise might be regarded as essential.

He mentioned this matter of "madness" only in passing, because his primary purpose was to deal with poetic *forms*, to classify and distinguish one kind of poetry from another, one *species* from another, within the general description of the *genus*: this was entirely consistent with his general philosophical method; and he claimed no more.

2. Rewards

The first claim of the *Poetics* on our attention, long before we come to the problematic passages, is that it is the earliest surviving treatise to record and distinguish systematically one poetic "kind" from another. In doing this, Aristotle was describing literature as he knew it in Greece where poets usually competed for prizes in this or that class or "kind". We know that his *Politics* was founded on the study, in detail, of the history and constitutions of 158 Greek states, and there is good reason to believe that the *Poetics* was preceded by a similar examination of Greek plays; we have to remember the number, richness and variety of the plays available to Aristotle, compared with the minute proportion of Greek

plays that have survived to us. He took over the kinds of literature as he found them; and by perpetuating them left a framework of reference for all European criticism since.

For it is largely through the *Poetics*, though not because of it, that the main poetic "kinds" are still distinguished, even in their very names, through all the literatures of Europe, as Tragedy, Comedy, Epic and Lyric. In the main European languages these words are taken over from Greek merely transliterated and adapted to the appropriate grammatical shape. Whatever later forms, or kinds, may have been since developed, these have persisted, and (what is more) these names are still in constant use in the critical judgment even of kinds of literature that were unknown to Aristotle. Thus, a medieval verse Romance can hardly be discussed at all without reference to, and comparison with, Epic; even if the reason for mentioning Epic is to point the differences. A modern fictional narrative in prose, usually in this country called a "novel" (from the Italian), but in French called a *roman* (with a throwback to medieval Romance)—even a novel can hardly be discussed without using the terms Tragedy, Comedy, Epic and Lyric—or the adjectives derived from them—as the quickest means of suggesting its character, or certain qualities in its various parts, or some aspect of its purposes or treatment. Even in a state of European literature in which the "kinds" are not strictly adhered to, the traditional kinds as distinguished by Aristotle still have vitality in helping an author to define his own purposes and methods, and in helping a critic to interpret them.

Also, quite apart from these words, which have been transliterated into the European languages, nearly all the leading critical ideas and distinctions used by Aristotle have been translated and still have a vital currency. Confining ourselves to dramatic criticism only, consider merely the terms plot, character, complication, dénouement, episode, chorus, unity of action (to go no further), and ask how criticism could proceed without them. One of the main reasons why I believe it good that the *Poetics*

should be read at the very beginning of a university course in literature is that it shows these essential current terms in their earliest formal context, related to a literature that you can read, at least in translation.

That word "related", which I have just used, is very important, and leads me to mention another great value which the reading of the *Poetics* at this stage may have. It is a means of accustoming oneself from the beginning to the fact that critical terms are relative, not absolute; that they need examination (not only in Aristotle but always, everywhere) in the light of the literature to which they refer and of the special purposes for which the critic himself is using them. This is just as true of modern criticism now—even of book-reviews in the weekly press—as it is of Aristotle himself, or, say, of Sidney or Dryden. Even though the words may remain in constant use in the same language, unchanged in form, yet their exact reference to the literature, and the nuance which they imply to the mind of the critic who uses them, may change, and frequently do change. The language of criticism is not a permanent, fixed, scientific vocabulary which, when once learnt, has merely to be correctly applied. It is constantly shifting; and it is the business of a trained mind, in writing or thinking of literature, to be alert to its shifts when they appear in the works of others, and to use the terms themselves carefully and studiously, in order that, so far as may be, the resulting criticism may make apparent the sense in which its own terminology is to be understood. That is the ideal; even if it is an ideal which scarcely any critic has ever attained.

At any period of literary history it is easy to pick up a current critical jargon, and to employ it fluently with an air of mastery and conviction, without penetrating at all to the centre of the problems with which it is meant to deal. Anybody who writes or speaks at all about literature is constantly finding himself (*experto credite*) falling back upon some specious, apparently rich and preferably resonant, piece of current critical jargon, just because he has failed to think out resolutely what he is trying to say. A part of any university training in English should be to

make you alert to this danger, should be a critique of terminology, so as to make habitual a concern about terms in this way. Nothing, unfortunately, is commoner than to find in undergraduate essays the use of technical critical language in a familiar and knowing way as if the mere use of it solved the problem and gave a triumphant irrefutable answer. In examining I have, over and over again, read essays about Tragedy, or some particular tragedy, which end up by just saying, as if the mere term clinched the matter, "... and thus is achieved that catharsis which, as Aristotle so rightly says, is the effect of tragedy on the emotions".

One of the reasons for reading the *Poetics* is to prevent the possibility of such writing. And I believe that it is by no means a drawback that you have to read this work in a translation from a language of which most of you know little or nothing. For the knowledge that it is a translation necessarily focuses the mind upon these verbal questions; upon the fact that words shift in meaning from language to language, and within one language from time to time. In his Introduction to Bywater's translation of the *Poetics*, Professor Gilbert Murray calls attention to certain difficulties in terms which a translation presents to English readers. One of the examples he takes is the word *μῦθος*, which is translated normally as "plot". This word, *mythos*, is the source of our word "myth": Professor Murray thinks that in this instance Aristotle had not analysed his own terms clearly; he says (pp. 12-13) that Aristotle had noted as a fact about Greek Tragedy of the fifth century that it

had always taken its material from the sacred myths, or heroic sagas, which to the classical Greek constituted history. But the New Comedy was in the habit of inventing its plots. Consequently Aristotle falls into using the word *mythos* practically in the sense of "plot", and writing otherwise in a way that is unsuited to the tragedy of the fifth century.

Now, this is in a sense a "difficulty"; but surely it is not a difficulty in the sense of being a distraction or an obstacle; it is rather one of those fruitful difficulties which bring to light the way in which critical terms have to be

stabilised in each context by the care and precision with which they are used. There is no doubt that the term *mythos* had been used in Greek writing earlier than Aristotle to mean such various things as a word; speech; a myth in the sense of a legend; a story, especially a fictitious story; and so on. Equally, there seems to me no doubt that, by the exact way in which Aristotle describes that for which he is using the word in the *Poetics*, he is re-defining the word for his own purposes within the context of his treatise, and making of it a technical term of an exact kind, intending to distinguish most carefully "plot" from both "myth" and "story". In ch. ix, where he chiefly discusses the question, he uses the word *mythos* qualified by a participle in the phrase which Bywater translates "the traditional stories", but when he uses *mythos* absolutely, without qualification, he uses it for what the poet *makes* of a story, and that is best translated as Plot. The sentence which opens the paragraph at the bottom of p. 44 of Bywater's translation could well be translated (to adapt one of Professor Murray's own suggestions):

It is clear from this that the "maker" ought to be more the maker of the plots than of the verses.

I find it hard to agree with Professor Murray that Aristotle has been "deceived" by his terms here; rather, it seems to me, he is consciously and carefully adapting an existing and familiar word, *mythos*, so that it becomes a "term", in his own context, of a special kind. He is thinking out a distinction between "stories", which are narratives of events in a broadly chronological sequence (whether they are traditional legends, or pieces of history, or fictional constructs), and "plots", which are stories after they have been made by the poet into organised unities with necessary connections between their parts. I shall come back later in these lectures to discuss Aristotle's treatment of "plot" more fully: it is most important; and I hope you will then understand better what I am saying here: but the point I now want to make is that, even without knowing Greek, the discussion of

the words chosen by a translator can (with slight help from someone who knows a little Greek) provide not obstacles, but an analysis of the use of terms, which is a useful training for criticism of any kind.¹

You may think this is a perverse and slightly sophisticated defence of the fact that a work which you can read only in translation is set in the syllabus. But an almost parallel situation would arise even if a short classical treatise of comparable originality and scope were extant and available with English as its initial language. The terms would there also be acquiring their more limited and special meaning only in the context in which the critic was using them, and you would be under the necessity of analysing a process of adaptation which almost needed "translation" into other English terms to solve it. Problems of this kind arise with Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (the English critical text set at Oxford).

But suppose your general subject were not "Tragedy", and you were set, e.g., selected chapters from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*: you would have to deal with a highly developed distinction between Fancy and Imagination; the distinction between the Primary Imagination and Secondary Imagination; the distinction between volition and will; and words like "coadunating" and "esemplastic" would come in course along the way. These are no easier than translated terms.

Or suppose, again, the subject were not Tragedy, and you were set some of the Critical Essays of the most influential living critic in English, Mr. T. S. Eliot: you would have to analyse his exact use of "sensibility", especially "the dissociation of sensibility" and the phrase "objective correlative", and much else of a semi-technical nature. And if you were set a selection from Mr. Eliot's essays, what else would you find? You would find that in one of the best of all his essays, the one called "The Perfect Critic" which first appeared in *The Sacred Wood* in 1920—an essay which should be hovering always in the background of your memory as a statement of the

¹ Cf. E. M. Forster's use of "story" and "plot" in *Aspects of the Novel* (London, 1927).

critic's standards and ideals—you would find that here, searching for the perfect critic, the best examples of the best critical method, Mr. Eliot himself sends you straight back to Aristotle; and you might justly complain that you had not been sent to Aristotle in the first place.

Aristotle is a person who has suffered from the adherence of persons who must be regarded less as his disciples than as his sectaries. One must be firmly distrustful of accepting Aristotle in a canonical spirit; this is to lose the whole living force of him. He was primarily a man of not only remarkable but universal intelligence; and universal intelligence means that he could apply his intelligence to anything. The ordinary intelligence is good only for certain classes of objects; a brilliant man of science, if he is interested in poetry at all, may conceive grotesque judgments: like one poet because he reminds him of himself, or another because he expresses emotions which he admires; he may use art, in fact, as the outlet for the egotism which is suppressed in his own speciality. But Aristotle had none of these impure desires to satisfy; in whatever sphere of interest, he looked solely and steadfastly at the object; in his short and broken treatise he provides an eternal example—not of laws, or even of method, for there is no method except to be very intelligent, but of intelligence itself swiftly operating the analysis of sensation to the point of principle and definition.¹

3. *Aristotle's life: the first stage*

With so much as general introduction, I want now to describe the circumstances and character of the book.

Aristotle's active life falls clearly into three main parts: he was born in 384 B.C. at Stagira, modern Stavro, a small town on the north-east coast of the peninsula of Chalcidice near Macedonia. It is from his birthplace that he got his ghastly nickname, "the Stagirite", which you will find used, e.g., by Pope several times in the *Essay on Criticism*:

As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line (l. 138).

His stepfather was domestic doctor to King Amyntas II of Macedonia, and Aristotle may have picked up much

¹ *The Sacred Wood* (1928) pp. 10 ff. London, Methuen. (1st edition, 1920, pp. 9 ff.)

information about medical work in boyhood. To this is often attributed his intense interest in physical science, especially in biology and physiology; and from it, ultimately perhaps, was derived the systematic thoroughness of his method.

The first main period of his life was from 367-347 B.C., when he was aged from 17 to 37, all of which time he spent in Plato's Academy at Athens, partly as pupil, partly as teacher and writer. His writings from this period have not survived, except in fragments—though there will be something to say of them later. But, the writings apart, the importance of his twenty years' association with Plato cannot be exaggerated. His whole type of thought was modelled on Plato's, and even where he most disagreed with his master—his doctrine about Poetry was an instance—he was taking up problems which Plato had propounded. There will be more to say later about the Platonic doctrine of poetry in its treatment of the emotions, and about how Aristotle differed from it; but I want here to emphasise the broad common ground which Plato and Aristotle shared. Their thought about all subjects was directed towards practical ends,¹ and their speculation was never far removed from the business of teaching. The overriding concern of the Academy was the discussion of the "good life", as it is livable by man, on earth, in a society of his fellow-men. All sub-divisions of human thought and activity were related to this primary ethical purpose, and all had their bearing on the political context in which ethical purposes were necessarily realised. The vision of human life as a whole was never lost sight of, and all special subjects were related to it. The individual was seen ideally as a balanced mature person exercising all his powers harmoniously and at full stretch, and such exercise was impossible except in a political organisation of the state that allowed and fostered it. The main business of the Academy was to teach men to be good men in the fullest sense, and good citizens. This fact underlies the attitude

¹ [This needs at least qualification.]

of both Plato and Aristotle towards poetry; it is the source of all the remarks you will find in Introductions to the *Poetics* and elsewhere, to the effect that the Greek attitude to poetry was more "ethical", more "moralistic", and less "aesthetic", than the typical modern attitude. But such remarks are misleading unless it is realised that the reason is that poetry was never thought of in isolation; it was something in which all men shared, an activity of public importance, to be interpreted as part of the means by which the whole human personality was both educated and controlled.

If you put yourself a question the other way round, and ask "Is it a fact that when a man is either writing or enjoying poetry he has, in so far as he is a poet or a reader of poetry, abrogated all other human characteristics, duties, claims and feelings?"; if you ask yourself a question in some such form as that, and find yourself necessarily tending towards the answer "No", you are tending towards the starting-point which both Plato and Aristotle took for granted.

I confess I am impatient with the view that tries to suggest some primitive insufficiency in Aristotle because he "moralised aesthetics".

LECTURE II

ARISTOTLE'S DEVELOPMENT

1. *Plato*

I HAVE already said that the work of Plato's Academy, where Aristotle spent twenty years, was largely concerned with teaching, with the methods of education best fitted to produce good men, good citizens and (above all) good rulers. It was in this context of education that Plato made his famous "attack" on the poets. The study of poetry—especially of the works of Homer—was the traditional Greek mode of education for boys and young men before they were considered intellectually mature enough to begin the study of philosophy; and it is in this context—we might say in the context of discussing the school syllabus—that the first critique (in *Republic*, Book II) of the effects of poetry occurs, and the decree of banishment from the ideal state is made against the poets.

It was not through insensitivity or ignorance that Plato did this. At the beginning of Book X of the *Republic* he makes Socrates speak of Homer with the highest honour and love as "the master and leader of all those tragic poets" (595 b-c), and later in the Book (607 c) he speaks of the "enchanting" power of poetry, especially Homer's. It was, in fact, because he felt this power so acutely and keenly that Plato reluctantly felt himself bound to decide as he did. In Book III when the perfectly skilful poet comes to the ideal city, he is to be honoured as a sacred, wonderful and delightful person; he is to be anointed with myrrh and crowned with a wreath: *but he is to be sent away*.

Plato attacked poetry broadly on two grounds, one intellectual, the other ethical.

On the intellectual side, all art is a copy of the world

of the senses, which is itself an illusion beyond which the wise man must be trained to penetrate; works of art are removed into the third place from the truth. I do not want to amplify this side of the Platonic objection now, because it belongs more properly with the discussion of the general aesthetic theory of "imitation", which I am deliberately postponing.

But I do want to discuss the second of Plato's broad grounds of objection, the ethical, because it is upon an answer to this that much of the central argument of Aristotle's *Poetics* depends, and because, after leaving the Academy, Aristotle's own educational practice perpetuated and reinforced the old traditional Greek system of bringing up young men in the study of poetry, and the writing of the *Poetics* was a consequence of this experience.

The first of Plato's ethical objections to poetry is the comparatively straightforward one that poets "tell lies about the gods" (*Rep.* II, 377 ff.), and that many of the stories they tell about gods and heroes and giants are immoral. For both these reasons, poetry—especially that of Hesiod and Homer—is bad for the young. Allegorical interpretation, he says, is no help; for children cannot distinguish between what is allegorical and what is literal: they both get a wrong idea of the nature of the gods and also accept as worthy of imitation, in their own lives, the tales of treachery and lust and so on, of which mythological poetry is full. And mothers use tales of the gods changing shape and going about in disguise, which frighten children and make them cowardly.

This must not detain us long; but I cannot leave it altogether without comment. There are, as Aristotle would certainly have seen, two separate questions at issue. The truth of what is said about the gods is one thing: the possible effect of stories on young children's minds is another, not all poetry being written *virginibus puerisque*.

Now the first of these two questions is touched on in the *Poetics* in that short telegraphic style, which at first may madden you, but which I hope may seem more sympathetic as time goes on. In *Poetics*, ch. xxv—the

chapter on some miscellaneous problems (Bywater, p.88)—Aristotle says that though the tales about the gods may, as Xenophanes thinks, be untrue, and though they may not be “the better thing to say”; yet they are “in accordance with opinion”. This is “what people say”; it is the traditional view.¹ Here Aristotle is making a note-like reference in the *Poetics* to matter which he had discussed elsewhere. The Italian scholar Rostagni has argued that Plutarch (*de Aud. Poet.*, II, 17 d-e²) has preserved the substance of a passage from Aristotle’s lost dialogue, *On the Poets*, on this matter, in which he says that a literal acceptance of what the poets say about the gods would be corrupting; but that poetry is not concerned with truth in this way. He says that the truth about the gods is hard enough game (*δυσθήρατος*) even for philosophers to catch, let alone poets; so we will not listen to them about it. He mentions Xenophanes, in this context, just as the *Poetics* does, as one of those who had first attacked the traditional mythological view of the gods. Aristotle would certainly have said that the question of what is and what is not true about the gods is a matter for philosophers, among whom he would include what we now call theologians. He says in the *Poetics*, ch. xxv (Bywater, p. 86): “There is not the same kind of correctness in poetry as in politics, or indeed any other art” (1460 b 13-14; the word is *ὀρθότης*); the theological side of philosophy would be such another “art”.

In addition to this, Aristotle had advanced beyond Plato in another respect, in that he began to view such matters historically. Book I of the *Politics* shows clearly how he saw parallels between the less developed communities of his own time (e.g., the nomadic) and the earlier condition of communities which had since deve-

¹ Cf. Wordsworth’s note on the “Immortality Ode”, where he says that he thought the use of the belief in the pre-existence of the Soul was justified for poetic purposes because it had “entered into the popular creeds of many nations” and had “sufficient foundation in humanity” (ed. de Selincourt, IV, 464).

² Πῶς δεῖ τὸν νέον ποιημάτων ἀκούειν—Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat, forming part of Περὶ παίδων ἀγωγῆς—De liberis educandis.

loped a high civilisation. And about the gods he says that Homer called Zeus "the father of gods and men", by analogy from the relation of a king to his people, which itself reflected the relation of a father to his family. In other words, the Olympian system in Homer, he realised, was the kind of religion which grew out of an early state of society. A poet using the traditional system was making no claim for its theological truth, and Aristotle did not take very seriously the danger Plato saw in it.

It is a separate matter to consider what might be the effect of the stories unexpurgated on young children's minds. (A similar situation has always existed, and still exists, with the use of the Old Testament in Christendom; and many parents, practising Christians and others, take Plato's view.)

We do not know what Aristotle thought about the use of Homer and Hesiod in educating really young children; but we do know, as I shall explain later, that in spite of Plato, he perpetuated the traditional Greek method of education in using Homer, and making a special commentary on Homer for the purpose, when he was tutor to a boy of what would now be called 13+; the boy who became Alexander the Great.

The next part of Plato's objection has its clearest statement in the *Republic*, Book X (606 d)—that poetry feeds and waters the desires and passions, instead of drying them up.

Poetry has the same effect on us when it represents sex and anger, and the other desires and feelings of pleasure and pain which normally accompany our actions. It feeds them when they ought to be starved, and makes them control us when we ought, in the interests of our own welfare and happiness, to control them.

(H. D. P. Lee's translation, in the Penguin Classics)

Now Plato was a rigorous intellectualist, and his view of human nature as given in the *Republic* (IV, 440 e-441 a) was based on a division of the soul into three parts—the rational part (*λογιστικόν*), the spirited part¹ (IV,

¹ Concerned with honour and power: "it is by nature the auxiliary of the rational part". (441 a.)

440 c-441 a) (θυμοειδές), and the desirous or appetitive part (ἐπιθυμητικόν). The good life for Plato is the fullest exercise of the rational part of the soul; its lowest part, the emotional and desirous part, is concerned with the things of sense and with desires for things of sense and with the emotions attending those desires: it "forms the greater part of each man's make-up and is naturally insatiable" (442 a).

A leading characteristic of Plato's thought, especially in the *Republic*,¹ is the bitter hostility which he assumes—with a manichean fierceness—between the reason and the desires and emotions. The metaphors he uses to describe it are those of war, decapitation, cauterisation. There is no question of adapting, training, using, directing, modifying this lowest part of the soul; it has everywhere to be opposed; the "common people", in whom it reigns most powerfully, are to be the lowest class in the state; the intermediate kind of person, in whom the "spirited" element is strongest, is to become the soldier and administrator; the rulers are to be the intellectualist philosophers, with whom reason is most powerful.² The system of the state is to be authoritarian, just as its practical psychology is to be repressive.

Perhaps the most telling part of the argument about the emotions in Book X of the *Republic* is the discussion of the expression of grief, the contrast between poetic treatment and the kind of behaviour we admire and aim at in real life. When Homer or a tragedian shows us a hero stretching out a long tale of woe, keening and smiting his breast, "even the best of us enjoy it", Plato says (X, 605 c-d), "and let ourselves be carried away by our feelings". But in times of grief in real life we aim to be restrained, quiet and enduring, trying not to play a woman's part.

¹ [The (probably) later *Timaeus* and Plato's last work, the *Laws*, greatly modified the opposition of soul and body, reason and desire. But they did not undo the effect of Plato's classic statement of the argument in the more popular and famous *Republic* and *Phaedo* of some thirty years earlier.]

² [Plato's ideal included intuitive contemplation as well as discursive reasoning.]

It gives us pleasure to pity the hero; but in doing so very few of us reflect that other men's sorrows contribute to our own.

I say that this is a particularly telling part of the argument because the emotion under discussion is not, like anger, liable to be anti-social and wasteful in real life; nor is it dealing with a fierce desire like uncontrolled sexual passion. Pity for another suffering grief, and grief at sufferings of our own, are gentle humane emotions, not necessarily anti-social or culpably self-regarding. This brings into prominence the fact that Plato was opposed not only to the indulgence of certain emotions and desires, but to the indulgence of emotion *as such*. It is always and everywhere bad for the reason to relax its control even over such a relatively harmless part of human nature as "the natural instinct for tears".

It is also a passage to remember most carefully when we come to Aristotle's discussion of pity and fear as being specifically the tragic emotions. Without question Aristotle had this passage in mind when writing; and he accepts a large part of Plato's position. The fundamental points in which Aristotle agrees with Plato are:

- (1) That poetry is an "imitative" art.
- (2) That poetry rouses the emotions.
- (3) That poetry *gives pleasure*, both as an imitation and as rousing the emotions through imitative means.
- (4) That the rousing of the emotions by poetry has an effect upon the whole personality (of the spectator or reader) and on his emotional behaviour in real life.

But he does not accept the vital step in the conclusion, by which Plato assumes that the relation between emotion as stimulated by poetry, and emotion as felt and expressed in real life, is a kind of cumulative infection which must lead (in real life) to dangerous excess. He rejects the whole theory that the emotions are in themselves bad. To this we shall return.

Tragic, comic and epic poets, then, are to be excluded

from Plato's ideal state, and the study of their works is to play no part in the system of education within it. Poets are to be allowed only if their work has a directly didactic aim, linked to the purposes of moral education. In Book III he says that the poets are to be *compelled* to impress upon their poems the image of the good character or not to make poetry in the city: in Book X these kinds of permitted poetry are defined rather more exactly as "hymns to the gods and the praises of good men". And music and the other arts are to be similarly censored and compulsorily directed.

At the very end of his discussion of poetry in Book X Plato throws out a challenge, saying that the lovers of poetry, who are not poets, should be allowed to write a defence of poetry in prose; and he would listen in a friendly spirit if the writer could show that poetry was "not only pleasant but also useful for political communities (*πρὸς τὰς πολιτείας*) and for human life".

Aristotle took up this challenge in more ways than one; the book called the *Poetics* was one of the consequences of his doing so: but it was not the only consequence.

I give you this partial account of Plato's views of poetry—and it is only partial, not claiming to be complete—at this stage in the lectures, because it shows you the context of Aristotle's thoughts and training about poetry in that vitally important phase of his life, between the ages of 17 and 37, when he was at the Academy. None of the works he wrote during that time—they were mostly works in dialogue form, designed on Plato's model—have survived, except in fragments. And it is now doubtful whether he wrote anything about poetry until after he had left Athens; but there is no doubt that his interest in poetry and his approach to it were permanently affected by what he heard there.

2. *The Second Stage of Aristotle's Life*

On Plato's death in 347 and the succession of his nephew, Speusippus, to the headship of the Academy (which Aristotle, not being an Athenian, could not inherit), Aristotle left Athens together with a fellow-mem-

ber of the Academy called Xenocrates, and went to Assos (in the Troad); from there he moved three years later to Mytilene in Lesbos, "where burning Sappho loved and sung"; and then, two years later again, he accepted an invitation from Philip of Macedon to become tutor to his son Alexander.

Aristotle was, by then, famous all over the Greek world as Plato's best-known pupil. This was, from the public point of view, a dramatic situation. Macedonia was already the leading power in Greece. Alexander was the heir to the kingdom, with the prospect of growing military strength and cultural influence. How he would be educated was therefore a matter of major concern. Aristotle was faced, in a sharp practical way, with the decision whether he was to accept the consequences of Plato's teaching, and attempt a form of education which should use only a few bowdlerised or didactic poetical texts as the foundation of Alexander's literary training; one which should aim to dry up the emotions, by ignoring the poets, in the hope of producing a "philosopher king"; or whether he was to accept the traditional Greek view of the usefulness of the poets, and justify it to himself, to his pupil and to the public.

In the list of Aristotle's writings given by Diogenes Laertius (early third century A.D.) are mentioned a number of published works, in dialogue form, among which are a Dialogue on Philosophy, a Dialogue on Rhetoric, and a Dialogue in three books called *On the Poets*.

It has long been believed that Aristotle refers to this Dialogue in ch. xv of the *Poetics*, at the very end (Bywater, p. 58), where he says:

All these rules one must keep in mind throughout, and further, those also for such points of stage-effect as directly depend on the art of the poet, since in these too one may often make mistakes. Enough, however, has been said on the subject in *one of our published writings*.

It is accepted as a matter of course by Bywater in his edition (p. 233) that this refers to the dialogue *On the Poets*. It was long assumed that this, like others of

Aristotle's dialogues, was an early work, belonging to the period of discipleship to Plato at the Academy. But Aristotelian scholars now argue that it was a work of his second period, and was part of Aristotle's revision of and divergence from Plato's philosophy. In particular, the Italian scholar, Rostagni, has maintained that the occasion of its writing was the appointment as tutor to Prince Alexander, and that it is to be thought of as part of Aristotle's justification of the educational policy he then adopted.

The only surviving fragments of the dialogue ¹ (rescued because they are quoted in later works by others) are very short and few, and there is no need to bother you with them in great detail. But three of these preserved fragments overlap with matters discussed in ch. i of our *Poetics* (pp. 24-5), where Aristotle says:

There is further an art which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, and if in verse, either in some one or in a plurality of metres. This form of imitation is to this day without a name. We have no common name for a mime of Sophron or Xenarchus and a Socratic Conversation; and we should still be without one even if the imitation in the two instances were in trimeters or elegiacs or some other kind of verse—though it is the way with people to tack on “poet” to the name of a metre, and talk of elegiac-poets and epic-poets, thinking that they call them poets not by reason of the imitative nature of their work, but indiscriminately by reason of the metre they write in. Even if a theory of medicine or physical philosophy be put forth in a metrical form, it is usual to describe the writer in this way; Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that, if the one is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet.

The main line of argument here is quite plain. Aristotle is arguing that it is not the use of metre which distinguishes a poet from a writer who is not a poet. Didactic or expository works, like those of Empedocles, may be

¹ They are to be found in Greek in *Aristotelis Fragmenta*, coll. Valentinus Rose, Teubner, Leipzig, 1886, and in English in Vol. XII of the Oxford translation of Aristotle, *Select Fragments*, Sir David Ross, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, 72-77.

written in hexameters (the same metre as Homer), but this does not make them poems. And also, certain kinds of prose work (the surviving fragments of the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus are in prose) have the essential quality of "imitation", which makes them nearer kin to poetry than are versified physics or versified philosophy. What distinguishes poets is not that they write in metre, but the "imitative nature" (Bywater) of their work. This point is emphatically made again in *Poetics* ch. ix (p. 43), in the comparison between poetry and history. You might put the work of a historian, such as Herodotus, says Aristotle, into verse; but it "would still be a species of history".

This is plainly part of Aristotle's answer to those parts of Plato's *Republic* which warn against the dangers of imitation and give a didactic function to the poets, and Plato's argument is turned against himself, when his dialogues are shown to be imitations and he appears more than halfway to being a poet of the dangerous imitative sort. (But he is not fully a poet because he does not use the second "cause" of poetry, harmony and rhythm.)

Now, one of the fragments of Aristotle's dialogue *On the Poets* also says, in very similar terms, that the mimes of Sophron and the Socratic conversations of Alexamenos are non-metrical forms of imitation,¹ and another of the fragments of Aristotle's dialogue says that Plato's own dialogues are something *between* poetry proper and mere prose;² and this corresponds exactly with that kind of

¹ Fr. 72 R(ose), 3 O(xford), from Athenaeus, *Dipsosophistae* 505 B.C. οὐκοῦν οὐδὲ ἐμμέτρους ὄντας τοὺς καλουμένους Σώφρονος μίμους μὴ φῶμεν εἶναι λόγους καὶ μιμήσεις, ἢ τοὺς Ἀλεξαμενοῦ τοῦ Τηΐου τοὺς πρότερον γραφέντας τῶν Σωκρατικῶν διαλόγων. Are we then to deny that the so-called mimes of Sophron, which are not even in metre, are stories and imitations, or the dialogues of Alexamenos of Teos, which were written before the Socratic dialogues? (Plato is said to have been an admirer and imitator of Sophron, whose works were found under his pillow: Diog. Laert. III.18 καὶ ἡθοιοῦσαι πρὸς αὐτά, ἃ καὶ εὔρεθῆναι ὑπὸ τῇ κεφαλῇ αὐτοῦ.)

² Fr. 73 R., 4 O., from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, III, 37. φησὶ δ' Ἀριστοτέλης τὴν τῶν λόγων ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ (i.e., Πλάτωνος) μεταξὺ ποιήματος εἶναι καὶ πεζοῦ λόγου. Aristotle says that the form of Plato's dialogues lies between poetry and prose.

writing which he says in *Poetics*, ch. i, "is to this day without a name", but which yet approximates to poetry in being imitative. Another of the fragments of the dialogue *On the Poets* treats more fully what is said in *Poetics* ch. i about Empedocles, for though clearly implying that he was not a poet, Aristotle there says he is Homeric, and an artist in language, skilled in metaphor and in the other devices of poetry.¹

Rostagni has argued, too, that there is very good reason for believing that the dialogue *On the Poets* also contained an attack on Plato's doctrine of Ideas, and it was upon the doctrine of the Ideas that Socrates in the *Republic* based his rejection of poetry as being an imitation, removed into the third place from reality. To this we shall return when we deal with the theory of Imitation more fully in the last lecture.

For the present it is enough to sum up by saying that the current opinion about this group of Aristotle's works is that the lost dialogue *On the Poets* contained a fairly full answer to the challenge made by Plato in the *Republic*, especially about the use of poetry in education, and that something of the fragmentariness and allusiveness of the *Poetics*, as we have it, is to be attributed to this fact.

It is also known that Aristotle prepared for Alexander's use a Commentary on Homer; and the list of his writings given by Diogenes Laertius mentions a work called *Problems in Homer* which was very possibly connected with the Commentary. The extreme compression and allusiveness of ch. xxv of the *Poetics* is attributable to its being a summary of the larger work.

Apart from the Commentary on Homer and the dialogue *On the Poets*, at the end of this second period Aristotle turned his attention to the collection of detailed evidence bearing on the history of Greek poetry. In this he must have had a lot of help from relations, friends and pupils. Together with his nephew Callisthenes he made

¹ Fr. 70 R., 2 O., from Diog. Laert. VIII, 2, 57-8. 'Ομηρικὸς ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ δεινὸς περὶ τὴν φράσιν γέγονε, μεταφορικὸς τε ὢν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς περὶ ποιητικὴν ἐπιτεύγμασι χρώμενος.

a list of the victors in the Pythian games, which was finished by 335 B.C.¹ The Pythian games were contests partly in music and poetry, partly in athletics; and thus the evidence collected would in part be material for a history of Greek poetry. After this Aristotle compiled a catalogue of Athenian dramas with their writers and dates (*διδασκαλῖαι*); this must have been after his return to Athens in 335, as all the evidence was there. And it was followed by a list of the victors in the dramatic contests at the Dionysia (*νῦκαι Διονυσιακαί*), which was very likely connected with the rebuilding of the theatre at Athens under Lycurgus in 330, and the preparation of the official text of the tragedians.

There are traces of this detailed work on the history of Greek poetry to be found in the *Poetics* as we have it; for instance the detail about dates in the history of Comedy in chs. iii and v (pp. 28 and 33-4), where he is clear that Epicharmus, from Sicilian Megara, was earlier than Chionides and Magnes, and was the first to write comedies with constructed plots. In ch. v Aristotle implies that he knows more about the history of Comedy than most people, and slips in the fact that it was only late that the Archon granted a chorus to the comic poets. And at the end of ch. iv he speaks familiarly of the other details in the history of Tragedy which he does not propose to enter into.

For our purpose these are minor points, but the evidence for Aristotle's detailed work on the history of Greek poetry is important as showing the inductive method that underlay the generalisations which much of the *Poetics* puts forward. It is the parallel work in *Poetics* to the detailed study of 158 separate constitutions which preceded the more general treatment of the *Politics*.

This is evidence of a fundamental intellectual change through which Aristotle passed in the period after leaving Athens. The change may have begun earlier, but it was

¹ There is extant the Delphic inscription of thanks to Aristotle and Callisthenes, cf. M. N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1948, Vol. II, 246, No. 187.

accelerated and intensified by Plato's death in 347 and by Aristotle's removal from the influence and environment of his master. Such inductive study of historical fact was no part of Plato's method; but from now onwards it characterises all Aristotle's writings. He starts with the observation and analysis of things as they are; and this affects not only his handling of practical matters in the *Poetics*—things like the management of plot and episode; the use of the chorus, and so on—but also the psychology upon which he bases the discussion of the emotional effects of Tragedy. In all respects he is more balanced, more realistic, more alert to what in fact happens in the "soul", the *ψυχή*,¹ of even the best of men. The rather dry common-sensical tone which pervades the *Poetics* is not the arid inadequacy of one whose speculation has always grovelled, but the mature wisdom of somebody trained in a more extreme school, who has lived through a period of exacting intellectual experience and come out at the other side critical but strengthened. And he has now, in addition, trained himself—to use Eliot's words again—to look "solely and steadfastly at the object", and to believe that "Nature makes nothing in vain", not even poetry.

3. *The Third Stage of Aristotle's Life*

This began in 335, when he returned to Athens. He rented some buildings beside a grove sacred to Apollo Lykeios and the Muses, a place where Socrates used to walk. There he founded his school, the Lyceum, which took its name from the grove: and he wandered in loggias or among the trees, discussing and teaching. The Greek word for walking up and down is *περιπατεῖν*; and so

¹ [In the *Eudemus*, written in the fifties before Plato's death, Aristotle argued for a pre-existent and immortal "soul", a substance separate from the body, as in Plato's *Phaedo*. But in the mature treatise *de Anima* soul and body are aspects of a single substance, related as form to matter. For this development, see F. Nuyens, *L'Évolution de la psychologie d'Aristote*, Louvain, 1948. It is in the sense of this second period that the plot is the "soul" of a tragedy.]

from his habit the school came to be called the Peripatetic school of philosophy, a name which stuck long after Aristotle's death.¹

The works of Aristotle which we have—apart from the fragments of the earlier dialogues—all belong to this period, the *Poetics* among them. They vary very much one from another in formal completeness and finish; and within any one work there may be differences between one part and another. Some are virtually finished treatises or text-books written *in extenso*, showing all the signs of careful arrangement and revision: the *Rhetoric* is of this kind; but the *Poetics* is not. Parts of the less finished books read like notes for working up.

The traditional order of works in the Aristotelian corpus may represent the order of the curriculum at the Lyceum: and if that is so, it is important to remember that the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* come at the *end* of that order. This is important for three different reasons:

(i) They imply a knowledge of the general philosophy developed in the preceding works. Thus, both the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* imply especially a knowledge of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*; this applies particularly to the theory of Catharsis, as we shall see later.

(ii) The *Poetics* implies a knowledge of the *Rhetoric*, most especially of the discussion of the emotions of fear and pity, which occurs in the *Rhetoric*, Book II, chs. v and viii, to which we shall return.

And the *Poetics* also implies both an earlier training in the study of poetry at what we should call the grammar-school level, and a knowledge of the dialogue *On the Poets*, of which I have already spoken, and of Plato's at least more famous and popular dialogues.

Now, do not be frightened by what I am saying here. You may be thinking: "Well, if Aristotle reserved the

¹ [This traditional view is more than doubtful. The Lyceum had a covered walk or loggia and came to be known as the Peripatos.]

Poetics for Greek men at the end of the university course, when they had already studied in detail his *Logic*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Ethics*, *Politics* and *Rhetoric*, and they were habituated to his language and modes of thought, how can I be expected to understand it, who have read no Greek and no other works of Aristotle?"

Be reassured. It is possible to explain in outline, quite adequately for our purpose, and intelligibly without a lot of technical knowledge, the main points that concern us. And such explanations are an enormous help for the understanding of the later course of European criticism.

(iii) The third reason why it is important to remember that the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* came at the end of the Lyceum course is that they both have a *practical* slant. They are the kind of works suitable for men about to go into public life; partly theoretical, partly practical. "They contain precepts based on theory rather than theory (ἀπλῶς) pure and simple." It is important to remember that the phrase in Aristotle's title (περὶ ποιητικῆς), which Bywater translates "the art of poetry", is really in full ποιητικὴ τέχνη, i.e., "The technique, general principles and rules, of poetry". τέχνη is in the first instance "the art of building"; then it comes to mean the "practical art" or technique of making anything. τέκτων = mason; our "architect" is from the same root. This explains the rather dogmatic form of many sentences in the *Poetics*, the tone of which would be understood between master and pupil as being relative to the situation in which the pupils were, and as bearing therefore on the state of Greek literature as they knew it. And this dogmatic tone is one of the sources of that slavish (and often mistaken) adherence to Aristotle in the neo-classic period, which failed to distinguish the deeper and more permanent "precepts" from the local and temporary. It helps to explain, for instance, the frigid and unbalanced neo-classic attitude to the

Unities, or towards such things as death and fighting on the stage.¹

These considerations taken together explain something of the unevenness of treatment in the *Poetics*; why some subjects are treated fully and clearly—e.g., the kinds of tragic plot; the difference between simple and complex plot; the nature of “Peripety” and “Discovery” (chs. x, xi, xvi), which is a matter of technical handling—while other matters, such as the catharsis theory, are not explained in full, partly because they had been explained elsewhere; partly because they do not bear so directly on practice. Also, they help to explain why the “madness” of the poet (or his “inspiration”, if you like) is mentioned only in passing: you can’t teach madness.

The dialogue *On the Poets* was, as ch. xv (p. 58) of the *Poetics* says, one of Aristotle’s “published works”. But the *Poetics* itself was not a published work. You may come across the term “esoteric” used for the unpublished works, and the term “exoteric” for the published. But the term “esoteric” does not here imply any secrecy or economy of the truth, as it implies in some other contexts; it merely means that these works survive in a form which was suitable for use within the Lyceum, where Aristotle and his assistants were available to expound the matter more fully. Whereas the exoteric works were written up more carefully for a wider audience. A similar distinction might be made nowadays between a set of notes to be used in giving a course of university lectures, and a carefully written book for publication, based on such notes.

The *Poetics*, then, is an esoteric work in this sense. In spite of the unevennesses, lack of proportion in places, and other faults of construction I have mentioned, the main design of the book is clear and logical: it falls into these five main parts:

1. chs. i–v. An introductory discussion of Tragedy, Epic and Comedy as the chief kinds of Poetry, all poetry

¹ Cf. “‘What! leave the Combat out?’ exclaims the Knight.
‘Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite.’”

Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, ll. 297–80.

being a form of Imitation, closely linked in this to Music. (Aristotle fully realises that Poetry and Music belong together, as "successive" arts, as distinct from, e.g., Painting and Sculpture, which are "simultaneous".)

The general theory of Imitation I am, as I have said, postponing.

In this part, ch. iv deals shortly with the psychological and historical origins of poetry and gives a summary history of Tragedy. Also, the second half of ch. v belongs specially to chs. xxiii and xxiv, to which it looks forward, as it contains in a short form the points of comparison between Epic and Tragedy.

2. Chs. vi-xxii form the main body of the whole work, beginning with the formal inclusive definition of Tragedy and then proceeding to the analysis of structure and the discussion of emotional effect.

Of this part, chs. xx-xxii, which discuss Diction, are of a rather different kind from the rest because they depend more on some knowledge of Greek. They should not be omitted altogether—you should, for instance, specially read what Aristotle has to say about metaphor—but they are, for our purpose, not of the same importance as the rest. Ch. xx has often been rejected as an interpolation.

3. Chs. xxiii-xxiv deal with the structure of Epic, more shortly, but on similar lines to the handling of the structure of Tragedy. This links up with ch. v.

4. Ch. xxv is the long chapter on Problems and their Solutions. This is of particular importance, as I have suggested already in my first lecture, because it contains the fullest statement of Aristotle's view of the kind of "correctness" to be expected of a poet. Poetry does not deal with truth of fact in the same way as, say, philosophy or physics do.

5. Ch. xxvi. A comparison of Epic and Tragedy, arguing for the superiority of Tragedy as an artistic kind.

I want to call your attention to the end of the second paragraph of ch. i (p. 23); these imitative arts, Aristotle writes:

differ from one another in three ways, either by a difference of kind in their means, or by differences in the objects, or in the manner of their imitations.

I have found that these apparently simple words are constantly being misunderstood because of the wording of Bywater's translation: readers fail to understand that the words "of their imitations" or "of imitation" are to be understood with all three of the preceding phrases.

(a) The "difference of kind in their means" (sc. "of imitation") refers to the difference in the *medium*, the physical vehicle of the art. And it is one of Aristotle's great merits as a critic that he never loses sight of the importance of the *medium* to a writer, never fails to stress what is and is not appropriate to each medium. Much modern aesthetic and literary theory suffers from the lack of this sense of medium. It is one of the points in which Aristotle's practical aim contributes most healthily to the balance and strength of his theory.

For a vigorous modern handling of this theme I refer you to *The New Laocoön* by Irving Babbitt, one of the American Humanists of the school of Paul Cliner Moore.

(b) The "differences in the objects" of their imitations refers to differences in the subject-matter of different kinds of poetry. I have found it sometimes supposed that "objects" means "ends" or "aims". Not at all. "Objects" here means—if I may be allowed to sound absurd—"subjects"; that is, the things, persons, actions imitated, and it looks forward to the distinctions in ch. ii (p. 27) which end by saying that Comedy "would make its personages worse", and Tragedy would make them "better, than the men of the present day".

(c) The differences "in the manner of the imitations" looks forward to ch. iii, where the manner of poetical treatment is explained as being necessarily dramatic *or* narrative *or* a mixture of the two, as when a poet (like Homer) composes now in his

own person and now in an assumed character in the "speeches".

Such, then, is the main outline of the work as we have it.

I must just say a word about two striking omissions:

(a) There is no adequate discussion of Comedy. Chs. iii and iv contain a considerable amount of material about the history of Comedy, implying (as I have already said) that Aristotle had acquired a detailed knowledge of it in his researches into the history of the drama. The first paragraph of ch. v, with its short discussion of the Ridiculous, seems to look forward to a fuller treatment of Comedy later. But this treatment never comes, though it is clearly promised in the opening sentence of ch. vi (p. 34).

Diogenes Laertius, in the list of Aristotle's writings to which I have already referred, distinctly speaks of a work called *An Enquiry into Poetic Art* in two books (πραγματείας τέχνης ποιητικῆς α' β'. V, 21). This work is almost certainly to be identified with our *Poetics*. But no trace of any Book II has survived, and the earliest extant MS of the *Poetics* (Byzantine c. A.D. 1000) does not call it Book I, as if there were then any knowledge of Book II.

The long-established belief is that this missing Book II contained the promised discussion of Comedy: and this belief is referred to by Dryden, in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, where he makes Crites say, at the beginning of his discourse in favour of the Ancients:

Of that book which Aristotle has left us, περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς, Horace his *Art of Poetry* is an excellent comment, and, I believe, restores to us that Second Book of his concerning *Comedy*, which is wanting in him.

He is recording the long-standing belief about the contents of the missing Book II; but the other half of what he says—that Horace's *Ars Poetica* "restores" the missing book—is highly disputable. Horace is far more making a digest of intervening criticism, and doing so with reference to Roman practice.

The  is extant in a work called the *Tractatus Coislinianus* a definition of Comedy of which much has been made by Professor Lane Cooper in his work *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*; but this does not seem to be in any way independent of the *Poetics* as we have it. Its authorship and date are unknown, and it reads like an almost mechanical invention by somebody working with the Aristotelian definition of Tragedy in front of him, and producing what has been called a "travesty" of it and a "sorry fabrication". In any case, it adds nothing to what we could do for ourselves; it follows the phrasing and wording in an exactly parallel way, substituting (where appropriate) terms picked up from the *Poetics*.

The only other possible explanation of the absence of any treatment of Comedy in the *Poetics* is that it had already been treated in the dialogue *On the Poets*; it may have been treated there in some fairly full way. But that does not get over the clear promise at the beginning of ch. vi that Comedy is to be treated "hereafter" (καὶ περὶ κωμωδίας ὕστερον ἐροῦμεν 49^b, 21-2).

(b) The second rather startling omission is that there is no treatment of lyric poetry:

It is touched on only occasionally, in mentions of the dithyramb and the nome, or of the choric parts of Tragedy. The probability is, as Bywater says, that from the importance of its musical element it belonged in Aristotle's classification of the arts more with music than with poetry proper. Greek lyric poetry dealt with the same mythology as Epic before and Tragedy after its culmination. Aristotle probably regarded it as having been absorbed by drama and "achieving its nature" more fully in Tragedy. The personal lyric had no structure of plot, like Epic and Drama, and so offered much less to interest Aristotle.

Remember, too, that the Greeks had no "descriptive" poetry in our sense, except in so far as it was incorporated in one of the other main poetic kinds, and related to a wider whole. Sometimes it is almost implied that the Greeks were either insensitive to visual beauty (especially of landscape) or else that they somehow missed seeing its

potentialities in poetry. But this was not so at all; and there is splendid evidence to the contrary in, e.g., *Hippolytus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Antigone's description, at the very opening of the play, of the view of Athens and of the sacred grove to which they have come; and the famous chorus about Colonus, the first stasimon—the nightingales, the groves, the flowers, the olive-trees, the horses and the sea—show how even landscape was a theme of the highest poetry, though not landscape for its own sake. And, to take only one more example, the messenger's speech at the end, about Oedipus's death, shows a combination of visual detail with the ritual and emotional solemnity of the action in a description which not even a prose translation can kill. These are effects of a kind which Shakespeare, too, achieved over and over again within a drama, relating visual description closely to dramatic action and the main themes of the play. And it is notable that the greatest non-dramatic descriptive poetry in English (I am thinking chiefly of descriptions of landscape and visible nature) was written at a time when the poetic drama, though often attempted, was in decline.

At the great periods of Greek literature "descriptive poetry" came within the framework of the great "serious" kinds, Epic, Tragedy and Lyric. No need was felt that it should establish "kinds" of its own.

LECTURE III

PLOT (I)

We come now to the main matter of the book.

I propose to begin the discussion of Aristotle's theory of Tragedy with its simpler elements, and work up through them to the more complex, and more difficult to understand. This will both be easier and also make the coherence of his treatment plainer: it will involve beginning with the more formal and structural matters (which are treated on the whole from the point of view of the poet) and proceeding later to the effects of Tragedy in emotion and pleasure (which are treated on the whole from the point of view of a member of an audience or a reader).

I shall deal with five main themes first, in this order: the construction of the Plot; relation of Plot to Character; qualities of Tragic Character; development of Plot; Tragic Incidents and Tragic Ending. The discussion of Tragic Incidents and the "happy or unhappy ending" will involve the emotions of the audience, and so provide the transition to the second main block of matter.

1. *Construction*

I have already in the first lecture, in dealing with the importance of terminology in general, taken Aristotle's use of the word *mythos* as a striking instance of it. I said that he is taking over the word as used for a "legend" or a "story", and then, in course of the discussion, sharpening and defining it to the point of becoming a technical term which must be translated "plot". He may not everywhere be entirely consistent (it is hard in one place in ch. xvii to make out that he is), but this working of his intelligence towards definition is the very process which makes the study of the *Poetics* so rewarding.

The distinction between "story" and "plot" must be held firmly in mind to understand his meaning. In his lectures on *Aspects of the Novel*, which I mentioned before (p. 18), E. M. Forster says that one of the characteristics of a "story" is that its "beginning and end are arbitrary"; this brings into focus Aristotle's insistence that a "plot" must have a beginning. The plot is something that the poet *makes* (ch. ix, p. 44 *ad fin*); but, as for the story, it is immaterial whether he makes it or not (ch. xvii, p. 61 *ad fin*), though in practice the tragedians do usually keep to the traditional stories (ch. ix, p. 44). And because the poet *makes* his plot, its beginning is as much of his making as anything else about it.

Aristotle's famous statement in ch. vii (p. 40) that a Tragedy must have a "beginning, a middle¹ and an end" is thus related to his whole view of the scope of the poet as a "maker". The beginning and end are matters within the poet's control, and on his determination of them depend the bounds of the unity which is the essential characteristic of all works of art, and of a plot as distinct from a story.

There are two points I want to make about beginnings:

(a) "A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else" (ch. vii, p. 40) (*ἀρχὴ δὲ ἐστὶν ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης μετ' ἄλλο ἐστίν*).

The emphasis here is on the *necessarily*, upon the logic of connection. There is no pretence that in order to define this beginning the poet may not have to refer to matters supposed to have happened earlier in the "story". A present situation involves its causes, and it is a great point of dramatic technique to determine how the knowledge of such antecedents is to be conveyed without weakening the clearness and novelty of the beginning, and the essential unity of the development of the initial situation. *King Oedipus* provides a fine illustration of the solving of this problem, as of much else. The play begins with the plague in Thebes, and the need to release the city from the plague by the discovery and punishment of the guilty man. The play's process is the process of the dis-

¹ [In ch. xxiii he uses of epic the plural, *μέσα*, "middles".]

covery; its end, the punishment. Sophocles makes his starting-point the moment of despair in the Thebans and their king's brave determination to deal with it. The initial situation (the plague, the mourning and the royalty) is given immediately in dramatic terms. Thereafter, each step which Oedipus himself takes provides the occasion for revealing some part of the antecedent knowledge which is necessary to the process of the discovery. And none of this information is needed for the grasping of the initial situation.

Very few plays, Greek or otherwise, make these revelations so skilfully, or provide so clear an illustration of what Aristotle means. In different periods, and with different dramatists, conventions have differed (and there have been endless experiments) about the method of "exposition". You will find these discussed in a convenient and lively way in Mr. F. L. Lucas's Hogarth Lecture, *Tragedy* (pp. 80 ff.); the Ghost in *Hamlet*, Prospero's long expositions of the past to Caliban and to Miranda are among his examples. I need not repeat them. There is no doubt that many of them, including some of Shakespeare's, are clumsy; the classical French use of the confidant seems to us sometimes even more clumsy still. The common, though not by any means invariable, Greek practice was to use an expository soliloquy in the Prologue spoken by a major character, or a minor character, or by somebody who does not recur again in the play.¹ A good example of the main character doing it is the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which Aristotle speaks

¹ Cf. Dryden, *Essay* (quoted from *Essays of John Dryden*, selected and edited by W. P. Ker, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1900, I, 61-2): Lisideius is speaking in praise of the French:

"There are indeed some protatick persons in the Ancients, whom they make use of in their plays, either to hear or give the relation: but the French avoid this with great address, making their narrations only to, or by such, who are some way interested in the main design."

According to Ker, Dryden probably took the word from Corneille, *Examen de Rodogune: personnage protatique*.

Donatus in Terent. *Andr.* Prolog, 1. προτατικὸν πρόσωπον. Cf. Scaliger, *Poet.*, I, 13.

of in ch. xvii, where Iphigenia's occasion for recapitulating the past is a premonitory dream, rather of the kind that opens Corneille's *Polyeucte*. Another example is the Watchman's speech at the opening of the *Agamemnon*. Of the conventions for handling the exposition, the prologue soliloquy is perhaps the best, because it is so frankly conventional and does not interfere (as, say, the confidant convention interferes) with the dramatic presentation of the opening situation proper.

In connection with this matter of the exposition of events antecedent to the beginning of the play, I must say something about the Greek use of traditional stories. There is a famous often-quoted and vulgar passage about this in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. It comes in Eugenius's defence of the Moderns (Ker, I, 46), where he speaks of the plot of a Greek play as

only some tale derived from Thebes or Troy, or at least something that happened in those two ages; which was worn so threadbare by the pens of all the epic poets, and even by tradition itself of the talkative Greeklings, (as Ben Jonson, calls them,) that before it came upon the stage, it was already known to all the audience: and the people, so soon as ever they heard the name of Oedipus, knew as well as the poet, that he had killed his father by a mistake, and committed incest with his mother, before the play; that they were now to hear of a great plague, an oracle, and the ghost of Laius: so that they sat with a yawning kind of expectation, till he was to come with his eyes pulled out, and speak a hundred or two of verses in a tragic tone, in complaint of his misfortunes.

Ker, in his edition of the Dryden essay, suggests that Dryden's probable source for this passage, either directly or indirectly, was a fragment of the comic poet Antiphanes,¹

¹ Fragment from Athenaeus VI, 1. Meineke, *Com. Frag.*, III, 106 and T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1884, II, 90. Antiphanes, no. 191.

μακάριόν ἐστιν ἡ τραγωδία
ποίημα κατὰ πάντ', εἰ γε πρῶτον οἱ λόγοι
ὑπὸ τῶν θεατῶν εἰσιν ἐγνωρισμένοι,
πρὶν καὶ τιν' εἰπεῖν ὥσθ' ὑπομῆσαι μόνον
δεῖ τὸν ποιητήν. Οἰδίσουν γὰρ ἂν μόνον
φῶ, τᾶλλα πάντ' ἴσασιν· ὁ πατήρ Λαῖος,
μήτηρ Ἰοκάστη, θυγατέρες, παῖδες τίνες,
τί πείσθ' οὗτος, τί πεποίηκεν. . . .

which says that merely on the mention of the name Oedipus "they know all the rest".

The relevant part of the Antiphanes fragment is this (you have to remember it is part of a speech by a character in a comedy):

In poetry now tragedy has all the luck since the stories are known beforehand to the spectators even before anybody speaks; so that the poet only has to remind them. For if I merely say the name Oedipus, they know all the rest—his father Laius, mother Jocasta, daughters, who his sons are, what will happen to him, what he has done.

But even if the audience did know the story beforehand, did this affect Greek dramatic practice? Did the dramatists play on this, as is sometimes suggested, especially in the way of achieving what seem to us rather illegitimate effects of dramatic irony? It is worth seeing what Aristotle says on this point, in ch. ix (p. 44):

One must not aim at a rigid adherence to the traditional stories on which tragedies are based. It would be absurd, in fact, to do so, as even the known stories are only known to a few, though they are a delight none the less to all.

Aristotle was writing in the middle of the fourth century when knowledge of the traditional stories may have been declining. The fragment of Antiphanes, which on the face of it directly contradicts Aristotle, belongs to the generation before him. The matter was obviously one of degree. How much detail would an audience know, and about which stories? Of the play called the *Rhesus*, traditionally but tentatively ascribed to Euripides, Gilbert Murray says¹ that the audience is not only expected to know the general story of the *Iliad*—"it merely means that the poet takes for granted the main outlines of the heroic saga"—but "we are also supposed to take up the story as it stands at the opening of the . . . tenth Book of the *Iliad*"; and the story is taken straight from Homer. (There is only one other extant Greek play taken straight from Homer.²) Aristotle would probably have condemned

¹ *The Rhesus of Euripides* translated by Gilbert Murray, p. 55 (London, George Allen, 1913).

² The *Cyclops* of Euripides.

this. For it is clear that, with an infinitely wider knowledge of Greek drama than we have, and belonging to the same civilisation that produced its masterpieces, he did not regard such preliminary knowledge as essential; and this plainly implies that he did not think a good dramatist traded on the audience's possessing such knowledge for any part of his particular effects.¹

(b) The second point about beginnings is the obvious one that a Greek tragedy normally "started later", so to speak, than, say, a Shakespearean tragedy. Here again Dryden's sprightly way of putting it comes aptly to hand:

The Ancients . . . set the audience, as it were, at the post where the race is to be concluded; and, saving them the tedious expectation of seeing the poet set out and ride the beginning of the course, you behold him not till he is in sight of the goal, and just upon you. (Ker, I, 39; spoken by Crites, in defence of the Ancients.)

I shall come back to this later when I discuss the so-called "Unity of Time". For the present, I want to say that this practice of the Greek drama did impose the necessity of more exposition by "relation"; but that it also clarified the boundaries of a play's unity: it brought into greater prominence the fact that the unity is *of the poet's making*; it is his conscious art, his choice within the convention, that determines the start. And the greater concentration, which the late start brings, made more evident that organic unity on which Aristotle primarily insists.

2. *Unity and Length*

Aristotle's view of Poetic Unity is governed by the conception of "order". Experience in real life, or history, or a chronological narrative or story, is amorphous and boundless (*ἄπειρον*)²; by contrast, a work of art is shaped,

¹ [There were many variant versions of myths, and dramatists were free to adopt any or invent new variations.]

² The two leading words in the *Poetics*, *ὅλον καὶ τέλειον*, are explicitly contrasted with *ἄπειρον* in *Phys.*, iii, 6, 207a 7 ff. (Butcher, p. 276). *τέλειος* means what achieves its end or purpose: action is "motion towards an end" and when it reaches the end is *τελεία*.

limited and complete in itself. Aristotle states and re-states this essential leading principle in a number of different places and different words, throughout the book.

In the formal definition of Tragedy in ch. vi (p. 35) the action of a tragedy is "complete in itself" (πράξεως . . . τελείας); in ch. vii (p. 40) the action is "a whole" and "complete in itself" (τελείας καὶ ὅλης πράξεως); in ch. viii it is "one action, a complete whole" (p. 42 *ad fin.*); in ch. xxiii (p. 79) Epic, no less than Tragedy, "is based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself" (περὶ μίαν πράξιν ὅλην καὶ τελείαν). And that same ch. xxiii also introduces one of the most valuable phrases in which Aristotle amplifies the idea of wholeness and completeness: he says "with all the organic unity of a living creature" (ὥσπερ ζῶον ἐν ὅλῳ). This is to be linked up to the passage in ch. vii (p. 40) which says that "to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must . . . present a certain order (τάξις) in its arrangement of parts".

This comparison goes back to Plato's *Phaedrus* (264 c) where Socrates says, of a speech, that it:

ought to be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own, not headless or footless, but having middle parts and extremities properly in keeping with each other, and with the whole.

The ideas of order, harmony, proportion and completeness are all present in the normal Greek idea of what is beautiful; and when attached to a "living creature" (whether a man or an animal) would require not only structural completeness, but also good health.¹

This comparison of the unity of a work of art to that of a "living creature" is so important because it provides a vivid refutation of the charge that Aristotle is describing a formal, dead, mechanical kind of unity. It is, with the

¹ [The word for animal can also mean picture or sculptured relief. In the *Phaedrus* too a drawing of a living creature may be referred to. The occurrence once again of Aristotle's favourite comparison of poetry to painting ("ut pictura poesis" in Horace) does not affect the argument, since a picture also must have "organic unity".]

passage in the *Phaedrus*, the very source of the still-current critical phrase “organic unity”, which is used to describe just the opposite. It leaves room for the vigour and freedom of creation; and it emphasizes the *life*¹ in the product. It also precludes the suggestion that Aristotle’s unity tends towards uniformity. Within a living creature (even in an animal, and still more in a man) there are many different parts with many different functions and different kinds of activity. So too in a play or poem the unity on which Aristotle insists is a complex living unity which involves the interaction of parts in effective movement. And, of course, just as one dog may differ from another dog, and one man from another man, so one tragedy may differ from another tragedy. It is one of the dangers of all “general theories” of Tragedy, that one is left asking at the end, “Well, if all this is so, why does one tragic play differ as much as it does from another?”

What Aristotle says about the order and wholeness of a tragedy is connected closely with what he says about its “magnitude”, “size” or “length”. In the formal definition in ch. vi (p. 35) the phrase “having magnitude” is emphatically to be taken together with all the latter part of ch. vii (pp. 40–1), which speaks of “a certain definite magnitude” and “length”. Aristotle is *talking about the physical length of plays*. I stress what ought to be obvious enough because I have found that people beginning the study of the *Poetics* are only too ready to take the “magnitude” in the formal definition of ch. vi as if it meant something like “importance”, or magnitude in the sense of dealing with persons of high status. Nothing of the kind.

This principle of “the right size” extends in Aristotle’s work beyond the *Poetics*. In the *Politics*, for instance, he says that there is a “right size” for a city and suggests it might extend to the limit of the range of a man’s voice.

¹ [In ch. vi (50 a 38) Aristotle says that “the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot” (Bywater) ἀρχὴ καὶ οὖν ψυχὴ· ψυχὴ is here in Aristotle’s mature sense of the word the first actuality (ἐντελέχεια) of the body, its form.]

This principle is both aesthetic and utilitarian; aesthetic in the sense that extremes are considered monstrous and horrible, like an animal (or picture) a thousand miles long; utilitarian in that things are related to the size and capacities of human beings, so that whatever is too large or too small is unmanageable, and cannot be seen and appreciated as a whole. Also, as things exist for a certain end—and the end of tragedy is a unity of action—their size must be functionally appropriate to that end. Thus in ch. vii there is no rigid dogma laid down about the length of tragedies; but the consideration of length is governed by reference to two criteria:

(a) The first criterion is the function of a tragedy itself; it must be of such a size that it can adequately display

the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from misfortune to happiness, or from happiness to misfortune.

(b) The second criterion is the capacity of the spectator or reader; the play must not exceed the length that can be compassed by the human memory; otherwise the essential unity of impression will be lost. But, so far as is consistent with its being comprehensible as a whole, the longer the better.

That is, it should have the greatest extension and variety that is compatible with unity of impression. Aristotle uses the word *εὐσύννοπος* (ch. xxiii, p. 80), capable of being grasped in a single act of vision, and instances the whole ten years of the Trojan war as too long and too complicated from the variety of incident in it. This brings me to Aristotle's handling of the "middle" of a tragedy, and the use of the term *Episodes*.

3. *Episodes*

The term "episode" is used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* in two slightly different senses, and the discussion of them is important for understanding what he said about the *process* of writing a Tragedy.

The simplest sense occurs in ch. xii (pp. 48-9) when he is giving the technical names for the various structural parts of a play, in the sense of the quantitative sections (*κατὰ τὸ ποσόν*) into which it is divided. These parts are for the speaking actors (1) the Prologue, (2) Episodes (varying in number) and (3) the Exode. For the chorus there are (1) the Parode, the choral song as the chorus moves in after the Prologue, and (2) Stasima, varying numbers of choral songs occurring through the body of the play. A *Commos* is a lyrical lament in which chorus and one or more characters take part; there are two such passages in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, (1) when the chorus question Oedipus about his past, (2) during the pealing of the thunder towards the end. An episode is defined as "all that comes in between two whole choral songs". This is entirely a technical term; and an "episode" is similar to an "act" in our dramatic terminology: it is a major clearly-marked division of the matter. It means literally "the passage which covers the entry of an actor in addition to the chorus" (which usually was on from beginning to end of a drama). The end of each episode was often, but not by any means always, marked by the exit of all the characters from the stage, leaving the chorus in sole possession to sing their stasimon dividing one episode from the next. Thus at the end of Episode II of *King Oedipus*, both Jocasta and Oedipus go off before the beginning of Stasimon II of the chorus; but at the end of Episode III Oedipus stays on during the short third stasimon of the chorus; and he begins Episode IV by addressing the chorus. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, on the other hand, Oedipus himself is on the stage continuously through the whole action till he goes off to his death, but the beginning and end of episodes are marked by the entrances and exits of other characters.

Elsewhere, however, Aristotle uses the word "episode" for a division of a poem, of a kind which is common to both Tragedy and Epic; and in Epic it plainly cannot mean an "episode", like an "act", in that technical dramatic sense. In ch. xxiv (p. 82), for instance, he says it is one of the virtues of Epic that it gives more scope than Tragedy

for diverse kinds of episodes (ἐπεισοδιοῦν ἀνομοίοις ἐπεισοδίοις). And again, at the end of ch. xvii, after summarising the story of the *Odyssey* in less than a dozen lines, he ends by saying that "everything else in it is episodes" (p. 63) (τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐπεισόδια: Bywater here puts "episode").

Now, if everything in the *Odyssey*, an epic in twenty-four books of about 12,000 lines (except a bald summary of ten lines or so), can be called "episodes", it is evident that "episode" is a very important term indeed in Aristotle's literary vocabulary, quite irrespective of its use as a technical term for a clear-cut division in drama.¹

At two vital points in ch. xvii, where Aristotle is discussing all this, it is most important to keep an alert eye on Bywater's translation. On p. 61, he translates:

His story, again, whether already made or of his own making, he should first simplify and reduce to a universal form, before proceeding to lengthen it out *by the insertion of episodes*.

And again, on p. 62, he translates:

This done, the next thing, after the proper names have been fixed as a basis for the story, is *to work in episodes or accessory incidents*.

In neither of these places is the version sensitive to Aristotle's use of words; for the phrases "by the insertion of episodes" and "to work in episodes or accessory incidents" imply almost that the poet is tittivating, decorating and artificially extending an object already there. They almost imply that the story is more important than what the poet does to it. Could anything really be more ridiculous than this mechanical idea that the poet *inserts*

¹ I know a little of the controversy that has gone on about this. Many of its earlier phases are summarised by Twining (ed. 1789), 210-13; (ed. 1812), I, 315 ff., etc.

The passage which most tells against me is *Rhetoric*, III, 17: ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐπιδεικτικοῖς [λόγοις], δεῖ τὸν λόγον ἐπεισοδιοῦν ἐπαίνοις, οἶον Ἰσοκράτης ποιεῖ· ἀεὶ γάρ τινα εἰσάγει, where "episodes" look just like mere stuffing, "dragging in". But I should aim to get over the difficulty in the same way as with *muthos*, by saying that Aristotle is in process of *moving towards* a clearer and more exact definition of terms.

things in a "story" here and there, like a dressmaker "letting in" pieces here and there? I must here warn you also against a new version of the *Poetics* recently made by Mr. L. J. Potts and published by the Cambridge University Press; he here translates "interpolate", which carries the same sort of derogatory implication as Bywater's version.

These two important passages in ch. xvii should, I think, be translated something like this:

(a) p. 61, bottom:

Whether the story is already made, or of his own making, he should set it out in general terms and then "episodise" it and lengthen it as I have suggested (οὕτως). (Analyse it into stages and work up each to a proper length.)

(b) p. 62:

Then, after the proper names have been assigned, he should make it into episodes (divide it into acts) (μετὰ ταῦτα δ' ἡδὴ ὑποθέντα τὰ ὀνόματα ἐπεισοδιοῦν).¹

In both these crucial places Aristotle uses one very workmanlike verb which can be quite fairly translated as "episodise": he says nothing at all about "insertion", or "working in" or "accessory incidents": such phrases utterly kill the comparison between the essential unity of a work of art and a living organism; and they tend also to reduce the significance of what he says in ch. ix (p. 45) about *necessity* in the sequence of the episodes. The worst effect, however, of Bywater's handling of the passages is to make it appear that the "story", which the poet may well be given traditionally, or take from any source whatever, has some kind of superior authority over the use which he himself makes of it. The story appears as the important matter, and the "episodising" as quite incidental.

¹ If Bywater is bad, Butcher is not much better: in both places he translates ἐπεισοδιοῦν "fill in the episodes". If "episodise" is thought objectionable, I would suggest "make into episodes". One certainly cannot say "make episodic", because Aristotle uses this as the adjective to describe *failure* in "episodising" (ch. ix).

But in Aristotle it is exactly the other way round. The "episodising" is the essential activity of the poet as the maker (or creator, if you like) of his plot. For it is exactly here, and in his diction (more than in his characterisation), that the individuality and originality of the poet most assert and declare themselves (see the opening sentence of ch. xvii). The misunderstanding of Aristotle has here been helped for a modern reader by the increasingly derogatory implications of the English word episode, which has now come to mean something like a "mere episode" or "fleeting and unimportant incident" (Bywater's gratuitous phrase "accessory incidents" reflects this); whereas, in Aristotle's use of the word, episodes are the essential limbs or organs of the body of the poem that make its life and function possible.

Thus, the processes which Aristotle is describing are quite clear. There is first a rambling and amorphous "story", often taken over from tradition or picked up from some other extraneous source (and how well this describes Shakespeare's habit, or Dryden's in *All for Love*, or Milton's in *Samson Agonistes*), and then comes the serious business of *making* it into a play or an epic. This is a creative activity.

The first phase of this process, Aristotle suggests, is a reduction of the "story" to essentials. This raises at once a question about the justice of Bywater's translations "reduce to a universal form", and "universal element". Butcher here translates "sketch its general outline", and "general plan".¹ And Butcher's phraseology seems to me right.² In justifying his translation in his essays he says (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 193-4) that the Greek word *καθόλου*, which is here at issue, "denotes the broad outline, the bare sketch of the plot". It does denote the broad outline; but it is the broad outline of

¹ Cf. Rostagni, edn. (1928) p. 68 "proporseli in termini generali".

² Butcher's sentence then continues ". . . and is wholly distinct from the *καθόλου* of ch. ix, the general or universal truth which poetry conveys." I think that the usage in ch. ix approximates more closely to that of ch. xvii than Butcher makes out. But that is not the point at issue here.

the story, not of the plot. In ch. xvii Aristotle is not at all concerned with "the universal" in any logical or metaphysical sense. All he has done in ch. xvii with the stories of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and the *Odyssey* is to make summaries of them and take out the proper names. The removal of the names stresses the fact that the *source* of his story is a matter of indifference to the poet; it has the effect of detaching the story from legend or history or from the borderland between them, and leaves it as a story standing on its own merits.

The summary of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* suggests that Aristotle is summarising "story" not "plot"; for it goes beyond the confines of that particular play, back to the matter of the sacrifice at Aulis, which was, in fact, the subject of another play by Euripides. The play *Iphigenia in Tauris* opens with Iphigenia already a priestess; and the whole business of her being spirited away from sacrifice by her father, Agamemnon, is in the past. All this is every bit as much "outside the plot of the play" as the reasons for the arrival of Orestes: but it is part of the "story" in a way that the matter dealing with Orestes is not. It does seem as if Aristotle in this context is using *μῦθος* again for "story" rather than "plot". For it would indeed be preposterous if he were merely to summarise the "plot" of Euripides's play when the whole illustration is meant to show what a poet does with a story before he makes a play or a plot out of it at all.

Bywater in his version is altogether too fond of the word "incidents", which tends to lower the importance of what Aristotle is saying. There is another instance of this at a critical point of ch. vi.

Aristotle enumerates the six elements in Tragedy—Plot, Characters, Thought, Diction, Spectacle, Melody. Note that the first of these is "plot"; in Greek the word is *μῦθος*, and this is its technical use. It should be "plot", not Bywater's rather wavering "Fable or plot".

Bywater's version then goes on:

The most important of the six is the *combination of the incidents of the story* (μέγιστον δὲ τούτων ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων σύστασις).

There is no word in the Greek whatever to correspond with Bywater's "of the story"; and "combination of the incidents" is inadequate and weak. Aristotle's language here is firm, strong and clear: it means "the construction of the actions" or "... of the acts", or "... of what is done".¹ And this "construction of the actions" is the creative "making" of the plot, of which I have been speaking.

This process of "making into episodes" is the vital act of creative construction. In ch. ix (p. 45) Aristotle says: "Of simple Plots and actions the episodic are the worst". A failure in the "episodising" produces a series of isolated episodes not joined to each other by probability or necessity.

He says in an interesting incidental passage that even good poets sometimes do this *because the actors want it* (διὰ τοὺς ὑποκριτάς), and in consequence they "twist the sequence" (διαστρέφειν τὸ ἐφεξῆς). This shows that by the mid-fourth century actors were demanding scope for individual display in their parts—evidence of assertive individualistic vanity—to the detriment of the play as a whole.

This idea of the "episodic" tragedy was obviously a familiar one to Aristotle because in the *Metaphysics*, XIII, 3 (1090^b 19) he emphasises the continuity of nature by saying that nature is not episodic in her phenomena like a bad tragedy. This brings out clearly again in another context the relevance of the comparison I have already dwelt on, between a complete tragedy and a living creature.

¹ It is hard to distinguish *πρᾶξις* from *πρᾶγμα* as "action" and "act", because of the modern use of "act" in dramatic terminology.

LECTURE IV

PLOT (2)

1. *Probability and Necessity*

PROBABILITY and necessity are Aristotle's two criteria of dramatic coherence, and they need rather careful thought; for they are not quite as simple to understand as on the face of them they appear to be. It is perhaps best to introduce the discussion by some questions which will indicate the field within which the difficulties lie—e.g., are probability and necessity only internal criteria, relevant only to the modes of connection between one part of an artistic creation and another? Are they only the internal artistic laws of the being of Tragedy? Or, have they also an outside reference to the relation in which a dramatic work of art stands towards real life?

Again, even if the primary reference of the terms is to internal connections within the work of art, are those connections thought of as being the same in kind as connections in real life?

Again, if the connections are of the same kind both in the work of dramatic art and in real life, has the artist any freedom beyond the probability and necessity which reference to real life would impose on him?

Lastly, a question of a rather different kind: are Aristotle's criteria equally applicable to all kinds of Tragedy which can be said to have artistic unity?

These questions are fundamental, and what I have to say about them will not give final, neat answers. And furthermore, I do not want to anticipate too much at this stage the general theory of poetry which I keep for discussion later. But it is impossible to avoid trenching on the wider problems altogether.

I start with the opening sentence of ch. ix (p. 43):

The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary.

The wording here is intended not to define the possible but to limit it: for it is clear that the actual (which is not the poet's concern) also falls within the class of the possible. The poet's concern is with the possible *in so far as that is governed by* probability or necessity (τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον).

We can better understand what is meant by this double criterion by considering the word which Aristotle uses to describe its opposite; that is the word ἄλογος, which is translated in your version "improbable". Thus in ch. xv (p. 57), where Bywater writes: "There should be nothing improbable among the actual incidents", the word is ἄλογον—

ἄλογον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν.

This is in the context of the "improbability" in *King Oedipus*. And also in ch. xxiv the word occurs twice again in a similar context, where the example is once more Oedipus's ignorance of the circumstances of Laius's death.

This word means, comprehensively, something like "irrational"; and the words with which it is contrasted, "probable and necessary" taken together, imply a high degree of "rationality". In this respect the criterion is intended to exclude from the play such things as chance; unrelated events for which adequate origins are not shown within the play itself; sudden supernatural interventions, and so on. For instance, these criteria would be violated if a writer were to make a man, after a serious and important quarrel with his wife, be run over by a train or accidentally killed at a football match. For there is no connection, except the accidental one of time, between the quarrel and the death.

So far, the criteria of probability and necessity are internal criteria. But are they only or mainly so? Some

critics write as if this were the whole of the matter. Ros-
tagni, for instance, says that "the action of the poem is
regulated by nothing but the internal laws of probability
or necessity". (Il fatto della poesia, invece, non si regola
su altro che sulle leggi interne del verosimile o del neces-
sario [Introduzione, 1927, p. lxxiii: 1945, p. lxxvi.]).

Butcher says (on p. 166, 4th edn., 1907):

The rule of "probability", as also that of "necessity", refers
rather to the internal structure of a poem; it is the inner law
which secures the cohesion of the parts.

The "probable" is not determined by a numerical average of
instances; it is not a condensed expression for what meets us in
the common course of things.

And Butcher then goes on for several pages about how
"the higher creations of poetry move in another plane".

Against this I wish to suggest that for Aristotle these
criteria of probability and necessity derive their validity
within the structure of the play from their validity in real
life.

The criteria are applied by Aristotle mainly to two sets
of circumstances, both explicit, side by side in ch. xv
(pp. 56-7). They are applied:

(a) To the connection of events in the play,
ἐν τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων συστάσει.

(b) To the words and deeds of a person being the
probable or necessary outcome of his character,
*τὸν τοιοῦτον τὰ τοιαῦτα λέγειν ἢ πράττειν ἢ ἀναγ-
καῖον ἢ εἰκός.*

Surely the "probability" which is at issue is ultimately
derived from a "numerical average of instances" or (if
not from exact statistics) from the belief that statistics
would confirm the finding. Surely the "numerical aver-
age" is thought to be strongly against the chance that a
man just after a serious and important quarrel with his
wife *would* be run over by a train. The calculable chances
are against the murderess of her children being suddenly
rescued by a heavenly chariot. And it is just for these
reasons that Aristotle condemns such events.

The case is similar with necessity. Though the necessity operates within the poem, its *necessariness* is independent of the poem. (a) With the connection of events the underlying assumption is that an event of class x must always have consequences y . The only thing limited to the poem itself is the statement that an event of class x has occurred. Such an event may never have occurred in real life; but still the necessity holds good in real life in hypothetical form: "If an event of class x occurs, it must have consequences y ." Similarly (b), with character, the necessity holds good in real life in hypothetical form:

If such-and-such a person exists, in such-and-such circumstances and related to such-and-such other characters, he *must* act in such-and-such a manner.

But the poet *does* have to establish that such a person *does* exist in those circumstances. It is this that he has to make "convincing" (*πιθανόν*).

It is thus quite beside the mark for Butcher, after mentioning Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Hamlet and Othello, to say:

We do not think of measuring the intrinsic probability of what they say or do by the probability of meeting their counterpart in the actual world. (*op. cit.* p. 167.)

Of course we do not. We are not judging the initial facts of the play by the facts of our personal experience or the facts of history. But we are, on Aristotle's principles, judging the logic of the development of the play by the logic of experience. And he assumes that the characters resemble us enough for us to be able to do this successfully. We are thinking of them in human terms with reference to common human experience.

Dramatic art has no higher degree of rationality than the physical world when that is philosophically understood; to that it may be by analogy compared, as in the comparison of its unity, order, completeness and life with the organism of a living creature. But in the moral world of men art makes evident in its very structure a coherence

and order which are notably lacking in the unlimited succession of incidents which befall a single man in the straight run of time, or in the jumble of half-understood experience which constitutes the life of most of us.

The criteria of probability and necessity are part of the means of demonstrating this ideal order, and we appreciate the order only because those criteria fall within the scope of our ordinary judgments.

2. *Conviction*

(τὸ πιθανόν)

In speaking just now of the initial presentation of a character I used the word "convincing"; the word might also be translated "credible". We have met it already in the first lecture, when I quoted a passage from ch. xvii, where Aristotle says that the poet "who feels the emotions to be described will be the most convincing". The word and its opposite "unconvincing" also occur in two important passages in connection with the discussion of the probable and the possible.

In ch. xxiv (p. 84) Bywater translates: "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility. The story should never be made up of improbable incidents; there should be nothing of the sort in it." Then in ch. xxv (p. 91):

For the purposes of poetry a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility;

and a little farther on in the same chapter he says that there can be no apology for improbability of plot when it is not "necessary" and no use is made of it.

I am aware that the context of these passages belongs more with the discussion of the general theory of poetry than with the discussion of the coherence of plot. But I think it is fair, especially in the light of the last passage, to relate them to that other context, and you will see that they do allow an element of freedom to the poet to override the strictness of internal logic maintained normally by the judgments of probability and necessity. Aristotle even uses the word "necessity" here of the poet him-

self, as a kind of artistic constraint which justifies him in violating the other "necessity" of logic when his matter is intractable. But to do this successfully needs the greatest exercise of a poet's skill.

The important point in Aristotle's paradox about "probable impossibilities" is that "probability" and "convincingness" must go together. If the poet's skill is such that he can persuade us of an improbability, the exactness of reference to empirical experience can be forgone.

This raises the very important question whether these criteria are equally applicable to all kinds of play, even to all Greek plays. The answer must, I think, be that they are not. Aristotle was writing with Sophocles in mind as his norm and ideal. He has very little to say about Aeschylus, for instance.

In the *Prometheus Vinculus* of Aeschylus it is easy to see that the plot is in Aristotle's derogatory sense episodic; it is possible to transpose the episodes without a violation of logical sequence, because there is no logical sequence according to the criteria of probability and necessity as Aristotle used them.¹ The whole situation is not, and is not meant to be, "human" in that sort of way. To establish the essential unity of such a play some other law of connection must be found.

In practice, when judging the artistic unity of particular plays, it is important to ask what kind of plays they are; whether they are meant to have the kind of unity of which Aristotle speaks. It may even happen that plays have a unity of a kind different from that which their author intended or thought them to have.

Samson Agonistes was clearly meant by Milton to have a unity of the Aristotelian kind; it was prefaced by an Aristotelian explanation, and it was obviously largely modelled on Sophocles. Dr. Johnson² objected to its construction on Aristotelian grounds, in that it lacked a middle. In effect he was saying it was episodic. It seems to me that the defences of the unity of *Samson Agonistes*

¹ See H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 2nd edn. 1950, pp. 58-9.

² In the *Rambler*, Nos. 139 and 140 (1751).

on purely Aristotelian grounds are governed more by an *a priori* desire to square Milton with Aristotle than by an honest examination of the play. The sequence of episodes does not seem to me to be governed by the criteria of probability and necessity as I think Aristotle intended them. In particular the Dalila episode is unmotivated by what has gone before it and does not contribute to the catastrophe which follows.

3. *The Unities of Time and Place*

I do not want to spend long in these lectures on the so-called Unities of Time and Place. They have been discussed *ad nauseam* in other places, and there is very little of fresh interest to be said. Neo-classic theorising about them is exemplified by Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. Dryden himself was aware of Aristotle's real doctrine, especially about the unity of place: Eugenius is speaking (for the Moderns):

But in the first place give me leave to tell you, that the Unity of Place, however it might be practised by them, was never any of their rules: we neither find it in Aristotle, Horace, or any who have written of it, till in our age the French poets first made it a precept of the stage. (Ker, I, 48.)

The important thing is to remember how little Aristotle said about time or place. The question of time is touched on by Aristotle only once. In ch. v (p. 34) he says (I quote with some omissions of insignificant words):

Epic poetry . . . differs from Tragedy . . . in its length—which is due to its action having no fixed limit of time, whereas Tragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that . . . though at first the practice in this respect was just the same in tragedies as in epic poems.

The original point here is the elementary comparison between the physical length of the two different kinds of work, an epic being several thousand lines, and a tragedy hardly ever more than about 1600. And then Aristotle just slips in, incidentally, a reason for this in the fact that the imaginary time covered by the action of a Greek

tragedy does not in practice normally exceed twenty-four hours, whereas the imaginary time in an epic may be weeks or years (in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* it is about fifty days).

There is not the slightest question that the phrase "a single circuit of the sun" means a solar day of twenty-four hours (μίαν περίοδον ἡλίου). The absurd attempts of neo-classical critics to interpret it as meaning a day of twelve hours or so were governed by their own totally different conceptions of dramatic delusion. Furthermore Aristotle says nothing of the twenty-four-hour limitation as being a "rule"; it was merely a fairly normal practice, and even Greek practice was flexible.¹

The important thing to grasp about Greek practice is that there was no claim whatever that time taken in performance precisely coincided with the supposed duration of the imagined action. There are two vivid instances of this in the *Oedipus at Colonos*. The stasimon of the chorus describing the battle in which Antigone and Ismene are rescued from Creon obviously does not last as long as the pursuit and battle would have lasted; nor does the interval between the last exit of Oedipus and the Messenger's speech describing his death at all represent the time taken by what the speech describes.

The fundamental absurdity of the neo-classic attitude appears plainly in what Eugenius takes over from Corneille's *Third Discourse*, just after the passage I

¹ Though it was normal, it was by no means invariable in Greek tragedy: e.g., in the *Eumenides* months or years elapse between the opening of the play and the next scene: and there is also a change of place from Delphi to Athens.

In the *Suppliants* of Euripides there is a gap to allow for the raising of an army in Athens; its march to Thebes; its victory and return—a minimum of ten days.

In the *Agamemnon*, even if a definite interval of days cannot be assumed between the fire-signals announcing the fall of Troy and the return of Agamemnon, at any rate the conditions of time are disregarded and the march of events is imaginatively accelerated: and in many Greek tragedies it is quite impossible to construct with confidence an exact chronology for the imagined action, e.g., *Oedipus at Colonos*.

quoted just now. The *Suppliants* of Euripides is his example:

Euripides, in tying himself to one day, has committed an absurdity never to be forgiven him; for in one of his tragedies he has made Theseus go from Athens to Thebes, which was about forty English miles, under the walls of it to give battle, and appear victorious in the next act; and yet, from the time of his departure to the return of the Nuntius, who gives the relation of his victory, Aethra and the Chorus have but thirty-six verses; that is not for every mile a verse. (Ker, I, 48.)

There is here the quite false assumption that Euripides *meant* to tie himself to one day, whereas plainly he meant nothing of the kind: and this false assumption is derived from the notion that the whole dramatic performance was meant to be a *delusion*, with stage time and imagined action running exactly *pari passu*. Eugenius's so-called Defence of the Moderns is, in this matter, a defence of the *delusionist* method, and a blaming of the Ancients for inefficiency on the grounds that they tried to be delusionists and didn't do it very well. But in fact they did not even try to be.

About the unity of place, Aristotle nowhere says anything to the effect that the stage should "represent" only one place throughout the course of the action. The nearest he comes to any mention of the matter at all is in the comparison between Epic and Tragedy, in ch. xxiv (p. 82):

In a play one cannot represent an action with a number of parts going on simultaneously; one is limited to the part on the stage and connected with the actors. Whereas in epic poetry the narrative form makes it possible for one to describe a number of simultaneous incidents.

So far as *visual* representation goes, this limitation was imposed by the necessities of Greek practice, though a divided stage is possible in a modern theatre. *Aurally*, however, Greek plays could include "simultaneous" action. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, for instance, the cries of Agamemnon being murdered in his bath are

heard "from within"; with the result that *in sound* the spectators get both the murder and the chorus's response to it.

Visually the Greek setting did as a rule represent only one place throughout the action. Very often it was the outside of a palace or a house, as in the *Agamemnon*, *King Oedipus*, the *Medea* and the *Alcestis*; or it might be some more elaborate scene requiring simple "props" or simple painted scenery as in the *Oedipus at Colonus* or the *Philoctetes*, where the action takes place near a grotto on the rocky sea-coast.

But even among the extant Greek plays there are exceptions to this. There is a slight exception in the *Ajax* of Sophocles, where there is a move from the outside to the inside of Ajax's tent; but this would have been done by opening the doors at the back, a kind of variation that the physical structure of the theatre easily allowed. As I have already said, the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus moves from Delphi to Athens.

The Renaissance critic who started the doctrine of "The Three Unities" in its rigid form was Castelvetro in his edition of Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1570. Thus Eugenius's statement that the French poets first made it a "precept" of the stage is not true. It was from Castelvetro that the doctrine came into Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*, which was written round about 1583.

Here is J. E. Spingarn's account of Castelvetro's doctrine, in his *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*:¹

The absurdities to which he carried it were not exceeded even by his most fanatical successors. He was so dominated by the idea of the necessity of the coincidence of stage time with imagined time that he argues Aristotle *could* not have meant twenty-four hours, because of the physical inconvenience of sitting so long in the theatre.²

¹ New York and London, Macmillan, 1899, pp. 98-9.

² Cf. also Dr. Johnson's refutation in his *Preface to Shakespeare*.

LECTURE V

THE RELATION OF CHARACTER AND PLOT

THIS brings us to the famous argument by which Aristotle says that "plot" is more important than "character"; it is stated in the second half of ch. vi (pp. 36-9) and has produced a great deal of discussion. It is absurd in any language (quite apart from questions of translation) to bandy about complicated terms like "character", "plot" and "action" as if they were "fixities and definites". In this particular discussion much avoidable trouble has been caused by the assumption that the meanings of the terms "character" and "action" are self-evident, and that there is some kind of elementary opposition between them.

The essential clues to the proper interpretation of this latter half of ch. vi are present in the language that Aristotle uses in the chapter itself; but they can be understood more clearly by reference to what he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And this is one of the passages which, as I said before, does presuppose some knowledge of the *Ethics* and the terminology used there.

The point to get hold of first is this: although Aristotle in the *Poetics* uses expressions which present the matter as if there were a sharp antithesis between "character" and "plot", or "character" and "action", this antithesis is not present in his whole theory, in which character and action were not opposed to each other, but inseparable. There is an interesting discussion of this in Butcher. He presents the matter as a question.

"If character and action were so intimately related in Aristotle's general theory of behaviour, why did he, in the *Poetics*, so emphatically present character as if it were

in some kind of antithesis to plot? Why did he present his case in an exaggerated way?" (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th edn. 1907, esp. pp. 344-5.)

Much of what Butcher has to say on this point is very relevant. He quotes the most extreme statement of Aristotle's position, the statement which is given in Bywater's translation, ch. vi (p. 37) as:

A tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. (ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγωδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἡθῶν γένοιτ' ἂν [50 a 23-5])

Butcher's footnote to this passage bears out much that I have been saying in these lectures and have now to say; it contains germinal ideas of which much more could have been made in his main argument:

In the popular antithesis of the two terms "character" has not its full dramatic value, and instead of signifying "characters producing an action", it stands for an abstract impression of character left on our minds by the reading of a play. Similarly "plot" is regarded as the "story" in a play, viewed in abstraction from the special nature of the persons; and, in particular, denotes a complication exciting wonder or suspense—an idea, however, which is not necessarily present in the word *μῦθος*.

What follows is a very much simplified statement of arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially Books I and II.

Aristotle says first that we are not good or bad in character *by nature*. This is in contrast to certain physical capacities which we do have by nature. The physical senses of seeing and hearing, for instance, are in us by nature. We had the sense of sight before we even saw; the sense of hearing before we even heard: we did not acquire these senses by acts of seeing and hearing. In so far as we have by nature a capacity for action it is physical action, which is ethically neutral or indifferent, and therefore does not involve character at all.

But the virtues (and the vices) are acquired only in so far as we have acted well or badly. We learn to become good or bad by acting well or ill just as a builder learns to build by building. By repeated acts of a certain kind

we acquire a habit or bent (*ἕξις*) of character. In this way qualities of character are legacies of past acts.

Historically in each individual, character is thus formed by action, is dependent on action for its very being, and has its qualities in virtue of the quality of the actions from which it is derived. In real life, quite apart from drama, character is subordinate to action because it is a product of action.

Secondly, he says that we are not good or bad merely in respect of *knowing* what is good or bad. Here Aristotle is partly answering the intellectualist ethics of the Platonic Socrates, so often expressed in the epigram "Virtue is Knowledge". Against this Aristotle insists (1) that the guiding principle of ethics is not the Absolute Good but a practical good, attainable as the end for man: and this end he ultimately identifies with happiness; (2) that in all ethical situations there is an element of desire which is the stimulus to decision, and the determinant of direction.

This inclusion of the element of desire is also part of Aristotle's revision of Plato's ethics. Its importance in Aristotle's scheme is that it is the "end" which we desire. We have a desire or wish to bring about a certain state of affairs, and it is this desire for the "end" which distinguishes human ethical action from the undirected play of circumstance. Action which is ethical is a movement towards an end.¹ The "character" which, as I have said, a man acquires *by acting* is formed by the kind of "ends" which he habitually proposes to himself as desirable. In so far as this is so, character is only a tendency, and it does not become fully "actual" unless a particular end is desired and the "movement" is thus set on foot towards it.

At this point in the argument Aristotle attempted to assimilate his ethical terminology to his metaphysical terminology, where the distinction between "potentiality" and "actuality" is a fundamental one. The processes by which he did this are technical and difficult to

¹ See R. P. Hardie, "The *Poetics* of Aristotle", *Mind*, IV (N.S. 1895), 350-64.

state clearly; and they hardly concern us, even if I were competent to expound them.

I must state the matter in an over-simplified way: "character", in that it is a bent, a tendency, a legacy of past acts, is not fully "actualised" or "realised". It is only fully realised when it is "in act", as it is not, for instance, when we are asleep.

Thus, from the point of view of drama, "character" in its full and proper sense occurs only in action. The mere presentation or description of certain "qualities" of character is the presentation of something less than the fullness of character.

Thus in Aristotle's ethics, with or without reference to the drama, character may be looked upon as the arbitrarily stabilised meeting-point of two series of actions; the antecedent series which has gone to its formation, and the consequent series in which it will be actualised in future. Character in itself is not fully "real" until it is "in act", or "in action".

I might make this clearer by a comparison; but it is not to be taken as an exact analogy, for it is not. Suppose you have a training-film of athletics, and stop it in the middle so that you have a "still" of a runner in his stride; the "still" will show you certain qualities of him as a runner—his build, his muscular development, his position, his way of holding himself, his style so far as that can be seen without movement. But it will not tell you whether he has a weak heart or poor staying-power; or how fast he runs or whether he is likely to win against such-and-such an opponent under such-and-such conditions: it will not even tell you much about his style as a whole. Movement is necessary for that.

In a broad way Aristotle's view of "character" in literature may be thought of as such a "still".

And indeed the comparison with athletes is one of Aristotle's own comparisons. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 8, 1099^a3, he says (in Sir David Ross's translation, Oxford, 1925):

And as in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete (for it is

some of these that are victorious), so those who act win, and rightly win, the noble and good things in life.

To Aristotle even happiness itself, which, when properly understood, is the ultimate end of man, is not a *state* but a form of activity. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 8, 1098^b 22, happiness is defined as "a sort of good life and good action". And Aristotle (b 30 ff.) goes on:

With those who identify happiness with virtue or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtuous activity. But it makes, perhaps, no small difference whether we place the chief good in *possession* or in *use*, in state of mind or in activity. For the state of mind may exist without producing any good result, as in a man who is asleep or in some other way quite inactive, but the activity cannot; for one who has the activity will of necessity be acting, and acting well.

You see how this elaborates the position which is very shortly stated in *Poetics*, ch. vi (p. 37):

All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions—what we do—that we are happy or the reverse.

It is saying something more than that we can only "know" the "characters" in a drama through what they say and do: it is saying that they *only exist as characters in* what they say and do. It is a truth of major importance for dramatic criticism. They exist only in their dramatic context and by their dramatic function. Much recent criticism of the drama—especially of Shakespearean drama—has been recovering this side of Aristotle's doctrine. The swing away from Bradley in Shakespearean criticism has been a swing away from the tendency to make back-inferences from the text to determine a supposed full and stable view of the "character's character", and then to project this inferred (and artificially rounded and complete) "character" back into disputable areas of the play as an instrument of interpretation. The protest against such methods can call on Aristotle for support. It has been a swing towards emphasis on plot, on the whole dramatic design and composition.

With pupils beginning the serious criticism of dramatic

poetry, I find the mistake of method often takes even more extreme forms. "Characters" like Oedipus and Samson are spoken of as if they have a firm, known "character" from legend or history; and Sophocles and Milton are virtually judged according to how nearly they get them "right". Or, commoner still, the character of Oedipus in the *Colonus* play is judged by the character of Oedipus as he appears in *King Oedipus*; or Sophocles is blamed for treating Creon differently in two different plays. But, as these two plays were not parts of a trilogy, Sophocles has absolute freedom to create and use what "characters" he likes. We must now return to, and examine, Aristotle's most extreme and most epigrammatic statement of his position. "A tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without character."

Note that in Aristotle's Greek, as in English, there is an ambiguity in the use of the word for "character". I have just illustrated this in English by using the phrase "the character's character". The word is used either for "the dramatic personage" or "the ethical nature", which may be of a dramatic personage, or of a person in real life. So also Aristotle uses his word *ἦθος* sometimes for the dramatic presentation of *ēthos*, sometimes for *ēthos* or character in its ethical sense whether in a play or not. This famous epigram does not of course mean that there may be a tragedy without characters, that is, without dramatic personages; it means that there may be a tragedy without dramatic personages who exhibit what Aristotle specifically calls "character" in the ethical sense. He then proceeds, in ch. vi (pp. 38-9), to describe very shortly what he means by "character" in this sense:

Character in a play is that which reveals the moral purpose of the agents, i.e. the sort of thing they seek or avoid, where that is not obvious—hence there is no room for Character in a speech on a purely indifferent subject.

Even taking Bywater's translation at its face value this is a rather ambiguous sentence (there are in fact problems about the correct reading of the Greek text).

In any case, it is evident that by "tragedies without character" Aristotle means plays in which personages go through a change of fortune (probably a change from happiness to misery, rather than the opposite) in which they suffer and act, but act *without showing why*, without adequately revealing the habit, bent and tendency of their characters, and without showing *their characters in act*, without showing their minds working upon the means to the actualisation of their desires. A tragedy of circumstance and event of this kind is probably capable of rousing the emotions of the audience; by self-projection into the cipher on the stage some kind of pity may be felt, and external circumstances alone may cause a kind of fear. Thus such plays are at least better than plays deficient in action; where there is nothing but a set of speeches describing static qualities. Aristotle says beginners can do this, "can write descriptive monologues, but fail to show action and interaction, and make their personages speak like rhetoricians".

The important positive doctrine is that "character in the play is what reveals the moral purpose in the personages". Now the word (and the related words) translated here "moral purpose" is the term for the actualising process by which we decide on an action as a means to achieve an end that we desire; this is sometimes translated "choice", and the verb of it "choose".

To explain this I quote from a paper by Mr. Colin Hardie, to whose knowledge and advice these lectures in general owe more than I can say. There is nothing unfamiliar to readers of Aristotle in what he writes, but it summarises the point clearly and suitably for our purpose:

An action is an activity designed to bring about an "end" and it has in it both an element of trained desire and an intellectual element. We have a desire or wish for a certain state of affairs. From this we argue back by a chain of means, until we arrive at something we see to be in our power here and now. We will the end and perceive the present state of affairs, and to link these two by a chain of means is the work of deliberation. This may be impossible, but if we think it is possible to achieve the end,

we choose (προαιρούμεθα) to do this act for the sake of the result it will bring about. The word προαίρεσις, usually translated "choice", is not choice between alternative ends nor choice between alternative means to one end, but simply the act of will which starts a bodily movement to put the chain of means in motion, and causes a change designed to produce the end. Now the nature of the end aimed at reveals and determines our character (ἥθος); if we actualise a tendency in ourselves to obtain this or that end, we are good if the end is what the good man aims at. This is not to say that the end justifies the means. On the contrary, a good act must be done *as* the good man does it. . . . If we desire what is good in itself, we may still make a mistake in calculating the means, either through ignorance of a fact or facts or through ignorance of what will bring about what (of the general rules governing conduct and of the probable or necessary consequences of any step). This calculation is the intellectual element (διάνοια), is scientific and can be discussed. Thus any action involves both "character" and "thought" (ἥθος and διάνοια).

The distinction between "character" and "thought", as made in ch. vi of the *Poetics*, is thus much plainer. So far as thought is an element in the speeches of individual personages in the play relative to their particular circumstances and decisions, it covers this area of deliberation or calculation—"all they say when proving or disproving some particular point" (ch. vi, p. 39).

As character is shown in the choice of ends (we can be said to "choose" both the end and the means to it), so thought is the deliberation about means to the end.

Aristotle means the "element of thought" to be partly this internal deliberative casuistry of the individual;¹ but it need not, of course, always be internal to any one personage in the play; others may take part in the deliberation and have an influence on the decision. But "thought" in this sense is deliberation about action, whether internal or not—"whatever can be said or whatever is appropriate to the occasion" (p. 38). Here Aristotle is presupposing some knowledge of the *Rhetoric*, especially perhaps of

¹ *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are plays in which this side of it takes a very large part, in which soliloquy on questions of means to ends is a major part of the play's doings.

Book II, chs. xxi and xxii. His mention of *Rhetoric* and *Politics* here in the context is partly a cross-reference to the earlier work. He is there speaking of the kind of arguments to be used "on such subjects as moral action is concerned with, and such things as are to be chosen or avoided with a view to action".

Discourse of this kind is said to belong in part to the art of Politics; because deliberation about "whatever is appropriate to the occasion" in any moral situation will almost certainly have to take into account social factors—something beyond the individual; for the occasion is an occasion in society, and the deliberation is about "whatever is appropriate" to it. In the more special sense, of course, it becomes "political" in typical tragedies as Aristotle knew them (and as Shakespeare wrote them) because the personages are of high position, with political influence and power, and the fate, good or ill, of many others depends on their personal decisions.

I should like to say in passing that it was one of the unfortunate consequences of the individualistic "character" criticism of the last century, that this political or social element in great tragedy was overlooked or underestimated. And I have found that even now beginners tend to underestimate it. I ask you to reflect how much there is, even in the few plays of our syllabus alone, of this deliberation about what "is to be chosen or avoided with a view to action" in a wide social and political context. In the *Oedipus at Colonus*, in the relations of Oedipus to Theseus, to Creon and, above all, to Polynices, how much depends on their views of him as a political asset, and on his views of them in their estimation and treatment of him from their own points of view! In *Samson* the matter is made almost diagrammatically clear. Samson's dialogues, especially with Manoa and Dalila, are set pieces of deliberation on what particular things to "avoid" if the half-apprehended destiny of saviour of Israel is to be fulfilled, in some future course of action not yet determined or foreseen. Manoa and Dalila present each a different possible solution of Samson's political relation to the Philistines; and by different processes of argument, both

are rejected and "avoided". Equally, *Lear*, *Polyeucte*, *Andromaque*, *All for Love* cannot be understood without taking into account the political element.

Next, thought is said to be shown alternatively in "enunciating some universal proposition". I fear that Bywater's verbal insensitivity has here once more done Aristotle a bad service. "Enunciating" is such a desperately awful word, a deathly word! The word means to show, to set something out so that it can be seen. The whole phrase here means, as a metaphor in literary criticism, something like "expressing some general matter", some general reflection on life or some general maxim of conduct—such as "treat your enemies as though they would become friends". Cf. *Rhetoric*, II. xxi on maxims (*γνώμαι*), as distinct from the particular deliberation about means to ends in the action. And this phrase covers generalised comment upon the action or growing out of it. It covers such things as the chorus in *King Oedipus*:

All the generations of mortal man add up to nothing!
Show me the man whose happiness was anything more than
illusion

Followed by disillusion.

Here is the instance, here is Oedipus, here is the reason
Why I will call no mortal creature happy.

(E. F. Watling, *Theban Plays*, 1947, p. 63.)

The chorus, indeed, shows the very process of thought moving from the particular to the general.

It covers such things as Macbeth's speech:

She should have died hereafter:

There would have been a time for such a word.—

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,

To the last syllable of recorded time;

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death.

(V, v, 17-23.)

Another point to consider is this: Aristotle treats this element of "thought" very shortly and very drily; and it is not perhaps evident on the face of the treatise, how much he intends to include within it. He presents it first as a form of reasoning about means to ends; but this reasoning takes into account "*whatever* can be said, *whatever* is appropriate to the occasion". It is therefore reasoning *about* the emotional factors too; the speeches, the discourse, include everything relevant. It is only necessary to pick up his cross-reference to the *Rhetoric* and glance at the *Rhetoric* in even a superficial way, to see his awareness of the fact that deliberation of this kind, and persuasion (whether it is self-persuasion or the persuasion of others) involves opinion and feeling (taking all affections and hatreds into account); the emotional side of human nature provides the stuff on which the mind works.¹ Aristotle's sense of Tragedy as an artistic whole, his sense of the total design, of the end, his sense that ultimately Tragedy deals with the great theme of "success or failure in their lives" (p. 36), *does* lead him to treat some of the subordinate points cursorily. Especially on the emotional side, he is so much concerned with the major emotions of the whole design and of the end, that the emotional element in the intermediate stages seems to be pushed rather out of sight, or at least not treated in proper proportion. But still his theory includes and allows for it at the vital points: (1) in the element of "desire" for the end, which is the mainspring, the sustaining force of the action; (2) in that all through, in the detail of the episodes, thought is working upon material charged with emotion.

I used just now the word "casuistry". In Protestant countries it is liable to carry derogatory implications, about deceit and shuffling and putting cushions under the elbows of sinners, and so on. But it is in fact that part of ethics, or of moral theology, which discusses not the general rules of conduct but the application of general

¹ And still more, of course, that kind of "thought" which expresses the general matter is thought *upon* the emotional content of the play.

rules to particular *cases* and the conflict of rules. And I used the word in the context of a character in a play deliberating upon the particular means to the achievement of the end he desires. This particularity is most important; and to show how, I call your attention to a sentence at the beginning of ch. vii of Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* :

Among statements about conduct those which are general apply more widely, but those which are particular are more genuine ¹ (*ἀληθινώτεροι*), since conduct has to do with individual cases, and our statements must harmonize with the facts in these cases.

Aristotle's whole treatment of ethics is concrete, definite and practical; and therefore he has very little respect for judgments about actions which take no account of the circumstances.² With a man in real life, you might be able to say that as the result of the accumulated experience of his past actions he had a bent or tendency towards actions of one kind or another: but you would not be able to make any very useful ethical judgment on his conduct till the particular facts and circumstances were known. So too, within a play, "character" means very little indeed until the particular facts and circumstances have been laid down through which the character declares itself. These facts and circumstances *are the Plot*.

All through the *Ethics* Aristotle is implicitly protesting against the Platonic tendency to generalise ethical judgments, to establish sweeping theories of value. And in the *Poetics* his doctrine of the pre-eminence of "plot" and "action" over "character" bears all in the same direction. It is a monstrously paradoxical fate that he should have been misunderstood as slighting and minimising the individuality of character, which it is supposed to have been

¹ Grant translates "more real": what about "bear more the stamp of truth"?

² [Cf. II, 9, 1109 b 23: Such [deviations from the mean] depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception: *ἐν τῇ αἰσθήσει ἡ κρίσις*, 1147 a 26; particular facts are within the sphere of perception: *ἡ γὰρ αἰσθησις κυρία τῶν καθ' ἕκαστα.*]

the great glory of later drama (especially English Elizabethan drama) to portray. His theory provides most explicitly for its portrayal. Indeed, his theory of the importance of plot is best understood as an attempt to guarantee the individuality of character. This is in complete harmony with the particularity of method which he proposes as necessary for the poet in ch. xvii. I touched on this for a different purpose in an earlier lecture, but now we are in a better position to understand its full implications.

The poet, Aristotle says (pp. 60-1), should remember :

(1) To put the actual scenes as far as possible before his eyes. In this way *seeing everything with the vividness of an eye-witness*, as it were, he will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook incongruities.

(2) As far as may be, too, the poet should even act his story *with the very gestures of his personages* . . . he who feels the emotions to be described will be *the most convincing*.

This is not the language of a theorist of generality. It is most necessary to emphasise this concern of Aristotle's with particularity and individuality, to which his whole theory of action leads up, because he is so often represented, or misrepresented, as the advocate of a generalised form of drama, and of a generalised or "typical" handling of character. The source of this in the Renaissance critics is rather Horace than Aristotle.

In more modern interpreters the explanation is quite plain—that more attention is given to what Aristotle says about the difference between poetry and history than to what he says about the relation between the particular and the general *within poetry itself*.

In the comparison between poetry and history he says that poetry is more closely related to the universal than history, because of the arbitrary succession of historical events in time, in which the links between event and event cannot be easily seen to follow laws of probability or

necessity. He never anywhere says that poetry does not deal with individuals and particulars at all, but that it *does* deal with individuals and particulars so related to each other that they reveal these laws of action and connection. There is nothing at all in his theory which precludes the subtlest development of character and motive, or the maximum, most concrete, poetic realisation of dramatic fact.

LECTURE VI

THE TRAGIC ACTION AND CHARACTER

IN the definition of Tragedy in ch. vi, Bywater's version makes (Aristotle say that Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is "serious") this is also Butcher's translation at that point. But in fact the Greek word here in the definition (*σπουδαῖος*) is the same as that used at the beginning of ch. ii (p. 25) in the sentence:

(The objects the imitator represents are actions, with agents who are necessarily either good men (*σπουδαίους*) or bad.)

The word for the good men in ch. ii is the same as the word translated "serious" in ch. vi. Is this difference justified?

Many people have argued for and defended the translation "serious" in ch. vi; and I have been among them in the past, and must now recant. The reason for wanting to defend it is obvious. If it can be made out that "serious" is right (as meaning "having importance", "being of import", "having weight", and so on), Aristotle's general theory is rescued from some of its heavier moralistic implications.

But there is no doubt that the whole range of parallel and contrasting words as they occur both in the *Poetics* and in the *Ethics* makes it unjustifiable to isolate this use of the term *σπουδαῖος* in ch. vi: it does mean "good", ethically good: and in the *Poetics* itself the clearest passage to bring in support of this view is that at the beginning of ch. xv (p. 55):

In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good.

The word here is not *σπουδαῖος*, but a word which has an unequivocal sense of "ethically good" (*χρηστός*). Aris-

totle is here speaking of "character" in the sense I explained it in the last lecture, as an ethical nature revealed only in act, in the desiring of an end and in the choosing of the means towards it. The goodness he here requires in the moral purpose is inseparably linked to the goodness of the whole action.

The word *σπουδαῖος* in ch. ii must be taken as synonymous with this word *χρηστός* in ch. xv; and it would be too glaring an inconsistency for *σπουδαῖος* in ch. vi to be used differently.

In ch. xv (pp. 55-8) Aristotle says that in treating dramatic "characters" (the word does not mean "personages" but characters in the sense I spoke of in the last lecture) there are four points to aim at; and every one of them raises important questions. They are :

(1) that the characters should be "good" (*χρηστά*).

(2) that they should be "appropriate" (*ἀρμόττοντα*).

(3) that they should be "like reality" (*ὅμοια*).

(4) that they should be "consistent" (*ὁμαλά*).

I shall take these four points in turn, as applying to the characters in general, referring, as necessary, to the special case of the tragic hero as I go along, and shall then discuss at the end what Aristotle says about the hero alone.

1. "Goodness" of Character

This predominant and main requirement of "goodness", which seems at first sight rather strange, is essential to Aristotle's whole theory because it is the foundation of that initial sympathy in spectator or reader without which the tragic emotions cannot be roused or the tragic pleasure ultimately conveyed. Aristotle assumes in his spectators a normally balanced moral attitude, by which they cannot give their sympathies to one who is "depraved" or "odious"; and sympathy is the very basis of the whole tragic pleasure. In particular, the special kind of sympathy which is pity. The bad man, Aristotle

says in ch. xiii (p. 50), falling from happiness to misery arouses some kind of human feeling in us, but not pity.

Also, when he comes to details of plot, he says (ch. xiv, p. 53) that the most tragic situations arise between friends or between blood-relations, that is between those in whom are found the affections and loyalties which characterise the good. In such situations there is the maximum possibility of pity.

But does Aristotle mean that all characters in Tragedy should be equally good, and that interplay of character as between good and bad is ruled out? He has no explicit statement about this, but his answer is by implication absolutely plain.

It is plain, both from ch. xv (p. 56) when he speaks of the badness of character of Menelaus in the *Orestes* as being "not required", and also from ch. xxv (p. 92) when, again using the example of Menelaus, he says there is "no possible apology" for "depravity of character" *when it is not necessary and no use is made of it*, that he admits that badness may be necessary in certain tragedies. In both chapters the words for badness are extreme words (54^a28 *πονηρία* 61^b19 *μοχθηρία*), meaning out-and-out badness, real baseness, depravity, wickedness: they are not intermediate words meaning absence of perfection or anything like that.

The action of the play as a whole should be a "good" one (i.e., it should portray efforts to bring about a "good" result), and the personages setting on foot the main action necessarily therefore are "good": but *in so far as this main action requires it*, bad characters, even depraved and wicked characters, may occur. The Creon of *Oedipus at Colonus* is not ruled out; nor is Iago.¹

Nothing is further from Aristotle's mind than the re-

¹ [Later moral ideas, e.g., that goodness consists in trying to do one's duty, must not be read into Aristotle. By "good" he means the habitual possession of one or more of the separate virtues, *ἡθικαὶ ἀρεταί*, such as courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, gentleness, truthfulness, friendliness and even wittiness (*εὐτραπείλια*). See the list in Sir David Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 203, and his discussion of goodness of character and the moral virtues, pp. 192-208.]

commendation of a negative or fugitive or cloistered virtue. Not only is his whole ethical theory a theory of activity, but the very word *σπουδαῖος* implies a zealous and energetic goodness. [This is doubtful, even if the adjective is derived from *σπουδῇ*, zeal.]

Some forms of Hebraic and Christian morality have emphasised negative virtue, especially in the avoidance of "sin"; but Aristotle's good man is not good unless he is desiring specific, positive, good ends and working towards their attainment.

This suggests another reason why, for Aristotle, the tragic hero was to be "not pre-eminently virtuous and just", but something less than that. The only explicit reason he gives in the *Poetics* for this decision (ch. xiii, p. 50) is that the entirely good man passing from happiness to misery "is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us"; he rejects such a character, in effect, because his suffering offends our sense of justice. But taking his theory as a whole it necessarily involves another reason. The perfect or nearly perfect man would be one whose desires were so trained and controlled, whose intellect also was so habituated to the right calculation of means and the making of the right practical inferences, that he would formulate to himself ends more immediately in his power. The gap between the desired end and what is in his power here and now would tend to close; right action would tend to become more and more immediate and spontaneous; the sphere of deliberation would be more and more limited; and in the ideal situation the opportunity for the dramatic display of action would disappear.

The insistence on "goodness" has no objectionably moralistic implications; it is quite free from the taint of direct didacticism. And though the word *σπουδαῖος* in ch. vi should not be *translated* "serious", it certainly involves the conception of seriousness. A tragedy is for Aristotle essentially a play in which great moral issues are involved—matters of the greatest possible importance to human life: and these cannot be made plain except in characters who are basically and mainly good. An evil

man has already a bent or habit of evil; and if his kind of action altogether controls a play, it is either, if seriously treated, merely horrible, or, if not seriously treated, the play is a comedy, and we are made to laugh at his evil and not be shocked by it.

Aristotle would certainly rule out, as not being tragedies, plays of policy in which the leading character is a calculating and unscrupulous person of a Machiavellian type, plays like *The Jew of Malta* or *The Massacre at Paris*, in which there is not even any suggestion of ultimate benefit to the state to justify villainy.¹ He would scarcely have understood the phrases "the Hero as Villain" and "the Villain as Hero". The required initial sympathy would be absent.

2. *Appropriateness of Character*

The second point is that the characters should be "appropriate" (*ἁρμοττοντα*). Bywater in his edition glosses this word by saying that there should in the individual character be "nothing at variance with that of the class to which the individual belongs". F. L. Lucas takes this even further by his rendering of the word "true to type", and he then goes on to say that "a modern dramatist would be very moderately flattered by being told that his characters were absolutely typical" (*Tragedy*, p. 111). This is making a point by overstatement, by a gradual edging further and further away from what Aristotle actually says.

There is no doubt that Lucas is edging in the direction of what many later writers took Aristotle to *mean*: and he himself quotes an extreme example of its application in Thomas Rymer's saying

that Iago is a badly drawn character because soldiers are notoriously an honest class of men.

This is a very sensitive point in the whole interpretation of the *Poetics*; one about which it is easy to be intellectually dishonest. I hope that, at least, I have left

¹ Cf. U. Ellis-Fermor, *Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1927), p. 90 and notes *ad loc.*

no doubt in your minds about my own bias: for I argued at very considerable length in the last chapter that Aristotle's insistence on the importance of plot is to be understood as an attempt to guarantee the individuality of character. My interest in the word "appropriate" is to clear Aristotle of the charge that he ultimately reduces all characterisation to the mere presentation of types.

There is no word in the Greek at all corresponding to "type". The word translated "appropriate" (*ἁρμόττοντα*) is quite fairly so translated; it is an intransitive participle meaning "fitting"; it is used first absolutely with no indication of what the character is to be fitting or appropriate *to*; and that is where the scope for various interpretation begins. The first example of applying the principle is the broad and very obvious one of the difference between the sexes. I must avoid going off into a digression about the Greek view of women. But it is important to realise that what Aristotle is here talking about (where Bywater translates "a female character") is "a womanly *ēthos*",¹ not just a female personage in a play. However recent analytic psychology may have demonstrated that each sex possesses qualities of the other, which may be found more or less developed, nobody even now pretends that the psychological make-up of the sexes is identical. It may well be possible to create a woman (say like Lady Macbeth) with certain masculine characteristics; but even now it still makes sense to say that if you want to create a womanly woman it is inappropriate to make her a manly woman. We may well think that Aristotle was wrong in calling some specific things unwomanly (such as being cleverly sceptical about the popular idea of monsters, which is the point at issue in the speech that Euripides gave to Melanippe), but it does not therefore follow that there is no sense or meaning in the conception of "womanliness". Classification of human characters is, *in some sense*, not only justifiable but necessary. Rostagni agrees with Bywater that classification of characters is what Aristotle is talking about, so that we can rule out the

¹ Accepting Bywater's conjecture *γυναικείω τὸ* at 54 a 23.

idea that he means that characters should be "appropriate" to the traditional accounts of them. The question is, what kind of classification, and how far does he mean it to be carried? The only other example that he gives of something "inappropriate" is a rather obscure one about the "lamentation of Ulysses in the *Scylla*", a work of the dithyrambic poet Timotheus. The context is not known; but I confess it looks rather like an example which opens up the possibility that Aristotle may have been moving somewhere towards the ground I want to keep him clear of. But even there you can see that there may be some sense in the judgment. If Ulysses was made to speak some desperately sentimental drivel, it might well have been "inappropriate": but, in default of detailed knowledge, the case, I admit, seems to lie on the borderline between EITHER being inappropriate to the traditional accounts of Ulysses, as that he was "wily" or tough, OR being inappropriate to some other preconceived conception of the *sort* of person he ought to be, OR being inconsistent with what Timotheus had shown him to be elsewhere. This third possibility is ruled out by Aristotle's later discussion of "consistency", which is evidently something different from "appropriateness": and I think the reference to the traditional stories as a criterion should be ruled out here also. We are therefore left with the problem of trying to define what preconception of a "class" may have been in Aristotle's mind, such as would govern the dramatic characterisation of women and of Ulysses.

If we consider not merely the narrower context of what Aristotle says about "appropriateness", but also the wider context of the whole chapter in which it occurs, it appears that women, slaves and Ulysses are being used as examples of something of a different sort from what Iphigenia is meant to exemplify. She is being considered at a different level of dramatic individualisation.

Very tentatively indeed I wish to suggest that the controlling conception in Aristotle's mind, in what is plainly a kind of classification, may have been that of "status"—of political and social status, as that was defined by

law, by custom, and by function. In Athens, of course, neither women nor slaves had the citizenship, and their position was defined and restricted in countless other ways by law. Ulysses would have a peculiar and clearly defined status in that he was a king.

In all ancient and medieval societies this concept of "status" has been fundamental. Athenian democracy itself was a democracy of adult male citizens only; the right to citizenship was jealously guarded and contested; the lesser rights of those who had not the citizenship were graded and defined by law. Aristotle himself, as a foreigner in Athens, could not be the owner of real property. In medieval Europe the feudal system, much as it varied from time to time and in different countries, was characteristically a system which perpetuated an elaborate hierarchy of status, from king to serf, each status in the hierarchy being related to a social and political function. Medieval political thought hinges on the concept of status. The first polity to be based upon the theoretical rejection of status was the Republic of the United States of America; and France followed. In England, even at the present day, you find surviving relics of status in the monarchy and the House of Lords; in certain legal privileges of hereditary peers; in the fact that a married woman living with her husband does not make an independent income tax return.

In all societies based upon status the positions of slaves, of women and of kings provide marked and extreme examples of the definition of status by law and custom.

The relation of character to status needs consideration in two aspects. Aristotle, with his insistence on practice as the source of character, would certainly have maintained that one brought up in slavery, doing the acts of a slave, would become slavish if not, in the more pejorative sense, slavish. His theory of the genesis of character would have tended to stabilise a type of character appropriate to the status. One brought up, as he had seen Alexander brought up, as heir to a monarchy would stabilise a habit of command and authority; and so on. In this sense his feeling for "appropriateness" corresponds

to the modern belief in the importance of environment. Environment would have a greater formative influence when it was clearly defined by law and daily imposed legal and social restrictions, and would tend more to the production of "types".

Secondly, when the conception of legal status was fundamental to the whole organisation of society, and there was no conception of a society in which it did not play a great part, breaches of what was "appropriate" to any status would have been breaches of the political and social order in the play. There might, of course, be a play *about* such breaches (and then the violation of appropriateness would, in Aristotle's terminology, be "necessary"), or involving a critique of the social order: but a typical Tragedy does not necessarily, for Aristotle, involve anything of that kind, but does take place within a social order which is familiar and intelligible; and the behaviour of the characters is referred to it.

If I am right in this connection of appropriateness with legal and customary status, it does tend in one way towards the typical; but in another way it tends to clarify the uniqueness and particularity of moral situations: our moral judgments "have more of the stamp of truth on them" when the circumstances are known; and the legal status of a character (e.g., bond or free) is one of the circumstances which have to be known. Also, within each status, there still remains the greatest freedom for individuality of characterisation; all women are not the same, any more than all slaves. In fact we can much better understand from this viewpoint the emphasis which should be given to that remark of Aristotle's (also in this ch. xv, pp. 55-6) which is so startlingly offensive to modern opinion:

Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being.

In spite of all the accepted legal restrictions of rights, scope and power, *in spite of* the limitations of status which the whole of society takes for granted, the individual may

rise above the inevitable tendency to run true to type. And this involves dramatic treatment too.

3. "Likeness" of Character

The third is to make them like . . . which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term.

This is a very difficult criterion to assess and involves large questions of general theory; especially it is difficult in this context because Aristotle gives no example to illustrate what he means. Bywater in his edition takes up the word as it is used farther on, towards the end of ch. xv, in the comparison with portrait-painters. There is no doubt that in that context the word does mean "likeness to the original". But *here* what Aristotle actually says, in his telegraphic style, is "Third is the being like" (τρίτον δὲ τὸ ὅμοιον). He is masterfully silent in answer to the question "like what?" Bywater prejudices the matter by his addition "like THE reality". *The* reality: *What* reality, is the point! His note in his edition makes it plain when he says: "the literary portrait produced by the poet should be 'like *the* original', i.e., like what the personage in question is in history or legend". This deprives the poet of all his creative freedom and ties him to a quite indefinable exemplar, because history and legend are themselves largely the creation of other writers. Butcher here also feels the necessity of answering in his translation the essential question "Like what?" which Aristotle does not answer in his text; but Butcher answers the question in what is to my mind the much saner and more likely way by translating: "Thirdly character must be true to life." Rostagni here in his note goes along with Butcher in saying that he understands Aristotle to mean that the characters should be "natural".

This requirement, of likeness, must also be taken in conjunction with the whole of ch. ii (pp. 25-7) in which Aristotle is differentiating Tragedy from Comedy by the consideration of the types of character shown acting in each. The analogy with portrait-painters comes in here too. He says that characters are either better or worse

than ourselves, or just like ourselves: and at the very end of the chapter he says that Comedy makes its personages "worse" and Tragedy makes its personages "better than the men of the present day".

It is clear that "ourselves" and "the men of the present day" are here to be equated. Taken together they represent what is now often summed up in the phrase "the man in the street".

As I tried to show at length in the last lecture, it is impossible to treat character and action, on Aristotle's theory, as separable: they are inextricably interdependent. The action of a tragedy has, as we have also seen, a greater coherence, a greater unity, a more clearly defined end than a slice of real life or a slice of history. To be necessarily fitting to such an action, character also must be modified from the commonplace norm of real life.

The question is how much and in what way is it to be modified, and how is the modification reconcilable with this requirement of "likeness"?

I want for the present to leave that in the form of a question and to return to it in the final lecture, when I shall discuss the general theory of poetry as "imitation".

4. *Consistency*

Very little need be said about the fourth of these requirements for character; for nobody could seriously dispute that consistency is a basic need. The character must be seen as a whole; development must take place according to intelligible principles. I have already discussed those principles when dealing with probability and necessity—what such-and-such a character will probably or necessarily say or do. And Aristotle properly provides for waywardness of all degrees in the formula "consistently inconsistent" (*ὁμαλῶς ἀνώμαλον*, homalously anomalous). This, as Twining says, note 111, p. 332 (1789); II, 145; (1812), is not concerned with momentary conflicting passions (what we should call emotions), but with "the basis or foundation of a character", which is what I have been

calling its habit, bent or tendency. Aristotle is not recommending a dead level, not a flat uniformity, but a living coherence.

5. *Hamartia*

I have already mentioned two reasons why the tragic hero cannot be perfect:

(a) As Aristotle explicitly says, his misfortunes would be odious to us—i.e. offend our sense of justice.

(b) By implication his whole theory requires a hero less than perfect in order to allow scope for action at all.

He does not say what kind of moral imperfections he is thinking of: he states the matter negatively only: the hero should be an intermediate kind of personage not pre-eminently virtuous or just.

This brings us to the famous and vexed question of “hamartia”—*ἁμαρτία*—it is wise to use the word transliterated into English, as “hamartia”.

The first thing to grasp about this famous word is that it is *not* a general inclusive descriptive phrase for those moral shortcomings in which the hero, as already described, is said to fall short of being “pre-eminently virtuous and just”. It should be quite plain from the two uses of the word in ch. xiii (p. 50) that Aristotle is quite clearly and deliberately distinguishing the hamartia from these general moral failings:

(a) misfortune . . . is brought upon him *not* by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment (hamartia)

and again (pp. 50–1):

(b) and the cause of it must lie *not* in any depravity, but in some great error (hamartia) on his part; the man himself being either such as we have described, or better, not worse, than that.

This second passage shows the emphasis very clearly: if anything the hero is to be *better* than “the intermediate

kind of personage", but still he commits this "hamartia". So little does the word concern his general moral character, that Aristotle attaches it, if anything, to the better man rather than to the worse. A further point, which Butcher feels bound to give weight to, even though it goes rather against the general drift of his argument, is that "great" or "big" (μεγάλη) "is not a natural adjective to apply to a mental quality or a flaw in conduct."¹

A clear warning is needed against the tendency of critics to use Aristotle's phrase "hamartia" as a general inclusive phrase to cover moral faults and failings. "Hamartia" is not a moral *state*; but a specific error which a man makes or commits.

The phrase "tragic flaw" should be treated with suspicion. I do not know when it was first used, or by whom. It is not an Aristotelian metaphor at all, and though it *might* be adopted as an accepted technical translation of "hamartia" in the strict and properly limited sense, the fact is that it *has not been* so adopted, and it is far more commonly used for a characteristic moral failing in an otherwise predominantly good man. Thus, it may be said by some writers to be the "tragic flaw" of Oedipus that he was hasty in temper; of Samson that he was sensually uxorious; of Macbeth that he was ambitious; of Othello that he was proud or jealous—and so on. These things may be true of those characters, and it may be important that they are so; but these things do not constitute the "hamartiai" of those characters in Aristotle's sense.

Bywater and Rostagni agree on this point, and I think I can safely say that all serious modern Aristotelian scholarship agrees with them, that "hamartia" means an error which is derived from "ignorance of some material fact or circumstance".²

The main evidence upon which this interpretation is

¹ Butcher *op. cit.*, p. 319, n. 3.

² Bywater, edn. p. 215. Rostagni writes: "cioè errore proveniente da inconsapevolezza, da ignoranza di qualche fatto o di qualche circostanza: colpa *involuntaria*". 1st edn., 1927, p. 48; 2nd edn., 1945, p. 71.

based is to be found in two passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V, ch. viii, and Book III, ch. i. Talking of the kinds of injury in transactions between man and man, Aristotle says (V, viii) that "those done in ignorance are *mistakes* when the person acted on, the act, the instrument, or the end that will be attained, is other than the agent supposed".

Aristotle calls "acts done by reason of ignorance of fact" *non-voluntary* (III, i); a special class lying between acts which are "voluntary" and those which are "involuntary". Such acts share some characteristics of voluntary action because they are derived from a wish for an end and proceed by the processes of deliberation; but they share some characteristics of involuntary action because the ignorance of some particular fact or circumstance produces a result other than that which was expected. Such acts are regretted by the doer, and are proper objects of our pity and pardon.

It is important to realise that the ignorance involved is not ignorance of the end, or a mistake in the kind of end to be aimed at; for that means a voluntary action and a bad one.

It is also most important to realise that Aristotle does not assert or deny anything about the connection of *hamartia* with moral failings in the hero. He assumes as a matter of course that the *hamartia* is accompanied by moral imperfections; but it is not itself a moral imperfection, and in the purest tragic situation the suffering hero is not morally to blame.

Now, it is plain, when this theory is understood as involved in the "error" of the tragic hero, that it fits the play *King Oedipus* like a glove. Oedipus sets in motion voluntarily, with a good end in view, the whole train of action which aims to discover the polluted person and so release Thebes from the plague. But he is ignorant of the circumstance that he has killed his own father; and the discovery of that fact produces a result other than what he expected.

It also fits many more tragedies than its rather dry and technical statement by Aristotle might make it appear:

but that does not become quite so plain till we take it in relation to Peripety and Discovery.

6. *Peripety*

The "hamartia" of the hero so understood is closely and inseparably connected with the "peripety" or reversal and the "discovery", which are the characteristic features of what Aristotle calls a "complex" as distinct from a "simple" plot (chs. x and xi, p. 46).

The action . . . I call simple, when the change in the hero's fortunes takes place without Peripety or Discovery; and complex, when it involves one or the other, or both.

This makes it quite plain that the peripety is *not* just the general change in the hero's fortunes which is essential for all tragedy. Even the simple plot involves a radical change from good to bad fortune. "Peripeteia" must not be translated or paraphrased "Reversal of Fortune"; for a reversal of fortune may well happen without it. If it is to be paraphrased at all, the phrase which fits best is "reversal of intention". For that is what it is, from the point of view of the character involved. From the point of view of the spectator or reader it is, in the plot of the play as a whole, a reversal of the direction of the action. As Aristotle himself says at the beginning of ch. xi (p. 46):

A Peripety is the change from one state of things within the play to its opposite of the kind described . . . in the probable or necessary sequence of events.

Aristotle nowhere says that a peripety can happen only in relation to the hero. No doubt he was thinking that in some of the best tragic plots this was so, and that the hero and others were involved in the sudden swift reversal. But it is worth noting that even in *King Oedipus* one character was not involved in the reversal. Teiresias all along knew that Oedipus was the guilty man.

Within any tragic plot a minor peripety may occur within the main course of the action, involving primarily

some other character than the hero. For instance there is such a subordinate peripety in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, when Polynices comes to his father in hope of a blessing and gets a curse. The very means that he chooses produce this unexpected result. Aristotle himself gives the example of the messenger in *King Oedipus*, at the beginning of ch. xi.

In the word peripety is contained the idea of the boom-erang or recoil effect of one's own actions, of being hoist with one's own petard, falling into the pit that one has dug for someone else. The action is complex because it moves on two levels, as it appears to the doer and as it really is, and because the cause of the disaster is woven in with the good intentions and right means to achieve them. Aristotle makes a technical term of what had often before been felt from Homer onwards: cf. *Odyssey*, I, 32-4, X, 27; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 266: ἡ δὲ κακὴ βουλή τῷ βουλευσάντι κακίστη; the Pythagorean verse (in Aulus Gellius, *N.A.*, VII, 2): Γνώσει δ' ἀνθρώπους αὐθαίρετα πῆματ' ἔχοντας, and the collection of stories from the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. in Aelian, *Var. Hist.* XIII, 23-4 (λέγεται δὲ ὁ λόγος πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλα μὲν θελήσαντας, ἄλλων δὲ τυχόντας).

The whole of *Rhetoric* II, 5, should be read: the idea, though not the word "peripety", underlies much of it.

7. Discovery

The "discovery" is in its essence, as Aristotle quite clearly says (ch. xi, p. 47), "a change from ignorance to knowledge". The recognition of a person, or the discovery of the identity of a person, like the recognition of Orestes by Iphigenia and of Iphigenia by Orestes (mentioned by Aristotle at the end of ch. xi, p. 48), is merely one special kind of this "change from ignorance to knowledge" which is what is meant in general by "discovery". It is rather a pity that in ch. xvi (pp. 58-60), which is entirely given up to discussing the various methods and processes of argument by which "discoveries" may be brought about, nearly all the

examples should be examples of the discovery of the identity of persons. For this is merely one vivid and easily intelligible kind. The statement of the general principle in the middle of ch. xi (p. 47)—that it is a “change from ignorance to knowledge”—is of far wider significance, and Aristotle shows this, though in a rather loose way, when he says that it

may happen in a way in reference to inanimate things, even things of a very casual kind; and it is also possible to discover whether someone has done or not done something.

Thus it is intended to include the discovery of whole areas of circumstance, whole states of affairs, about which there was previous ignorance or mistake. Such discoveries may come about, technically, through the recognition of some object or person or some trivial or minor thing; but the total implications of the discovery are not trivial or minor at all; they may include, as Aristotle in his quiet way says in passing, such terrific changes as the change from love to hate or from hate to love.

You will see at once how closely this is linked to the “hamartia” when that is properly understood. The discovery of the truth of the matter is the ghastly wakening from that state of ignorance which is the very essence of “hamartia”.

Hamartia, peripety and discovery all hang together in this ideal schematisation of tragic plot.

The common old phrase “getting hold of the wrong end of the stick” may help as an illustration. The hamartia, or error of ignorance, is not to know that you have got hold of the wrong end, or not to know which is the right end or the wrong, or not to know that it is the sort of stick that has a right end and a wrong, and to hit yourself very hard with it as a result.

The “peripety” is a real reversal, a turning of the stick round the opposite way, brought about by force of circumstances or by the action of other characters.

The “discovery” is the realisation of which really is the right end, and of the fact that you had got hold of the

wrong one, and also, perhaps, of a whole train of consequences.

Of course such little illustrative analogies must not be pressed into details.

F. L. Lucas in one of the very best parts of his book, *Tragedy*, discusses the question (pp. 91-105) and I refer you to him in excuse of my rather summary discussion.

LECTURE VII

CATHARSIS AND THE EMOTIONS

IN the second lecture I said that Aristotle agreed with Plato in certain main points about the effect of poetry and its connection with the emotions: these points were:

- (1) that poetry is an "imitative" art.
- (2) that poetry rouses the emotions.
- (3) that poetry *gives pleasure*, both as an imitation and as arousing the emotions through imitative means.
- (4) that the rousing of the emotions by poetry has an effect upon the whole personality of the spectator or reader and on his emotional behaviour in real life.

I also said that Aristotle rejected, in all spheres of his practical philosophy, Plato's whole theory that the emotions are in themselves bad; and in particular he rejected the view that, by rousing the emotions, poetry produces a dangerous excess of these emotions in real life. Aristotle's theory of catharsis is his answer to Plato on these points, and one of the main elements in his defence of poetry as having a proper and necessary place in human life, and therefore in the state. The theory of catharsis cannot be taken out of this wider ethical context; and any attempt to isolate it and to speak of it as if it is in the modern sense of the term an independent "aesthetic" theory is a distortion of Aristotle's whole treatment of the matter.

1. *Pity and Fear*

These two emotions are described by Aristotle as peculiarly and specially the tragic emotions and he nearly always uses them in conjunction with each other, as a pair.

[This conjunction of the two is probably traditional and is found in Gorgias, *Helenae Encomium*, 8.]

The main passage in which he writes about the nature of these emotions in the *Poetics* is in ch. xiii (p. 50) where he says:

pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves [i.e., by the misfortune of one like ourselves].

This very short treatment of these emotions can be expanded and explained by what Aristotle says in Book II of the *Rhetoric*.

There, in ch. v, fear is defined as

a kind of pain or disturbance due to a mental picture of some destructive or painful evil in the future (W. Rhys Roberts's translation).

and he adds that this impending evil must be near at hand, not distant. A little later in the same chapter he says further that

speaking generally, anything causes us to feel fear that when it happens to or threatens others causes us to feel pity.

Thus pity and fear are very closely linked; and this becomes still clearer from the definition of pity in *Rhetoric*, II, 8, as

a sort of pain at an evident evil of a destructive or painful kind in the case of somebody who does not deserve it, the evil being one which we might expect to happen to ourselves or to some of our friends, and this at a time when it is said to be near at hand.

And this again is related to fear a little further on, where he says that pity turns into fear when the object is so nearly related to us that the suffering seems to be our own, and we pity others in circumstances in which we should fear for ourselves.

Thus in Aristotle's treatment pity is not an altruistic and disinterested emotion. There can be no pity in his

view, where there is not also fear. Both pity and fear are derived from the self-regarding instinct, and pity springs from the feeling that a similar suffering might happen to ourselves. The objects of pity therefore should be like ourselves. And this has its obvious bearing on the third requirement for Character in Tragedy in ch. xv—that it should be “like” (p. 56). This is the basis of the very possibility of sympathy—of the “feeling with” somebody else. When the good prosper we rejoice with them. When the good suffer or expect to suffer, we share their pains and fears; and that is pity.

If we do not have a tendency to fear for ourselves we cannot share the fear of others. Rash and presumptuous people therefore tend to be incapable of pity. And at the other extreme, if we ourselves are already in terrible suffering and have nothing worse to suffer or fear, we also for this reason tend to be incapable of pity, because we are absorbed in our own fear and cannot share any more with others.

Ideally, according to justice, the two scales of goodness and badness and of pleasure and pain should be in harmony, so that the good have pleasure and the bad pain. Tragedy illustrates a dislocation of this harmony; for it is of the essence of the situation which calls forth pity, that the misfortune and suffering are undeserved. Tragic pity is felt only for the good; it is therefore not a patronising or sentimental feeling by which we look down on the sufferer: we continue to look up at him. Aristotle's pity and fear are sympathy for the good part of mankind in the bad part of their experiences: this (*φιλανθρωπία*) is the emotional side of justice.

You will thus see that no theory of catharsis makes sense which speaks of purging away a “painful element” in pity and fear. Aristotle does not say that pity and fear have a “painful element”; he says of both of them in the definitions in the *Rhetoric* that they are species of “pain” or “disturbance”; therefore to get rid of the “pain” would be to get rid of the emotion altogether. That would throw over the whole of Aristotle's ethical theory; there are things which the good and wise man *ought* to

fear. To deprive him of any part of his emotional equipment would be to make him a useless ethical cipher without even the potentiality of goodness.

Still less is it possible to accept a theory of catharsis which says that by Tragedy pity and fear are to be purged of their "self-regarding" element; as if catharsis were some kind of process by which pity and fear were converted from being self-regarding emotions into being altruistic emotions. That would, on Aristotle's theory, sweep away the very possibility of having any sympathy at all. For pity is based on a fear which is, though not for ourselves, yet *as if* for ourselves.

The tragic character (personage in the play) has to be far enough removed from ourselves to allow for the possibility of pity; but near enough to ourselves to allow for the possibility of fear.

Neither the personage in the play nor the spectator should be too far removed from a supposed emotional "norm"; otherwise there is no common emotional ground, and the interaction of feeling (which is sympathy) becomes impossible.

Next, Aristotle everywhere says that pity and fear are the characteristic and necessary tragic emotions. And that raises the question whether he means to exclude all others from the emotional experience which Tragedy involves. From what I have already said it should be evident that by implication he does not exclude them.¹

The very sympathy, upon which pity and fear themselves depend, implies admiration; it implies also the following of the persons in the play in their desires and in all the emotional elements of the situation. Just as the character itself does not appear except in the detail of the action (which, as I have already shown, involves emotions), so sympathy with the person involves feeling those emotions with him, whatever they are. Admiration tends towards love; and its opposite, righteous indignation

¹ [The phrase in ch. vi (p. 35) "in the catharsis of *such* emotions", τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (49 b 27), seems, as Bywater says, to include the "whole group of disturbing emotions" (especially "enthusiasm") and not be limited to the two nor extended to all.]

(which is the emotion of anger directed by a sense of justice), tends towards hate.

Such emotions are not excluded, provided only that they are not incompatible with pity and fear.

2. *Catharsis*

In this technical sense Aristotle uses the word *κάθαρσις* only once in the whole of the *Poetics* as we have it; that is, in the formal definition of Tragedy in ch. vi (p. 35): Bywater translates:

~~with incidents arousing pity and fear~~, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.

It is certainly best to keep the word "catharsis" as a technical term, simply transliterating it from Greek into English, as Bywater has done: any attempt to translate it by one single English word prejudices the whole interpretation.

But I must in this passage warn you once more against Bywater's extraordinary predilection for the word "incidents"; there is no equivalent of this in the Greek, and the use of the word again here has the unfortunate effect of making the matter seem "incidental", almost unimportant. Bywater himself translates much better in ch. xiii (p. 49), where he writes of "actions arousing pity and fear".

In fact the Greek word *κάθαρσις* does occur once more in the text of the *Poetics*, though not in this technical, special sense of Aristotle's. In ch. xvii (p. 62), in the summary of the plot of Euripides's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, it is the word used for the "purifying" of Orestes.

This is one of the word's frequent normal meanings in Greek; it means ceremonial purification from a religious impurity.

There has been great controversy whether the term in this context of ch. vi is to be treated as a "metaphor" from religion *or* from medicine. It is extremely useful to keep these two other contexts of the term in mind, because they are convenient points of reference for the under-

standing of it, and one cannot go far in reading discussions of catharsis without finding this distinction between medicine and religion offered as a dilemma, as if it required the choice of one *or* other of the two alternatives.

The theory that Aristotle's use of the term was a metaphor from medicine was cogently revived in modern criticism by Weil in 1847 and by Bernays in 1857. Both the most influential English interpreters of the *Poetics* in modern times—Butcher and Bywater—have accepted this view in one of its several forms; but it is not in itself modern; it was known to the Italian Renaissance critics, and Milton showed in his Preface to *Samson Agonistes* that he was familiar with it, although he did not by any means accept it as a wholly adequate explanation of Aristotle's meaning. In simpler and more popular works than Butcher's or Bywater's editions, there occur phrases that imply a tacit acceptance of the medical origin of the term almost always in one sense, without any hint that the question is open to debate: thus, when Hamilton Fyfe uses phrases like "as strong a purge" (*op. cit.*, p. xvii), "a powerful aperient" (p. xix) and "a good clearance", he is uncritically perpetuating one form of the medical associations of the term. Mr. F. L. Lucas, in his *Tragedy*, asserts (p. 24) dogmatically and emphatically that catharsis, as Aristotle uses it, "is a definitely medical metaphor—a metaphor of an aperient", and he expresses his distaste for the theory which this involves, in the summary and too memorable epigram: "the theatre is not a hospital" (p. 29).

These widely current forms of the medical interpretation of "catharsis" are based on the mistaken notion that the only medical uses of the word are equivalent to the English word "purging" in the sense of evacuating something undesirable by the use of an aperient. I have already asked (and I hope answered) this question. What is it that can be evacuated? It cannot be the emotions of pity and fear themselves, because it is good that people should have them; it cannot be a "morbid element" in them because nothing is said about their having a morbid element.

But the word is used in a medical sense not only of a quantitative evacuation of this kind; it is also used of a qualitative change in the body, in the restoration of the proper equilibrium (e.g., between heat and cold) in the body; and a state of health depends on the maintenance of this proper equilibrium. In the *Problems*, a work of Aristotle's school rather than of Aristotle himself, but not much later than Aristotle and reasonably good evidence of his teaching, we find (Problem XXX) this question of the heat and cold in the "black bile" of the body expressly linked with the emotions. And coldness in the black bile is said to be the physical accompaniment of the emotions of "despair and fear". This state is corrected by the restoration of the equilibrium, the balance, the mean of temperature. And this is a medical form of catharsis.¹

The most difficult passage in which Aristotle mentions catharsis is in the *Politics*, VIII, 7. He is there discussing music, and says that one of the functions of music is to effect a "catharsis"; and he says:

we use this term without explanation for the present ; when we come to speak of poetry, we shall give a clearer account of it.

The trouble is that, when he *does* come to speak of poetry, he does not make this promise good.

We are thus forced, paradoxically, to try to use the passage in the *Politics*, which Aristotle himself admitted to be inadequate, as a means of interpreting the even more inadequate passage in the *Poetics*.

The *Politics* passage is the one which gives the strongest justification to the view that the catharsis is a "relief to overcharged feeling".

We accept the classification of melodies given by some philosophers into melodies of character, melodies of action, and orgiastic melodies. They say further that each of these has a scale which naturally corresponds to it. We say, however, that music is to be studied for the sake of many benefits and not of one only. It is to be studied with a view to education, with a view

¹ See esp. D. S. Margoliouth, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (1911), pp. 57 ff.

to catharsis—we use this term without explanation for the present; when we come to speak of poetry, we shall give a clearer account of it—and thirdly with a view to the right use of leisure and for relaxation and rest after exertion. It is clear, then, that we must use all the scales, but not all in the same way. For educational purposes we must use those that best express character, but we may use melodies of action and enthusiastic melodies for concerts where other people perform. For every feeling that affects some souls violently affects all souls more or less; the difference is only one of degree. Take pity and fear, for example, or again enthusiasm. Some people are liable to become possessed by the latter emotion, but we see that, when they have made use of the melodies which fill the soul with orgiastic feeling, they are brought back by these sacred melodies to a normal condition as if they had been medically treated and undergone a catharsis. Those who are subject to the emotions of pity and fear and the feelings generally will necessarily be affected in the same way; and so will other men in exact proportion to their susceptibility to such emotions. All experience a certain catharsis and pleasant relief. In the same manner cathartic melodies give innocent joy to men.

(J. Burnet's translation, pp. 124-6, with "catharsis" and "cathartic" substituted for "purge", "purgation" and "purgative".)

Though Aristotle does there say that such feelings as pity and fear, "or again enthusiasm", exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all, it is particularly the "enthusiasm" or "religious frenzy" that he gives his attention to, and to its cure by music (of which he has little to say in the *Poetics*).

Religiously excited persons are liable to fall into a frenzy. This "enthusiasm" is not to be dealt with by suppression, which merely makes it stronger; nor by letting it have uncontrolled sway, where it becomes disordered and wild. But it is to undergo a catharsis by means of religious ritual and music. And the "soul" of a person so affected is thus to be brought back to a balanced state.

As he describes it, this is a sort of homeopathic treatment; as Butcher says: "it consisted in applying movement to cure movement, in soothing the internal trouble of the mind by a wild and restless music".

Aristotle then says that "those who are influenced by

pity and fear have a like experience . . . they all undergo a catharsis of some kind and a lightening, with pleasure”.

The point is that he says the experience is of the same kind and they have *some kind* of catharsis, *τινὰ κάθαρσιν*: he does not say they are always formally identical. The instance of the religious enthusiasm is *one* example of a group of experiences of much wider range.

To ask if “catharsis” is a *metaphor* from medicine or religion is to put the question in the wrong form. For it is not a *metaphor derived from* either. The point is that illustrations of the same general principle are found in relation to physical states in medicine, to some emotional states in religion and to some emotional states in poetry. In Tragedy in particular to the emotional states of pity and fear.

In English we may also use the word “healthy” about moral and emotional states and in a sense it can be thought of as a metaphor from medicine. But that does not exclude the general principle of “well-being” which can be physical, moral, mental, emotional and so on.

This broader principle, to which the medical, the religious and the poetic catharsis has to be referred, is to be looked for in the wider context of Aristotle’s thought as a whole, and the guide to it is the principle of “the Mean”, “the intermediate”.

I shall approach this from the ethical side, because it is that which concerns the *Poetics* most.

We go back once more to the opening books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; and what follows is a summary of Aristotle’s doctrine there:

Virtue of character is about pleasures and pains; pleasures and pains are the results of successful or thwarted activities, and activities are movements towards a *desired* end. Hence nothing is more important in the education of character than training to rejoice and feel pain rightly, at the right things and times, and to the right extent. It is not right to be afraid of nothing or to be angry at nothing: there are things the wise man should fear and be angry at.

The passage which expresses Aristotle’s general con-

ception most clearly is in *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, vi (Ross's translation) :

If it is thus, then, that every art does its work well—by looking to the intermediate and judging its works by this standard (so that we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it; and good artists, as we say, look to this in their work), and if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect and the intermediate. For instance, both *fear* and *confidence* and *appetite* and *anger* and *pity* and in general *pleasure* and *pain* may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue.

The Aristotelian idea of the “mean” is derived ultimately from the Pythagoreans, who discovered that the musical scale is based on simple mathematical proportions; and the idea of right proportion is not, in the musical scale, merely a matter of quantity. It is a quantitative method of expressing a qualitative difference between one note and another.

So too in ethics the idea of “the mean”, “harmony”, “balance,” is not purely quantitative; it is rather a theory of the relation between quantity and quality. Virtue and goodness are themselves not measurable; but they lie in a balance of things that are, if not measurable by an exact scale, yet amenable to quantitative statements: it makes sense to say a man is more or less pleased, more or less angry, more or less fearful. The goodness does not lie alone in the adjustment of quantities of pleasure, anger or fear, but in the balance and rightness resulting from such adjustments.

A tragedy rouses the emotions from potentiality to activity by worthy and adequate stimuli; it controls them by directing them to the right objects in the right way;

and exercises them, within the limits of the play, as the emotions of the good man would be exercised. When they subside to potentiality again after the play is over, it is a more "trained" potentiality than before. This is what Aristotle calls *κάθαρσις*. Our responses are brought nearer to those of the good and wise man. And this is the view which Milton puts forward in his Preface to *Samson Agonistes*; for though he translates the cathartic process by the verb "purge", he explains his translation as follows:

that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

Milton's phrase "just measure" is the "mean", the standard of the good and wise man, of which I have been speaking.

The result of the catharsis is an emotional balance and equilibrium: and it may well be called a state of emotional health.

The worst mistake we can fall into, in considering this theory of catharsis, is to think of the emotions of pity and fear in some abstract way irrespective of the objects to which they are directed, or by which they are aroused. Aristotle's whole doctrine only makes sense if we realise that the proper development and balance of the emotions depend upon the habitual direction of them *towards worthy objects*. It is worth looking back again to the last sentence of the passage quoted above (p. 109) from *Ethics*, II, vi, in which fear and pity are mentioned.

It seems to me of great value, not only for understanding what Aristotle means in the *Poetics*, but also for understanding the effect of art of all kinds in educating and developing the personality. For I believe, with Plato and Aristotle, that art (*μουσική*) has these effects. The effect of inferior art is to excite emotion in a cheap, shallow, unworthy way, and to induce emotional responses too easily, by the presentation of unworthy objects. All the shallow and facile emotions which we sum up together under the word "sentimentality"; all the crude forms of

emotion which are roused only by broad and coarse situations, are among the things which Aristotle is trying to guard against. He wants people not to be emotionally sloppy or sententious; not to be violent or imperceptive.

The theory of catharsis was more than just a piece of special pleading in answer to Plato.

Aristotle's educative and "curative" theory has a very important element of permanent truth in it; but it is not, even from his point of view, the whole of the story.

F. L. Lucas is quite right in mocking at the idea that we go to the theatre *in order* to have our emotions purged. We go because going gives us pleasure. Aristotle too realised this; he constantly speaks of the "tragic pleasure" and the pleasure proper to Tragedy.

LECTURE VIII
PLEASURE AND IMITATION

IN this last lecture I want mainly to discuss two large questions which remain outstanding. The first is the relation of the theory of the emotional catharsis, which Tragedy is said to bring about, to the other theory, which runs all through the *Poetics*, that Tragedy gives pleasure.

The other question is one which I have all along deliberately postponed to the very end, the general theory of imitation, and I shall not say a great deal about it.

The first question, as will be seen, leads into the other.

First, then, about catharsis and pleasure. I begin by going back to the famous sentence in Milton's Preface to *Samson Agonistes* which I quoted in lecture vii, to remind you of the exact way in which it is worded:

Tragedy . . . said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated.

I want now to start from the phrase "with a kind of delight". Notice Milton's caution "*a kind of delight*". "Delight" is his word for what I shall in this lecture call pleasure.

Notice that Milton links the pleasure more to the excellence of the imitation than to the fact of the catharsis. We now have to consider whether he is justified in this.

This is a crucial point for the understanding of Aristotle, and also for the whole theory of Tragedy.

Nothing is easier than to make fun of Aristotle's theory of catharsis by asking whether people do in fact stand

for hours in queues outside theatres *in order* to get three hours' psychotherapeutic treatment, and go to see *Macbeth* in order to have their excessive timidity nicely adjusted.

First I simply want to ask two questions:

1. Where in the *Poetics* does Aristotle ever say or even remotely suggest that the expectation of a catharsis of pity and fear is the *reason why* people go to see tragedies?

2. Is it not a fact that, in this fragmentary and peculiar text we are discussing so minutely, he mentions this special catharsis just once, while he speaks ten or a dozen times in different phrases and places of the "pleasure" of poetry or the "special pleasure" of Tragedy?

There is all the difference in the world between the reason why we undertake a certain activity, and the incidental benefits which result from it.

'It is tempting to try to make Aristotle's theory neat and rounded-off by saying that the catharsis of emotions *is* the immediate or even the sole cause of the special tragic pleasure; and to cap it inevitably with the quotation from the ending of *Samson Agonistes*, and say that the pleasure of "calm of mind, all passion spent"—such a smug and self-approving delight—*is* the pleasure which draws us to Tragedy. But Milton, I think, knew better. It is contrary, as was once said of something else, to Aristotle and to common sense. Experience does not bear it out; nor does the text of the *Poetics*, nor does Aristotle's theory of pleasure in general.

I want to say a little first about Aristotle's general theory of pleasure, especially as it is developed in Books VII and X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He there says that pleasure is consequent upon activity, and completes the activity which causes it; it rounds the whole thing off like the bloom of health and freshness on the cheeks of a youth. Pleasures differ from each other as activities differ, and e.g., the pleasures of music can be felt only by

the musical. The goodness of pleasures is judged by the goodness of activities; and the standard of the goodness of activities is the wise and good man.

Aristotle distinguishes "pure" pleasures from accidental pleasures, and therefore also activities which are purely pleasant in themselves from those which produce some kind of pleasure accidentally or incidentally. Pure pleasures are those which occur immediately in the exercise of functions and in doing things without any consciousness of a preceding want. Types of these are the pleasures of perception, the pleasures of reasoning and reflection, the pleasures of the exercise of healthy emotion, affection and so on.

Incidental pleasures arise from the getting rid of a pain, or the correcting of something that has gone wrong; and from things of that kind.

If there is a pleasure attendant on the catharsis of emotion it is an incidental pleasure, not a pure one. But by its means a man's capacity for pure pleasure would be enhanced.

Suppose an ideal Aristotelian man went to see a tragedy—the perfect *φρόνιμος*—no catharsis would happen to him; he would not need it. And if he were also seeing a tragedy composed by a poet whose moral values were right (i.e., agreed with those of this ideal spectator), he would be perfectly attuned to the emotional situation presented to him, and enter immediately into perfect sympathy with the action. He would not have to "adjust". And he would not therefore get any incidental pleasure from such adjustment. But equally he would not be deprived of any pleasure; rather, he would have pure pleasures in their highest form, the pleasures of exercising perception, of exercising thought, of exercising emotion, all upon utterly adequate and worthy objects. Such pleasures are obtainable from all serious poetry; from Tragedy and Epic alike; it remains to see from the *Poetics* how this is so, and in what the specific pleasure of Tragedy consists.

We must first look at the leading passages in which the pleasures of Tragedy are referred to.

At the end of ch. xiii (pp. 51-2), when Aristotle is discussing the kind of plot with a double story in it, in which the bad personages come to a bad end and the good triumph, he says the spectators like it. But he says "the pleasure here is not that of Tragedy", but is rather the proper pleasure of Comedy. In ch. xiv (p. 52) the word "pleasure" comes twice:

Not every kind of pleasure should be required of a tragedy, but only its own proper pleasure. The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation.

This is the clearest and most important passage to remember. With it should be taken the passage I have quoted for another reason in an earlier lecture, from ch. xxiii (p. 79 middle), where Epic also is said to have "its own proper pleasure", distinct from the pleasure both of Tragedy and of Comedy. Again in ch. xxvi (p. 95), towards the very end of the book, it is said that "the two forms of poetry [sc. Tragedy and Epic] should give us, not any or every pleasure, but the very special kind we have mentioned".

Aristotle nowhere makes clear what he considers to be the special kind of pleasure proper to Epic.

The vital sentence on p. 52 needs more careful examination:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως δεῖ ἡδονὴν παρασκευάζειν τὸν ποιητὴν. (53^b10-13)

"The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation." Such is Bywater's version. Butcher, however, translates: "The pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation."¹

The structure of the Greek sentence here makes ἀπὸ

¹ Translated by D. S. Margoliouth: "The dramatist ought to produce the gratification which comes from the portrayal of imaginary woes and terrors." (*Op. cit.*, p. 181.)

Rostagni has no note on this passage, but discusses the whole question at length in his "Introduzione", pp. lviii ff., on which I much rely in what follows.

ἐλέου καὶ φόβου and διὰ μιμήσεως co-ordinate phrases, both qualifying the specific pleasure which the tragic poet produces: the *from-pity-and-fear-through-imitation* pleasure. Aristotle therefore in this sentence does not commit himself to saying that the pleasure is derived from the rousing of certain emotions *or* from the imitation. He says it is derived from both at once: and, indeed, the choice of prepositions rather suggests that it *may* be *only* by means of imitation that pity and fear can become a source of pleasure.

The whole question is: what is the relation of the tragic pleasure to the pity and fear, which are clearly and unmistakably described by Aristotle as forms of pain?

Aristotle in his way of handling this question is both allusive and elusive. I am far from giving any final answer to this question: but I will attempt to discuss in Aristotle's own terms, the terms with which we know he was familiar from Plato, the area in which the problem lies, and the main features of it. If I can succeed in making these main features clear, I shall be more than satisfied.

I have already referred to the matter twice in a general way, when I have stated in tabular form the main points on which Aristotle agreed with Plato in his treatment of poetry: each time I have used the same formula:

(3) that poetry *gives pleasure*, both as an imitation and as arousing the emotions through imitative means.

That is true of all kinds of poetry alike.¹ But what about Tragedy?

In the same lecture as that in which I first put forward this formula, I also summarised a passage from the *Republic* Book X (605 C-D, 606B), which I said we had to remember carefully when we came to Aristotle's

¹ [As was said above, p. 28, not all poetry was, for Plato at least, imitative.]

discussion of pity and fear. I will now quote the relevant parts of that passage:

When we hear Homer or one of the tragic poets representing the sufferings of a great man and making him bewail them at length with every expression of tragic grief, you know how even the best of us enjoy it and let ourselves be carried away by our feelings; and are full of praises for the merits of the poet who can most powerfully affect us in this way.

(Trs. H. D. P. Lee, Penguin Classics, 1955, p. 383.)

And there is another passage a little further on, also speaking of a poem: he says that when we see in a poem:

another man with some claim to goodness, even though his grief is excessive; it (our better nature) reckons the pleasure it gets as sheer gain, and would certainly *not* consent to be deprived of it by condemning the whole poem.

(Trs. H. D. P. Lee, p. 384.)

Thus, though Plato despised and disapproved of these pleasures, he recognised that the delights in imitations are derived not only from pleasant spectacles but also from piteous ones. And in the *Philebus* (48a), when he is talking about mixed pleasures, Plato says:

And you remember also how at the representation of tragedies, the spectators *rejoice in their grieving*.

This last, vital, phrase is translated by Jowett "smile through their tears": let that be a warning to all sentimentalists of the verbal pitfalls in writing of Tragedy.

This great paradoxical contradiction of experience, which lies at the core of the appreciation of Tragedy, is already expressed by Homer, in the *Iliad*, 24, 513, "but when Achilles had had his pleasure of grief" (*αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥα γόοιο τετάρπετο*), and is endorsed and accepted as indisputable in two of Plato's dialogues; and Aristotle knew its history. His knowledge of it underlies the treatment of the "proper pleasure" of Tragedy in the *Poetics*.

But his whole treatment of the pleasure derived from poetry in general is in fact fragmentary and rather confused. In ch. iv (pp. 28-9) the pleasure is derived partly from the "natural sense of harmony and rhythm",

partly from the human instinct for imitation. This pleasure in imitation is treated, however, as the pleasure accompanying, the intellectual process of reasoning, of forming a sort of syllogism on the likeness between the imitation and the object imitated (and this is done by an analogy between painting and drawing). But when we come on to the more developed treatment of imitation as a serious term in the theory of poetry it appears that in the things imitated are not merely objects or *sensa* of the external world but ἡθῆ καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις (“men’s characters, as well as what they do and suffer”).

And in ch. vi (p. 37 top) it is specifically said that Tragedy is an imitation not of persons but of “action and life, of happiness and misery”. And again in ch. xi Tragedy is said to imitate “actions which arouse pity and fear” (p. 47, where Bywater’s translation of the word “represent” should be corrected to “imitate”—for the Greek is *μίμησις*—to bring it into line with chs. iv and vi, as part of the technical terminology of the treatise). When we reach this point it is evident that the pleasure derived from imitation has ceased to be the pleasure of an intellectual, reasoning process about “likeness”, and has become a pleasure like that which Plato describes in Book X of the *Republic*, a pleasure of sympathy, of fellow-feeling, of sympathetic emotion into which we are led by the art of the poet.

The presence in the *Poetics* of this idea of the poet “taking the mind” of the reader or spectator “captive” (*ψυχαγωγία*¹) is rather disguised in Bywater’s version by his choice of words. For Aristotle, even the “spectacle” (*ὄψις*), which he decries as not essential to the tragic art, plays its part in this process of “captivating”: at the end of ch. vi (p. 39) the phrase which Bywater translates “The Spectacle, though an attraction . . .” is rather “The spectacle too has power of illusion” (ἡ δὲ ὄψις ψυχαγωγικὸν μὲν . . .). But far more important to the whole

¹ [The word *ψυχαγωγία* is a strong one and means “enthraling”, “entrancing”, “absorbing”, transporting the mind whither the poet will, to Mycenae or Elsinore.]

general theory is the fact that one of these words about *ψυχαγωγία* comes in the important discussion of peripety and discovery earlier in ch. vi. Where Bywater, on p. 38, writes that Peripeties and Discoveries are "*the most powerful elements of attraction in Tragedy*"—a phrase to which we have already given full weight in one sense—here at this critical point the Greek means something like :

Peripeties and Discoveries are the things, by which Tragedy *most absorbs and grips the mind* (*τὰ μέγιστα οἷς ψυχαγωγεῖ ἡ τραγωδία*).

And, as I have already said, the peripety, rightly understood, is the ultimate tragic situation, the irony of action. I am not saying here that these versions by Bywater (or other similar versions, for Butcher too uses mild, colourless words in these places) are *wrong*, for in some contexts these "soul-leading" words did in Greek become more or less workaday words for "attract", "attractive", etc.; but I am saying that the vocabulary needs balancing up on the other side to show the affinity between these terms of Aristotle in the *Poetics* and the far more extreme language of Plato about the excitement of the emotions by poetry, and the pleasures it gives (cf. *Republic* 605d, 3-4, *ἐπόμεθα συμπάσχοντες*—we follow the poet in emotional identification, and "let ourselves be carried away by our feelings"); and in doing this I am following Rostagni who paraphrases the word which Bywater translates "attractive" as "having a great seductive power over the soul" (p. lix).

It is only, I think, by reference to Plato, and especially to those passages in the tenth book of the *Republic*, that we can recover the context of Aristotle's thought, and see, from his fragmentary and allusive treatment of tragic pleasure, how it fits into his theory of pleasure and his theory of poetry.

He accepts the Homeric and Platonic contradiction that in Tragedy we "rejoice in our grieving". The pleasure is derived from the poet's skill as maker and imitator, from his power to make us follow him; it is "a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated".

The peculiar element, therefore, in the pleasure of Tragedy, as distinct from the pleasures given by other forms of art, is that the pleasure is derived from the imitation of emotions and situations which taken in themselves, or taken as they operate in real life, are forms of pain or causes of pain. The tragic poet does not, as Butcher argues, deprive them of a painful element by the catharsis; nor, as others have suggested, does he exhaust them by exercise to the point of disappearance. (Nobody's experience of Tragedy corresponds to this.) Rather, by the skill of his art, by his power to bring the mind into sympathy, he provokes the pure pleasures of exercising thought and emotion and the senses of sight and hearing upon themes which would be, but for the way he treats them, only painful. Some themes, as Aristotle says in several places, remain nothing but painful because the poet treats them wrongly. And this I think we recognise to be true of many interesting and "moving" plays which fall short of being great tragedies.

This puts all the burden of success or failure upon the poet's skill in the use of his medium. The "medium" of Greek tragedy included music, dancing and spectacle, and of course the rhythm even of the non-choral verse. Of the pleasures caused by these, Aristotle has something to say, at least in passing. By implication, by his insistence on the plot and the organic unity of the whole living work, he includes the pleasure derived from the appreciation of this unity. But of the main element in the medium of Tragedy, what he calls the "Diction", he has little to say that is of any major interest or importance. He admits the language as one of the causes of pleasure.

The chapters on language, mid-xix to the end of xxi, are at the grammatical rather than the poetic level. Chapter xxii, however, contains three passages to which I want just to call attention because they are of importance for two separate reasons.

Two of the passages are on p. 75 :

The perfection of Diction is for it to be at once clear and not mean. The clearest indeed is that made up of the ordinary words for things, but it is mean, as is shown by the poetry of Cleophon

and Sthenelus. On the other hand the Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms, i.e. strange words, metaphors, lengthened forms, and everything that deviates from the ordinary modes of speech. . . .

. . . A certain admixture, accordingly, of unfamiliar terms is necessary. These, the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental equivalent, etc., will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness.

These are one of the sources of the mistaken renaissance neo-classic view of language which spoke of words as if they were merely the "dress" of a thought, so that you could keep the "thought" unaltered but dress it more plainly or more ornately according to taste. A still more influential source of this theory was Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

But there is also in ch. xxii (p. 78) one short passage of two sentences which does contain at least the germ of a fruitful and valuable approach to poetry:

But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.

The importance of that passage need hardly be underlined, and it has had its full share of recognition from modern critics. It is curious that Aristotle nowhere expanded it.¹ But do not forget that he wrote it.

I wish to say little about the theory of imitation beyond this; but there are a few points that I want to make quite clear, as guides against false assumptions rather than as developments of the positive side of the theory. The main points can be put in two sentences:

(1) Aristotle is in more ways than one seriously inconsistent in his use of the term "imitation".

(2) What he says is partly naïve, almost childish, and partly very sophisticated.

¹ [He has a good deal to say about metaphor in *Rhetoric*, III, chs. ii and x.]

As a consequence of these facts, it is possible, by taking some parts of what Aristotle says to the exclusion or distortion of others, to push his general theory of art either towards a crude representationalism or towards a developed, rather airy idealism, according to taste.

In what follows I shall use "imitation" as a single-word translation of the Aristotelian word *μίμησις*, and the verb "to imitate" for its verb.

First, let us look at some of the inconsistencies.

One of the major inconsistencies in the use of the term "imitation" occurs in Aristotle's treatment of narrative poetry. This question goes back to Plato, who, in the *Republic*, Book III (393-4), opposes imitation to narrative in a main part of his argument against poetry as a form of imitation. Socrates there says that if an epic poet such as Homer "never concealed his own person" but wrote his whole poem as narrative, there would be no imitation in it; that poetry is imitative when the poet speaks in the person of another and makes his style like that of the person who is said to be speaking. This is used by Socrates as a means of dividing all poetry and story-telling into one of three forms:

First, that which employs representation only, tragedy and comedy, as you say. Secondly, that in which the poet speaks in his own person; the best example is lyric poetry. Thirdly, that which employs both methods, epic and various other kinds of poetry.

(Trs. H. D. P. Lee, p. 133.)

This Platonic ¹ division is not forgotten by Aristotle, who uses it in ch. xxiv (p. 83, the whole of the middle paragraph): the central sentence is:

The poet should say very little *in propria persona*, as he is no imitator when doing that.

¹ [Cf. G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (Methuen, London, 1935), c 6, pp. 179-208. "The discussion in the tenth book is somewhat confused because Plato here seems to be using the word *μίμησις* in both the general and particular sense. We should do well, however, to hold fast to the meaning of uncritical impersonation from which he himself starts" (p. 188).]

But this paragraph in ch. xxiv is utterly inconsistent with what he says in ch. iii and elsewhere in passages where he plainly includes narrative among the forms of imitation. The main passage at the beginning of ch. iii is as follows (p. 27):

Given both the same means and the same kind of object for imitation, one may either (1) speak at one moment in narrative and at another in an assumed character, as Homer does; or (2) one may remain the same throughout, without any such change; or (3) the imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described.

It is very difficult, in fact impossible, to explain this inconsistency away as a careless use of terms,¹ because in each place the term "imitation" is built into the argument of the context, and the drifts of the argument in the two places are in contrary directions.

Though it is not possible to try to explain this inconsistency away, it is possible to try to explain it; and that attempt will, I hope, throw some light on Aristotle's treatment of imitation in general.

The discussion will partly turn upon the distinction between imitation in the sense of "mimicry", and imitation used as a term for works of art. Many of the inconsistencies, shifts and uncertainties in Aristotle's use of the term "imitation" can be better understood if this basic distinction is clearly grasped.

(The essence of that kind of imitation which is "mimicry" is that the imitation is *in the same medium*, in the same material, as the thing imitated. This is often expressed in the Latin phrase *in pari materia*. A man imitating the call of a cuckoo does it in the medium of sound, with his voice; whether the aim is to deceive with illusions of false spring, or to take in another cuckoo, or as Aristotle says to give pleasure by the likeness, to entertain his friends—the method is the same; the medium of the imitation is in every case the same as the matter of the thing imitated,

¹ As Bywater does in the Introduction to his edition, p. xv; also his notes on the two passages do not adequately take the matter up.

that is sound; and in such a case deceit, actual delusion, is possible, given the right conditions.

Another example takes the matter a little further. Take the case of a child walking behind a pompous or peculiar person in the street and mimicking the gait and gestures of the person in front of him. Here the medium of the imitation is still in a sense the same as the material of the thing imitated—one person walking imitates the movement of another person walking; but here under no circumstances is there any possibility of delusion or deceit. The *size* of the child absolutely forbids it. Even though the medium is largely the same, this is not a hoax but an entertainment. The pleasure to be got from it, such as it is, lies in seeing the combination of likeness with unlikeness (as with a metaphor).

[It seems quite plain that Aristotle had not altogether got away from the sense of imitation by which it means plain mimicry of something in the same medium. And the evidence of this is that he uses the fact that children learn by imitation in support of his general doctrine that "art" is a form of imitation.)

Plato's whole theory of artistic imitation and consequently his whole condemnation of it on the intellectual side was exactly this; it was all a form of mimicry, and was in effect a foolish and time-wasting attempt to "rival reality". The silliness of this has been adequately shown many times, and recently (1951) with great clarity by N. R. Murphy in *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic*, ch. xi. He there points out quite adequately that to know the essential difference between a bed and a picture of a bed you merely have to try sleeping on the paint and canvas.

In the main lines of his thought Aristotle was concerned to overthrow this early and crude Platonic doctrine, along with the theory of the "Ideas" on which it was based. It has often been clearly pointed out that Aristotle's great advance on Plato's general theory of art is the conception of the *medium*. Once you see this difference—a likeness of form, perhaps, but an essential difference of matter—you can no longer look on art as an

attempt to rival reality; it is something different, to be defended in its own right: and the main drift of all the *Poetics* is in that direction.

Why, then, did Aristotle not jettison all reference to the elementary idea of mimicry in his theory of imitation?

I have time only to suggest one explanation. He saw that in the drama, in acting, there is an element of mimicry. The matter imitated is men in action, and the medium of the art is men in action also. He could not quite lose sight of this, and it led him into those parts of his work which could be later twisted to an entirely delusionist theory of drama.

He is trying to maintain a delicate balance between contradictory extremes; this mimic element in the drama is one extreme.

At the other extreme we find him saying that music (in which the representationalist element is at a minimum) is the most imitative of the arts—because its movements and melodies correspond to the moods of men's souls.

In the general theory he is trying to maintain a balance of the same kind as he is trying to maintain in his theory of dramatic character. There the extremes are :

- (a) that characters should be "like" ourselves ;
- (b) that the poet imitates men as they ought to be, not as they are.

The element of "likeness" is necessary for sympathy; the element of "unlikeness" is required so that their actions may have the greatness and coherence necessary to the unlikelike unity of a dramatic plot.

Bibliography

- D. J. ALLAN, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*. Oxford University Press, 1952 (Home University Library 222).
- S. H. BUTCHER, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. London, Macmillan, 1st ed. 1894, 2nd 1898, 3rd 1902, 4th 1907, reprinted 1932.
- I. BYWATER, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*. (Text, translation and commentary.) Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909. Text only, 1898 and 1911. Translation only, 1920.
- LANE COOPER, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1924.
- W. HAMILTON FYFE, *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940.
- G. M. A. GRUBE, *Plato's Thought*. London, Methuen, 1935.
- R. P. HARDIE, "The Poetics of Aristotle", *Mind* IV (N.S.) 350-64, 1895.
- W. JAEGER, *Aristotle* (1st German ed. 1923), translated by R. Robinson. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1948 (2nd ed.).
- H. D. F. KITTO, *Greek Tragedy, A Literary Study*. London, Methuen, 1939, 2nd ed., 1950.
- T. KOCK, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta*. Leipzig, Teubner, 1884.
- F. L. LUCAS, *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics*. London, Hogarth Press (Hogarth Lectures 2), 1928; 6th impression, 1949.
- D. S. MARGOLIOUTH, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1911.
- N. R. MURPHY, *The Interpretation of Plato's Republic*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1951.
- É. NUYENS, *L'Évolution de la psychologie d'Aristote*. Louvain, 1948.
- S. OWEN, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*. An analytic commentary and notes. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1931.
- J. POTTS, *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*. Cambridge, 1953.
- A. O. PRICKARD, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*. London, Macmillan, 1891.
- V. ROSE, *Aristotelis Fragmenta*. Leipzig, Teubner, 1886.
- W. D. (SIR DAVID) ROSS, *Aristotle*. London, Methuen, 1923.
- A. ROSTAGNI, "Il dialogo aristotelico περί Ποιητῶν", *Rivista di Filologia* N.S. IV, 1926, 433-70; V, 1927, 145-73.
- Aristotele, Poetica*, Introduzione, Testo e Commento, Turin Chiantore, 1st ed., 1928; 2nd ed., 1945.

THOMAS TWINING, *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry*. London, 1st ed., 1789.

Translations

Aristotle, *Ethics (Nicomachean)*, translated W. D. Ross, vol. IX of the Works of Aristotle in English. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925.

Select Fragments, translated by Sir David Ross, vol. XII of the Works of Aristotle in English. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952.

Poetics (Aristotle on the Art of Poetry), translated by Ingram Bywater. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1st ed., 1920, often reprinted.

Politics (Aristotle on Education, being extracts from the *Ethics* and *Politics*), translated by John Burnet. Cambridge University Press, 1903.

Rhetoric, translated by W. Rhys Roberts, vol. XI of the Works of Aristotle in English. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924.

Plato, *The Laws*, translated by A. E. Taylor. London, Dent, 1934.

The Republic, translated by H. D. P. Lee. Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1955.

