

RELATIONS BETWEEN WHOLE AND PART

IN ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: Aristotle analyzes drama from several different perspectives. As a result, he recognizes several kinds of artistic whole, each with different kinds of constituent parts. This thesis examines the nature of these parts, as well as their relations to each other and to a particular concept of the whole. Aristotle is most interested in drama viewed as an organized combination of incidents. Therefore, the largest part of this thesis is concerned with plot: with the incidents that form a plot and the episodes that express these incidents. The relations between the different elements of tragedy are also discussed. Aristotle is shown to have devised a highly complex account of drama--which, unfortunately, achieves unity and coherence by emphasizing plot at the expense of the other elements.

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Dedicated to  
my Mother and Father

RELATIONS BETWEEN WHOLE AND PART IN ARISTOTLE'S POETICS

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## PREFACE

It has often been observed that the Poetics has been most influential when it has been least understood. For example, the famous doctrine of the Three Unities was made possible only by wrenching some of Aristotle's statements out of their contexts and grotesquely exaggerated their importance. It might be observed with equal justification that isolated parts of Aristotle's argument have been studied far more intensively than the design of the whole. A great deal of attention has been given to concepts like hamartia and peripeteia; and the number of analyses of the katharsis problem exceeded the point of diminishing returns decades ago. There are reasons for this fragmented approach. Aristotle's emphasis on plot, which is central to the design of the Poetics, has seldom found much favor; but many of his individual perceptions can be incorporated into different aesthetic frameworks without suffering much diminution in suggestiveness and profundity. Nonetheless, such a concern for isolated points of interpretation can only result in an unbalanced view of the treatise.

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to give the overall design of the Poetics the attention which it deserves. Only the most formal aspects of Aristotle's analysis have been considered: the nature of unity and completeness; the relation

between plot and episode; the nature and role of subordinate elements such as thought and diction. More concrete aspects of Aristotle's theory of tragedy, such as his descriptions of peripeteia and anagnōrisis, have been studied elsewhere in great detail; there is no need for them to be discussed again here.

A study of the structure of the Poetics may well suggest approaches to aesthetics at least as fruitful as those which have been generated by the concepts of hamartia and katharsis. Aristotle's brief work is one of the few studies of art whose primary concern is neither the relation between artist and art or the relation between art and spectator; instead, there is implicit in his approach the conviction that such problems can only be considered in detail after we have examined the nature and constituent parts of the work of art itself. Many aestheticians might maintain that such an approach puts the cart before the horse; but the perceptiveness and detail of Aristotle's analysis casts at least some doubt on such a peremptory dismissal. In the structure of this dry dispassionate work on tragedy, it is at least conceivable that there may be found the key to an aesthetic method which avoids the vague, unproductive truisms that often plague discussions of the arts.

Finally, a technical note. In order to facilitate the typing, all Greek words in the thesis, including those in passages quoted from various authors, have been transliterated. No

attempt has been made to find any device to indicate when a Greek word is transliterated by me, and when this is done by the author of a passage. Such a device would probably end by being an encumbrance rather than an aid.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among Aristotle's many achievements may be included the division of knowledge into specific disciplines, kept distinct from one another by differences in approach and subject matter. Therefore, to avoid serious errors, we must begin our study of the Poetics by determining Aristotle's purpose in writing it--since it is safest to assume that an author with so constant an awareness of the nature and limits of any subject will take care to make both method and content subordinate to the purpose of a work.

No explicit statement of aim is given in the Poetics: Aristotle begins his first chapter by telling us what he proposes to examine, but he does not tell us why. We can determine this unstated aim either by relying on the internal evidence of an incomplete text on a subject that seems almost to invite preconceptions; or by ascertaining the division of human knowledge to which poetry belongs. We shall adopt the latter course--as Aristotle himself does in the opening chapters of many of his other works.

For Aristotle, there are three kinds of science<sup>1</sup>: the

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted in what follows to Elder Olson, "The Poetic Method of Aristotle: Its Powers and Limitations", in Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature, ed. by Elder Olson (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 175-191. The same collection includes a paper dealing with Aristotle's various uses of the concept of "art": Richard McKeon, "Rhetoric and Poetic in the Philosophy of Aristotle", 201-236.

theoretical, the practical and the productive. The theoretical sciences (metaphysics, physics, mathematics) deal with necessary first principles and their end is knowledge; the practical sciences (politics and ethics) teach us to determine the nature of right (and wrong) action--and their end is right action itself rather than the mere knowledge of what is virtuous. The productive sciences are concerned with originating change "in another thing or in the artist himself considered as other" (Met. 1046b3)<sup>2</sup>, and their end is the creation of the product or state which should result from such changes.<sup>3</sup>

Poetry, then, must be one of the productive sciences. Some of the implications of this fact are made clear in the following excerpt from a detailed account of the nature of "making" (poiēsis), the genus of which poetic art is a species:

Of the productions of processes one part is called thinking and the other making--that which proceeds from the starting point and the form is thinking, and that which proceeds from the final step of the thinking is making. And each of the other, intermediate, things is produced in the same way. . . .

The active principle then and the starting-point for the process [for example] of becoming healthy is, if it happens by art, the form in the soul. . . . (Met. 1032b15-23)

Several points emerge from this passage. First, it seems obvious that the actual making that follows thinking cannot be the subject of a science, i.e. we cannot make universal state-

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Aristotle in this thesis will be from The Works of Aristotle Translated into English, edited by J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross, latterly under the sole editorship of W.D. Ross (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1908-1952).

<sup>3</sup>For Aristotle's formulation of these distinctions, see Met. 1025b1-1026a33 (on theoretical science); Ibid., 1032a25-1034a32 (on productive science); Nic. Eth. 1094a18-b11 (on practical science).

ments about anything as variable and closely grounded in experience as the practice of an art. Therefore, in the study of any species of poiēsis, our subject-matter will be the "form" of the thing which is to be produced, and the "intermediate" things which are involved in that production:

The scope of any productive science, therefore, is the rational part of production centering in, and indeed based upon, the nature of the product; and the structure of such science may be described as hypothetical regressive reasoning, taking for its starting-point, or principle, the artistic whole which is to be produced and proceeding through the various parts of the various kinds to be assembled.<sup>4</sup>

Now let us examine the opening statement in the Poetics:

Our subject being Poetry, I propose to speak not only of the art in general but also of its species and their respective capacities; of the structure of plot required for a good poem; and likewise of any other matters in the same line of inquiry. (1447a8-11)

It can be seen that Aristotle has followed his own general requirements for the study of productive sciences with scrupulous care: his only declared concerns are the "forms" and the parts of different kinds of poetry. In short, the work is intended to be devoted predominantly to problems involved in the analysis of the work of art considered in itself. For this reason, the Poetics gives only minimal attention to the relations between the artist, the world and his works<sup>5</sup>: Aristotle would probably have thought such matters appropriate to psychology rather than to the study of poetic art.

Similarly, some attention is given to the nature of the

<sup>4</sup>Olson, op. cit., p.181.

<sup>5</sup>Possible references: 1455a21-34; 1459a5-7. But in both cases, the observations are made in a context having little to do with this problem.

effects of tragedy on its spectators: it is the end of poetry to produce such effects and the products of art can be properly understood only in terms of their ends (cf. Part. An. 639b15). But the effects of tragedy are considered in the Poetics only to the extent which is required for a proper insight into the nature of the work of art as such<sup>6</sup>.

There is a less obvious but equally important consequence of this careful limitation of the purposes and concerns of the Poetics: if Aristotle, in his discussion of poetic art, fails to deal with a problem which is not directly concerned with the work of art in itself, this is no indication that he is unaware of the problem. For example, the Poetics has nothing to say about the role of fine art in society; but the matter is discussed at some length in a more appropriate treatise: the Politics.

Finally, and most importantly, it should be noted that a defense of the fundamental assumption of the Poetics--that fine arts (as we should call them today) are modes of imitation--is not given in the work; and Aristotle would probably hold that such a defense is not one of the concerns of a science of the poetic art. The physicist takes for granted certain basic principles--since the proof of these principles is the business not of physics but of metaphysics (cf. Phys. 184b25ff.). In the same way, when we turn to the study of poetic art, we may distinguish between different kinds of imitation (as Aris-

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<sup>6</sup>The discussion of the ideal tragic hero in chapter 13 is a good illustration of this point.

totle does in the first three chapters of the Poetics), but the proof of our basic assumption is the concern of another science (probably metaphysics)<sup>7</sup>.

It is of course possible to use the insights of the Poetics for purposes other than those which its author intended. For example, a number of Aristotle's pregnant suggestions about the nature of the relation between spectator and art object have been further developed by legions of writers. However, in a work such as this thesis, which is intended to shed light upon the actual structure of the Poetics, the strict limits within which Aristotle conducts his argument must always be kept in mind.

These limits have enabled Aristotle to write a treatise which avoids much of the vague diffuseness of many works on poetry; but his method is still beset with many of the characteristic problems of aesthetics. He devotes most of the Poetics to a definition of tragedy and a treatment of its constituent parts. Such a task involves only technical difficulties in most of the practical sciences; describing the design of a bicycle or a water-pump involves few philosophical problems. However, in the fine arts the description of mere physical constituents seems to have only minimal use. Therefore, one's view of the nature of an artistic whole; of the nature of the constituent parts making up this whole; of the relations between whole and part, and between the different parts--all these,

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<sup>7</sup>Unfortunately, such a proof cannot be found in any of Aristotle's extant works.

as well as the conception of art which makes them possible, become matters of crucial importance. They form the subject with which this thesis will be concerned.

We shall present the argument of the thesis in the form of a summary of its four chapters.

I. We begin by examining Aristotle's account of the nature of a well-structured plot: that is, with the meaning of "unity", "completeness" and, above all, the "probability and necessity" that must characterize the links between events in a plot if that plot is to be an ordered whole. The interpretation which emerges from this discussion is then used to shed light on some aspects of the famous ninth chapter of the Poetics. We conclude with a number of observations on Aristotle's analogy between the plot of a story and the soul of a body.

II. The nature of plot is more carefully defined. There is a vital distinction between the plot of a tragedy and the actual sequence of actions of which a tragedy is composed--a distinction which is developed in Chapters 16 to 18 of the Poetics, where Aristotle attempts to describe the process involved in translating a relatively abstract pattern of incidents (plot) into specific actions (episodes).

III. We consider Aristotle's arguments for the primacy of plot. Most important is his argument that plot is the source of a drama's intelligibility. Then the nature of each of the other five elements comes under scrutiny--with particular emphasis on the treatment of diction. We find that Aristotle's

analyses enable us to solve particular problems of, say, characterization or diction, but leave us unable to view these elements as wholes--in the way that plot can be viewed. In short, when Aristotle holds that tragedies must be complete, unified wholes, he is referring more to the plot than to the whole drama. We saw that the episodes of a tragedy are radically dependent on its plot. In the same way, diction, character, thought, music and spectacle are not made parts of the whole by an intricate network of mutual relations; instead, each contributes to the whole by being subordinated to the "life and soul" of tragedy: its plot. The chapter ends with a review of the capacities of each element. It is concluded that the elements should be understood not as ingredients that combine to form a play, but as different means of structuring drama, arranged in a declining order of complexity.

IV. In this chapter, the findings of the thesis are summarized, and some possible explanations for Aristotle's distinctive approach to literature are proposed. It is suggested that his view of art as imitation results in a lack of interest in elements like diction; and his frequent analogies between living things and works of art lead him to search for a "soul" of tragedy--a single element which completely dominates and orders the whole. However, as the thesis as a whole attempts to show, these defects are derived from the same vision of poetry which makes possible the many conspicuous merits of the Poetics. It is doubtful that Aristotle have been able to present so coherent a view of the nature

of tragedy if he had moderated his strong emphasis on plot,  
for example.

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## CHAPTER I

## NECESSITY, PROBABILITY AND THE WHOLE

Since Aristotle is constantly reminding us that tragedy is an imitation of an action (1449b24, 1451b28, etc.), it seems best, in a thesis on the relations between parts and whole, to deal with the nature of the relations between the events in a plot: to deal, that is, with probability and necessity.

It may be useful as a preliminary to show the manner in which some of the key terms used by Aristotle in describing plots are related to the concepts of probability and necessity. Plots, we are told, "should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end" (1459a18-19). This simple formulation conceals a host of complexities--as we shall see.

No definition of "whole" is given in the Poetics; but Aristotle is most probably thinking of the definition given in the Metaphysics, which states that "of quanta that have a beginning and a middle and an end, those to which the position does not make a difference are called totals, and those to which it does, wholes" (1024a1-2). However, Aristotle does mention certain characteristics of plots which are wholes.

The first characteristic displays an interesting simplicity: a plot which is a whole must be of significant size:

Beauty is a matter of size and order, and therefore impossible either (1) in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity; or (2) in a creature of vast size--one, say, 1,000 miles long--as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder. Just in the same way, then, as a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, but a size to be taken in by the eye, so a story or Plot must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory. (1450b36-1451a6)

We shall have more to say about this matter of size toward the end of this chapter. For the present, we must return to the other characteristic of wholes. We saw that being a whole involves having a beginning, middle and end. Aristotle develops this point in the following passage:

A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well-constructed Plot, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described. (1450b27-34)

It should be stressed here that a plot of the sort which Aristotle has in mind does not have merely the simple completeness involved in an assemblage which has everything it needs. The notion of connection between the parts is emphasized: Aristotle speaks of events which are the "necessary or usual" consequents (or antecedents) of other events. A history may have a beginning and an end, but the lack of connection between its events makes it impossible for it to be a whole in the sense which has been indicated:

A history has to deal not with one action, but with one period and all that happened in that to one or more persons, however disconnected the several events may have been. Just as two events may take place at the same time

. . . . without converging to the same end, so too of two consecutive events one may sometimes come after the other with no end as their common issue. (1459a22-29)

This passage in its turn leads to a new step in our analysis. If being a whole is the same as being a connected whole, then plot must deal with one action: one action in the sense of a single sequence of events connected by probable and necessary links, and converging to the same end. Only in this way can unconnected events be avoided. In other words, a complete whole not only includes the relevant but excludes the irrelevant. Thus, in a chapter dealing with unity of plot, Aristotle observes:

The truth is that, just as in the other imitative arts one imitation is always of one thing, so in poetry the story, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole.---(1451a30-35)

Thus, when Aristotle maintains that a plot should be both a complete whole and the imitation of one action, he is stating complementary requirements. There can be no unity in a plot if the omission of any significant incident leaves it incomplete; but without the unity of a probable and necessary sequence of events, there would be no way of identifying a significant incident, and we would be left in the position of Aristotle's rather naive historian, who achieves completeness by an indiscriminate narration of everything which happened during a delimited period of time.

We noted above that a sequence of events would make up one action only if the events were connected by "probable

and necessary" links. In this way, we come to the two terms whose analysis will occupy the better part of this chapter--since they are concepts on whose soundness Aristotle's concept of unity and thence of wholeness have been shown to depend.

The principle difficulty facing any attempt to elucidate these terms would seem to be Aristotle's apparent conviction that they constitute a sufficient explanation of the unity of an action. Now it is certainly true that a plot cannot be unified unless each of its incidents is linked solidly to the next. But how can such links, by themselves, determine a play's direction? We are led to believe that Aristotle regards one or both of these terms as the key to an explanation of the process by which all the incidents of a play are related, not merely to each other, but to the play's goal or theme. But how is this possible?

The difficulty may be surmounted if it is assumed that Aristotle is using in the Poetics a concept of necessity which may be found in several of his other works--a concept which is elaborated in the following passage from his treatise On the Parts of Animals<sup>1</sup>:

For there is absolute necessity, manifested in eternal phenomena; and there is hypothetical necessity, manifested in everything that is generated by nature as in everything that is produced by art, be it a house or what it may. For if a house or other such final object is to be realized, it is necessary that such and such material shall exist; and it is necessary that first this and then that shall be produced, and first this and then that set in motion, and so on in continuous succession, until the

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<sup>1</sup>See also: Phys., 199b34-200b8; and De Gen. et Corr., 337b14-338a4.

end and final result is reached, for the sake of which every prior thing is produced and exists. . . . The mode of necessity, however, and the mode of ratiocination are different in natural science from what they are in the theoretical sciences. . . . For in the latter the starting point is that which is; in the former that which is to be. (639b24-640a4)

Since there is virtually no concern in the Poetics for the process of creating a work of art, there is no direct parallel with the above passage--which analyzes the reasoning involved in the building of a house. But surely hypothetical reasoning of this kind need not be restricted in its use to the description of processes; it may plainly serve as an aid to the study of an already created work. For example, we may state that since this house must keep people warm, its insulation is a necessary part of it. In the discussion of plot the pattern of hypothetical necessity<sup>2</sup> employed bears an even closer resemblance to the sort described in the Parts of Animals. Since Aristotle, in his account of plot, is describing parts that follow one another in a temporal sequence, it is easy to compare the successive incidents of a tragedy to the successive steps that are involved in the building of a house. We are told that each step in the building of a house not only contributes towards the achievement of the final goal (the com-

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<sup>2</sup>This view--that the necessity mentioned in the Poetics is hypothetical rather than logical--has been examined by only a small number of commentators. Harold Skulsky, "Aristotle's Poetics Revisited", Journal of the History of Ideas, XIX (1958), 147-160, gives the matter a favorable but rather brief treatment (see especially pp.152-153). Gerald F. Else, Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), gives a bare reference (pp.304-305), without elaboration, to the important passage from the Parts of Animals.

pleted house), but is also the consequence of a preceding step and the precondition of the next. The same pattern is clearly discernable in any tragedy. Consider the scene from Sophocles' play, in which Oedipus extracts from the frightened old shepherd the secret of his, Oedipus', origins. The scene contributes towards the achievement of the goal of the play: describing the downfall of Oedipus; it is the consequence of the search for the murderer of Laius, and also the consequence of the preceding scene involving the messenger from Corinth; finally, it is the precondition of the next scene, in which we learn that Oedipus has blinded himself.

On this account, it can easily be seen how Aristotle can regard "necessity" as a term which enables us to explain both the relations between events and the relations of all the events to the whole. It is not surprising that Aristotle should find in such a term a sufficient explanation of unity.

Let us consider the implications which this account of necessity has for the interpretation of probability. The two most important points are: (1) the use which we have attributed to necessity is one which has relevance only to a drama's strictly internal structure, where (2) it plays so dominant a role that there is no significant place left for probability. Therefore, if our interpretation of necessity is correct, probability, as it is used in the Poetics, must have reference to some sort of agreement between the events of a drama and the events of "real life".

A clue to the sort of agreement involved may be found

in Butcher's interesting treatment of the problem:

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. . . . The incidents of the drama and the epic are not those of ordinary life: the persons, who here play their parts, are not average men and women. . . . Such characters are in a sense better known to us. . . . than our everyday acquaintances. But 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.<sup>3</sup>

Butcher's views find ample confirmation in the text. Aristotle states in the Rhetoric that the persons and things spoken of in verse are "comparatively remote from ordinary life" (1404b14); and he tells us in the Poetics that characters should be given distinctive portrayals that nonetheless make them larger than life (1454b8-14). But what then is the relation between such extraordinary characters or incidents and those which one encounters "in the common course of things"?

Butcher's answer may be found in the following passage:

At the outset the poet must be allowed to make certain primary assumptions and create his own environment. Starting from these poetic data--the pre-suppositions of the imagination--he may go whither he will. . . . By vividness of narrative and minuteness of detail, and, above all, by the natural sequence of incident and motive, things are made to happen exactly as they would have happened had the fundamental fiction been fact.<sup>4</sup>

Central to this passage is the view that a good poet will make things happen "exactly as they would have happened had the fun-

<sup>3</sup>S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a critical text and translation of the Poetics, and with a prefatory essay "Aristotelian Literary Criticism" by John Gassner (a republication of the fourth edition of the work, published in 1911 by the Saint Martin's Press; New York: Dover Publications, 1951), pp. 166-167.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-173.

damental fiction been fact". There is an intriguing possibility here: that statements of probability in the Poetics, like statements of necessity, are best framed as conditionals<sup>5</sup>. A probability statement would thus take the form: if X, then Y is probable. Y is being tested by the rules of probability, but X need not be so tested. This may be translated into the terms of drama as follows. There are certain aspects of a play, such as the character of Oedipus, or perhaps even the appearance of the ghost in the first act of Hamlet (the "primary assumptions" to which Butcher refers), which we may accept without question; but the drama's other events--those which follow from these primary assumptions--are subject to the rule of probability. (This suggests that Butcher's claim that the poet, starting from his "poetic data", "may go whither he will", is somewhat incautious<sup>6</sup>.)

Thus, if there were a person such as Hamlet, he would

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<sup>5</sup>An interesting approach to this problem may be found in Humphrey House, Aristotle's Poetics, revised, with a preface, by Colin Hardie (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1956), pp. 58-64. House sees that the problem of probability must be resolved by the use of conditional statements, but, like most of those who have written on the Poetics (including Butcher), he seems to regard "probability and necessity" as indistinct parts composing one unit of meaning. As our interpretation attempts to show, the two terms are related, but must not be confused with one another.

<sup>6</sup>This idealistic interpretation of Aristotle may be the result of Butcher's tendency, in an otherwise excellent commentary, to see the Poetics primarily as a study of the means by which a poet communicates a view of life to the spectator--rather than as a study of the structure of one particularly complex example of man's productive activity (on this point, see our Introduction).

probably delay avenging himself. If Orestes were about to be sacrificed, it is probable that he might refer to the similar death of his sister.

There are many passages in the text of the Poetics which strongly confirm this interpretation of Aristotle's use of the term "probability". Consider the following discussion of the nature of error in poetry:

There is, however, within the limits of poetry itself a possibility of two kinds of error, the one directly, the other only accidentally connected with the art. If the poet meant to describe the thing correctly, and failed through lack of power of expression, his art itself is at fault. But if it was through his having meant to describe it in some incorrect way (e.g. to make the horse in movement have both right legs thrown forward) that the technical error (one in a matter of, say, medicine or some other special science), or impossibilities of whatever kind they may be, have got into his description, his error in that case is not in the essentials of the poetic art.  
(1460b15-22)

We find here the sort of reasoning which has been described above. Even if an artist takes as his subject something which is quite impossible, he is not to be faulted qua artist. The artist is criticised only if he violates his own premisses.

Our interpretation may also be used to illuminate the maxim which Aristotle repeats twice in the Poetics (1460a26; 1461b11): that a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility. The artist's basic assumptions (which may involve impossibilities) are accepted if they are convincingly developed: developed, that is, in a manner which is probable. Ghosts may not exist; but all the characters in Hamlet act as most people would probably act if ghosts existed and if they met one. The example which Aristotle uses to ex-

plain his views concerning the reverse case (i.e. an unconvincing possibility) is of some interest:

The story should never be made up of improbable incidents; there should be nothing of the sort in it. If, however, such incidents are unavoidable, they should be outside the piece, like the hero's ignorance in Oedipus of the circumstances of Laius' death; not within it, like the report of the Pythian games in Electra. . . . (1460a27-31)

It is significant that improbabilities that occur during the action of the story are to be avoided at all costs; but, just as we may be excused if we begin by assuming that hinds have no horns, so we may be excused for an absurdity if it is kept outside the action and thus belongs, in effect, among the initial assumptions rather than among the elaborations of these assumptions.

Finally, a study of all the contexts in the Poetics where the terms "probability" and "necessity" are used provides considerable support for the interpretations that have been advanced here. If our account is correct, "necessity" must be used in contexts where there is a reference to the design of the whole; "probability" will be used wherever the plausibility of the relation between two specific events is being judged.

Now "probability" and "necessity" are only used in tandem<sup>7</sup> in contexts where there is a clear reference to the design

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<sup>7</sup>See 1451a12, 28, 38; 1451b35; 1452a20, 24; 1454a34. Aristotle speaks at 1451b9 and 1454a36 of actions that are the probable and necessary outcome of a man's character. We cannot conveniently discuss these two special cases at length here, except to say that neither passage is inconsistent with the argument of this chapter. For a detailed study, see Chapter III.

of the whole--i.e. to the nature of the sequence of events. By itself, this is inconclusive. Most commentators seem to assume that the frequent union of the two terms causes their separate meanings to be rather unimportant; "probability" becomes merely a weaker form of "necessity" with both being understood to refer to the need for a strong internal structure in the drama. We would argue, on the other hand, that in these passages Aristotle gives two separate requirements, one of which--necessity--is a good deal more important than the other.

We can resolve matters by an examination of the contexts in which each word is used alone. Let us begin with "necessity". We are told that dance, music and spectacle are "no necessary part" of tragedy, which "may produce its effect" simply by being read (1462a11-13); that the baseness of character of Menelaus in Orestes is not necessary for the story (1454a29); and that "there is no possible apology for improbability of Plot or depravity of character, when they are not necessary and no use is made of them" (1461b19-20). In all three cases, the necessity of something is clearly determined by its relevance to the whole<sup>8</sup>.

The uses of probability are too numerous to be dealt with individually<sup>9</sup>. However, none of the contexts involved makes any obvious reference to the design of the whole; in

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<sup>8</sup>There is an exceptional use--for the Poetics--at 1448a1, where Aristotle refers to "agents who are necessarily either good men or bad". He seems here to mean logical necessity.

<sup>9</sup>See 1451b13, 31; 1455a7, 18; 1455b10; 1456a24; 1456b4; 1460a27; 1461b15.

most of them, Aristotle is evidently discussing the likelihood of a particular event, given a particular context. The examples from Iphigenia in Tauris (1455b10) and Oedipus the King (1460a30) both have this sense. Thus, Aristotle's usage of both "probability" and "necessity" seems to confirm our interpretation.

In conclusion, we must explain why these two terms, which are sharply distinguished in our analysis, are so intimately connected in the Poetics. The best answer would seem to be that they represent two contrasting views of art held simultaneously by Aristotle. (1) The demand for probability reflects a view of art as imitation. We have seen that Aristotle does not require slavish realism of the artist; but the demand that the artist develop his primary assumptions according to probability is nonetheless a concession to verisimilitude. (2) The demand for necessity reflects a view of art as an internally harmonious, autonomous structure. Since it is only imitation that gives a structure content and only structure which makes controlled imitation possible, the two views of art are--for Aristotle--mutually interdependent. Indeed, one of the greatest virtues of the Poetics is the ease with which it balances the demands of form and content--demands that many aestheticians might be tempted to call irreconcilable.

At this point, we turn to a section of the Poetics whose interpretation not only involves problems of intrinsic interest, but also adds some new dimensions to our discussion of Aristotle's views on the structure of tragedy. We are referring

to the famous ninth chapter of the treatise.

We shall begin by comparing two translations of the key passage in the chapter. Bywater offers the following version:

From what we have said it will be seen that 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. . . . Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do--which is the aim of poetry, though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say, Alcibiades did or had done to him. (1451a36-b11)

Included in Bywater's commentary on this passage are the following remarks, which are relevant to Aristotle's definition of a "universal statement":

In all these forms of imaginative literature [tragedies, comedies and also modern novels] the personages are, as we say, "characters", in other words, ideal personalities, made to act and speak in accordance with the law of character which the author has assumed for each.<sup>10</sup>

The characters in the Drama are "universals", i.e. types of character rather than actual individuals; that is what poetry really means them to be, notwithstanding the individualizing proper names it attaches to them.<sup>11</sup>

There is a major objection which can be directed against the interpretation of "universal" which emerges from these remarks: it leaves the development of Aristotle's argument in ruins. Aristotle clearly indicates in the first line of the

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<sup>10</sup> Ingram Bywater, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, a revised text with critical introduction, translation and commentary (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1909), p.189, ad 1451b7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.190, ad 1451b10.

chapter that he is continuing the argument of Chapter 8--which deals with unity of action. Unity of action is a matter having to do, for the most part<sup>12</sup>, with the internal structure of the work of art--with the probable and necessary links between the events in a story. If Aristotle is now dealing with character types, he is engaged in a comparison between a part of the work of art (the portrayal of character) and something external to the work (common observable patterns of behavior). Thus, to maintain Bywater's position it seems necessary to deny Aristotle's own belief that there is a continuity in the arguments of Chapters 8 and 9. Further, we must conclude that Aristotle is guilty of serious ambiguity in his usage of "probability" and "necessity": in the space of two brief chapters, he has presumably applied these terms first to plot (i.e. a part of the work of art), then to the reality which the artist is to imitate. It is not inconceivable that Aristotle should be so ambiguous and inconsistent. A theory of art as imitation can easily confuse the structure of the art work and the structure of its model. However, we can soundly argue that such confusions exist in the Poetics only if there exists no equally viable analysis and translation of the text. But in our opinion there exists just such an alternative.

Here is L.J. Potts's translation of the latter part

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<sup>12</sup>As we have mentioned, the criterion of probability is our everyday experience--which is external to the work of art. But it seems clear that when Aristotle mentions probability and necessity together, most of the emphasis is on the work's internal structure.

of the passage given above in Bywater's version:

It follows therefore that poetry is more philosophical and of higher value than history; for poetry unifies more, whereas history agglomerates. To unify is to make a man of a certain description say or do the things that suit him, probably or necessarily, in the circumstances (this is the point of the descriptive proper names in poetry); what Alcibiades did or what happened to him is an agglomeration. (1451b5-11)<sup>13</sup>

This version is distinguished mainly by the view that the Greek katholou is best translated, not as "general" or "universal", but as "according to the whole" (the use of the word "unify" in the passage above conveys much the same meaning). This translation makes Chapter 9 fully consistent and continuous with the discussion of unity of action in Chapter 8. Potts makes the following remarks on his treatment of Chapter 9:

From [Bywater's translation] one might conclude that for Aristotle the value of poetry consists in classifying human nature into types and making them illustrate general truths. . . . But Aristotle had laid it down in set terms that tragedy is not an imitation of character, but of doings; his starting point is not psychology, but myth. And 'according to the whole' does not usually in the Poetics mean 'consistent with common observation or experience', but 'consistent with the fable as a whole'; though what is the second may and indeed should also be the first.<sup>14</sup>

It should perhaps be noted that an interpretation like this one can be maintained even if Potts's rather unusual rendering of katholou is not accepted. For example, the following view of Aristotle's ninth chapter can be found in a recent article:

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<sup>13</sup>L.J. Potts, Aristotle on the Art of Fiction, an English translation of Aristotle's Poetics with an introductory essay and explanatory notes (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1953), p.29.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p.72.

Thus the term "universal" (katholou). . . properly indicates when applied to plot that events and characters making up the "complete action" are "consistent with the whole" of the action. The "universality" of the action refers to a class of events (poia) which would result if we assume with the poet the existence of a certain class (poio) of men and a prior situation (see 1451b8-10); it never refers to a particular situation (ti) which actually does or can happen (see 1451b8-10).<sup>15</sup>

Both Potts and Skulsky (the author of the above passage) have perceived that the integrity of Aristotle's argument can be preserved only if Chapter 9 is regarded as the culmination of the preceding analysis of a "complete whole". In Chapters 7 and 8, Aristotle explains how unity is maintained by the probable and necessary connections of events. In Chapter 9, he tries to give us some indication of the nature of the autonomous structure which he has been analyzing. His use of the word katholou is central to this attempt. In fact, in the differences--and resemblances--between the use of this word in the Poetics and its more technical use we may discern the essence of Aristotle's view of poetry. Like the universals of the real world, a poem is (ideally) free of accident. Hence poetry is regarded as "more philosophical" than history.

Another remark by Skulsky is apposite here:

Thus the fundamental character of the pleasure in mimesis is of the kind we have described, the rational contemplation of order and complexity ("beauty") as embodied (in tragedy) in a "complete action".<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, universals give us knowledge; but poetry's primary concern is not truth. This is the reason why (as we

<sup>15</sup>Harold Skulsky, op. cit., pp.152-153.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.151.

saw above) the poet may present convincing impossibilities or make mistakes because of an ignorance of, say, physiology or medicine, and still produce a great work of art.

It can be seen that the interpretation of Chapter 9 is a crucial point in any analysis of the Poetics. The chapter can give us a vital clue to the meaning of a difficult and compact text; but if the meaning of katholou is misconstrued, we can be left with the erroneous view that Aristotle regards the poet mainly as a purveyor of intellectual and moral nourishment.

We shall conclude this chapter by considering a few of the major implications of Aristotle's treatment of probability, necessity, and the whole.

The first point is an obvious one; nonetheless, it should be mentioned, since it will never be far from view in the subsequent pages of this thesis. We are speaking of Aristotle's conviction that the unity of a tragedy or epic lies in the unity of its action. This conviction makes itself felt in his analysis; his key terms--probability and necessity--have almost exclusive reference to the links between a play's events. (Aristotle speaks of the probable and necessary result of a certain character, as we saw; but such remarks remain brief and undeveloped.) Thus, Aristotle understates the case when he calls plot the most important of the six elements of tragedy (1450a15). Plot is radically distinct from the other elements; since its unity is the unity of the whole drama, there

is a sense in which the other five elements are mere attributes, while plot is substance--as we hope to demonstrate more fully in Chapter III. When Aristotle calls plot the "life and soul" of a tragedy (1450a38), his remark should be regarded as far more than a casual metaphor. The following passage is one of many which illustrate this point:

Again: to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. (1450b34-36)

The order in the "arrangement of parts" in a drama is of course assured by an adherence to probability and necessity. In short, order in the events is to a play as an organizing principle (psuche) is to a living body. Plot, we saw, is the only element which makes tragedy a whole; and in plot we also find that proper arrangement of parts which is one of the sources of beauty.

We may detect in this comparison between plot and soul a tendency, evident throughout the Poetics, to describe the work of art in a manner analogical to that which may be found in Aristotle's descriptions of living organisms in the biological treatises. This tendency is made explicit in Aristotle's statement that the stories of epic and drama "should be based on a complete action. . . so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature" (1459a19-21). It is also implicit in the characteristic of wholeness which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter: limited size. When Aristotle states in On the Soul that "in the case of all complex wholes formed in the course

of nature there is a limit or ratio which determines their size and increase" (416a16), he is surely establishing a principle of which the rule in the Poetics governing the size of plays is an analogue. In fact, in the passage involved (1450b34-1451a15), Aristotle actually compares the size of a beautiful plot to the size of a beautiful animal.

Aristotle's use of an organic analogy is probably also relevant to his preference for plays with complex plots. Just as living things are organized into a hierarchy according to their degree of complexity, so one tragedy is likely to be superior to another if its parts are more intricately arranged. This assumption on Aristotle's part may help to account for his acute awareness of certain merits of drama--as well as his seeming obliviousness to certain others. He appreciates the ingenuity with which a poet may structure events drawn from history or legend<sup>17</sup>; but he seems not at all interested in the gradual development of a simple tragic situation (Prometheus Bound is a good example).

However, these aesthetic preferences are not significant merely as the possible illustration of an excessively zealous employment of an analogy. They also serve to raise an important problem which we must now discuss: the respec-

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<sup>17</sup>The Poetics places a greater emphasis on originality of plot--and incident--than is sometimes admitted. See H.C. Baldry's interesting article, "Aristotle and the Dramatization of Legend", Classical Quarterly, n.s. IV (1954), 151-157. He notes that when Aristotle speaks of a combination of incidents, "he means not merely manipulation of a given story to form a 'plot', but a creative activity which so transformed the story that it might be said to have been made anew" (p.156).

tive roles of theme and structure in Aristotle's view of drama. A proper treatment of this intricate subject would require a full-length paper. It is sufficient for our purposes to mention certain points that may help to define the significance of Aristotle's concept of dramatic structure--i.e. of those relations between whole and part which concern us in this thesis.

For a modern critic, an author's theme is usually of primary interest--because (among other reasons) it is held to determine structure. From the perspective of such a critic, Aristotle's emphasis on plot seems to exalt subsidiary and rather mechanical considerations<sup>18</sup>. However, we suggest that Aristotle maintains, not that structure is superior to theme (if this implies that the two are in any way competitive), but rather that it is only by the right kind of structure that theme can be adequately realized. In short, in direct contrast to a modern critic, Aristotle holds that structure is prior to theme, in the sense that we can predict in advance of specific case that certain structures will be more successful in implementing themes than others are. To say that Aristotle is less interested in simple plays than in complex ones does not show that he would prefer Agatha Christie to Aeschylus;

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<sup>18</sup>This view is expressed with particular offensiveness by Robert Langbaum, "Aristotle and Modern Literature", Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XV (1956-57), 74-84: "Where aesthetic pleasure is bought at the price of truth, where for the sake of entertainment writer and audience are willing to assume the objectivity of a mere fashionable and class morality, there--as in all the kinds and degrees of our melodrama, from the well-made Broadway play. . . to the comic book--the literature of action, as described by Aristotle, still flourishes" (p.74).

it simply underscores his contention that the tragic effect (which Aeschylus surely achieves) could be produced more effectively with a complex plot.

Thus, the analyses of the Poetics deal not with all aspects of good poetry, but simply with those basic characteristics of structure which may not be sufficient for artistic greatness, but which (at least according to Aristotle) are certainly necessary. As we shall see, this point will often prove relevant in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

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## CHAPTER II

## PLOT AND EPISODE

In our last chapter, we considered Aristotle's views on the relations between the incidents in a plot. What we found was a theory which places so great an emphasis on unity of action that its author can maintain that in a properly constructed plot, the several incidents are "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole" (1451a32-33).

In this chapter, one of the questions which we shall try to answer is: what is the nature of this plot which must be so rigorously unified? At first glance, this question seems rather trivial. Aristotle tells us repeatedly (for example, at 1450a15) that plot is the "combination of the incidents". But what exactly is the meaning of "incident"? In a play or epic, must every action or event (no matter how trivial) be regarded as an element in this "combination"? If this is Aristotle's view, it is vulnerable to a simple objection: there never has been and never will be a literary work that satisfies the demand for that sort of unity of action. Is the structure of the Iliad, for example, so perfect that every loser of a duel must be disembowelled at one particular juncture and no other? Even in a far more tightly-knit work like Aristotle's

favorite, Oedipus the King, it would surely be rash to argue that the plot structure would suffer unless every conversational exchange was in one exact place.

If Aristotle's views were to have any plausibility, it seems to us that he would have to regard the "incidents" of a plot as the essentials of the actual sequence of events that make up a play. On this account, the first scene of Oedipus the King could be said to present the following incident: Creon tells Oedipus that the oracle of Apollo has predicted that the plague in Thebes will not end until the murderer of Laius has been found. (It goes without saying that this incident, in accordance with Aristotle's theory of unity, can neither be deleted nor transposed.) Such an interpretation of the nature of the incidents that are combined to form a plot must be presented with some care. It is not being argued that there are a few lines in the opening scene of the play which are "essential", while the others are "non-essential" padding. Rather, the scene is said to consist of a group of interrelated, particular actions, from which the viewer extracts an essential point which is significant for the development of the plot.

It does not seem that Aristotle felt the need for such a concept of plot in the first fourteen chapters of the Poetics. In this early part of the work, he is concerned with the difference between poetry and history; and all the events in a poem are thus seen, by comparison, as necessary. But does he indicate, in the later chapters of the work, an awareness that plot might be more distinct from the actual actions in the play

than he had at first believed? If he does (as we hope to show in this chapter), it will become apparent that in the latter part of the Poetics he is tracing the first outlines of a new and highly sophisticated theory of dramatic action, while maintaining the fundamental soundness of his earlier formulations.

In our analysis, we shall be concerned mainly with Chapters 16 to 18 of the Poetics. Let us begin by considering an influential account by Solmsen<sup>1</sup> of these rather fragmentary parts of the treatise.

There are three main points in Solmsen's interpretation: (1) Chapters 16 to 18 are later additions by Aristotle to an earlier text of the Poetics<sup>2</sup>; (2) they mark a return to the subject of plot; (3) the sharp difference between this treatment of plot and the analysis given in Chapters 6 to 14 is the consequence of a more "empirical" approach to tragedy on Aristotle's part. Since we shall be frequently referring to Solmsen's argument, it will be convenient to quote his conclusions at some length:

The eidē anagnōriseōs enumerated in XVI are simply gathered up from the practice of ancient tragedies; there is nothing to remind us of the strict, logical way in which the eidē were deduced in VI. The second half of ch. XV and ch. XVI contain a good many precepts, but they are simply stated without any deductive reasoning and without resorting to the fundamental theories expounded before. 1455b 32 ff. make a further step toward classifying tragedies in accordance with what Aristotle found existing in practice, and they are much more detached from the fun-

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<sup>1</sup>F. Solmsen, "The Origins and Methods of Aristotle's Poetics", Classical Quarterly, XXIX (1935), 192-201.

<sup>2</sup>Chapters 12, 24 and part of 15 (1454a37-b18) are also regarded by Solmsen as late.

damental tenets and much more empirical than the classification in ch. X. The terms desis and luisis, introduced in the beginning of ch. XVIII, seem to me to be more extrinsic and more extrinsically defined than peripeteia or any other term that is defined in the previous chapters. If the conviction that every tragedy has to be a holon still underlies 1456a. 25 ff., it certainly remains much more in the background. Ch. XVII is very closely connected with the view expressed in ch. IX that hē poiēsis is tōn katholou, but Aristotle has never gone as far into the actual making and composing of a tragedy as in this chapter in which he teaches the playwright in detail how has to set to work.<sup>3</sup>

A study as detailed and perceptive as Solmsen's deserves the extensive attention which it has received. His point about the lateness of certain parts of the text is accurate and important--since it accounts for the presence in these chapters of new terms such as desis and luisis, and new approaches to such matters as anagnōrisis. In addition, he rightly discerns the lack of continuity between the later, simple descriptions of poetic practice and the highly structured analyses of Chapters 1 to 14. But we maintain that he gives an inadequate explanation of this change when he states that Aristotle has simply become "more empirical" in his methods. (Of course, the passages in question are empirical; but, as we hope to show, this is more an effect than a cause of the peculiar character of these chapters.) However, such an explanation is made inevitable for Solmsen by his assumption that Chapters 16 to 18 are concerned primarily with plot. We shall offer a challenge to that assumption in the analysis which follows.

First, let us consider Aristotle's views on the role

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<sup>3</sup>Solmsen, op. cit., p.200.

of episodes in the literary work. It is given in the following passage, in which Aristotle is explaining how a poet should go about composing a drama or epic:

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. . . . 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. One must mind, however, that the episodes are appropriate. . . . In plays, then, the episodes are short; in epic poetry they serve to lengthen out the poem. The argument of the Odyssey is not a long one. A certain man has been abroad many years; Poseidon is ever on the watch for him, and he is all alone. Matters at home too have come to this, that his substance is being wasted and his son's death plotted by suitors to his wife. Then he arrives there himself after his grievous sufferings; reveals himself, and falls on his enemies; and the end is his salvation and their death. This being all that is proper to the Odyssey, everything else in it is episode. (1455a34-b23)<sup>4</sup>

As a preliminary, it is necessary to understand what Aristotle means by epeisodion--which is the Greek word translated in the above passage as "episode". Epeisodion is an ambiguous term; it can refer either to an interpolation or to an action which is in some sense a legitimate part of the whole<sup>5</sup>. Aristotle uses it in Chapter 12 of the Poetics, for example, to refer to a quantitative part of tragedy (1452b16, 20). The English "episode" is similarly ambiguous.

If we understand "episode" to mean "interpolation", we have committed Aristotle to the blatantly unacceptable view

<sup>4</sup>I have used Bywater's translation with some reluctance, since it is misleading at some points (see our discussion below). However, no other version seemed to offer a significantly better rendering.

<sup>5</sup>I am indebted here to Allan H. Gilbert, "The Word Epeisodion in Aristotle's Poetics", American Journal of Philology, LXX (1949), 56-64.

that tragedy or epic consists of a thin line of relevant action surrounded by arbitrary digressions. Yet such a meaning is clearly assumed by Bywater. He translates epeisodioun kai parateinein (1455b1) by "lengthen it out by the insertion of episodes"; and at 1455b13, epeisodioun is rendered as "work in episodes". Humphrey House, referring directly to Bywater, presents strong objections to these translations:

In both these crucial places [1455b1, 13] 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 . . . about necessity in the sequence of the episodes.<sup>6</sup>

If House's case is sound, we are left with the other meaning of epeisodion: it may refer to an action which is in some sense a part of a whole. But what sort of part is it, and to what kind of whole does it belong? Gilbert, after arguing (in a manner similar to House) that epeisodion cannot mean "interpolation" in the Poetics, suggests the following answer:

It seems, then, that Aristotle employed the word epeisodion not merely to mean the part of a play between the choral songs, but more loosely to mean any action that is a subordinate but necessary component of the integral action of the play.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Gilbert, like House, wishes to present episodes as parts of the plot--of that whole unified by probability and necessity to which Aristotle devotes so much of the analysis of the Poetics. Unfortunately, their position is hard to reconcile with

<sup>6</sup>Humphrey House, op. cit., p.54.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert, op. cit., p.64.

the text--and, in particular, with one of Aristotle's examples: the Odyssey. How is it possible to show that Odysseus' encounters with the Lotus-eaters or the Laistrygones must be regarded as "necessary components" of the epic's "integral action"? These episodes are appropriate, as Aristotle requires (1455b14); but it is surely extravagant to call them necessary.

It seems that we can avoid the problems created by Bywater's position on the one hand, and Gilbert's and House's on the other, only if we find an interpretation which presents episodes as more important than mere digressions, yet less important than actual parts of the plot. We shall present such an interpretation below--via a close examination of the passage on episodes.

Aristotle begins by stating that the poet, once he has decided on his "story", should simplify and reduce it to a "universal form" (katholou)<sup>8</sup>. It seems to us that there is a parallel here with the usage of katholou in Chapter 9 (see our discussion in Chapter I of this thesis). In both cases, actions which are connected to one another "according to the whole" are contrasted with an amorphous collection of events. In Chapter 9, the contrast is with history; in this chapter, with an as yet unstructured "story" (such as, perhaps, the legends involving the house of Atreus). If the parallel which we have drawn is correct, Aristotle is speaking, at the beginning of the passage in question, not of a mere preliminary outline but

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<sup>8</sup>Potts translates katholou in this passage as "significant and unified outline" (op. cit., p.40).

of the actual plot of the drama or epic<sup>9</sup>.

However, the resemblance to Chapter 9 soon ends. To his old account of the construction of drama Aristotle has added a new step: "episodising" and lengthening the plot. What is the nature of this operation? The answer which we shall give was anticipated at the beginning of this chapter. When we "episodise" a plot, we translate it into specific terms. Aristotle is describing a process by which the author moves from a comparatively abstract "combination of incidents" to the representation of particular actions. For example, Book XVI of the Iliad presents the following incident in the plot of the epic: Patroklos is killed by Hektor. Homer episodises this incident by describing how Patroklos slays a few dozen Trojans and is finally vanquished as a result of Apollo's interference in the battle.

On our interpretation, episodes are neither outside the plot nor a part of it; they are instead a kind of "medium" through which the plot is expressed. No explicit statement that such a relation exists between plot and episode is to be found in the Poetics. This is disappointing, but not surprising: we have already mentioned Solmsen's view of Chapters 16 to 18 as sketchy additions, written years after the earlier

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<sup>9</sup>There is a further parallel between the two passages which we have been comparing. In Chapter 17, the next step after reducing the story to a "universal form" is giving the characters proper names (1455b13). Compare this with the account of Comedy in Chapter 9, where Aristotle notes that "it is only when their plot is already made up of probable incidents that they give it a basis of proper names" (1451b12).

chapters. We must be content to observe that the interpretation which we are advancing is a logical development of Aristotle's earlier views. If Aristotle perceived, on returning to the Poetics, that his criterion of strict unity was unworkable, a change in doctrine such as the one for whose existence we have been arguing would become inevitable if the old theory of unity was to be preserved in some form.

Although we have (hopefully) established the basic character of episodes and episodising, a problem remains. We must amplify a remark which we made above: that Aristotle requires that episodes be appropriate (1455b14), but says nothing about their being necessary<sup>10</sup>. Let us clarify the meaning of this point. Episodes are means subordinate to an end: the expression of the incidents in a plot. One episode could conceivably serve that end as well as another. Therefore Aristotle calls them "appropriate" rather than "necessary". In the same way, we might say that it is "necessary" for a house to have doors and windows, but merely "appropriate" that it should be made out of bricks (since stone or wood or concrete might do as well).

That episodes are not necessary seems plausible in the case of epic; but the point seems less certain when we turn to tragedy. Let us consider the reasons why. Aristotle ob-

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<sup>10</sup>In Chapter 9, Aristotle speaks plainly of sequences of episodes that may be characterized by probability and necessity (1451b34-38). But if Solmsen is right, this chapter was written prior to Chapter 17, and may indicate the very fact which we have been maintaining: that Aristotle develops a new concept of "episode" in the later stratum of his work.

serves that the episodes in plays are short, while those in epic serve to lengthen out the poem (1455b16). He is noting that only the epic poet's discretion limits the duration and number of the episodes through which he expresses his plot, while the tragedian, who is working in a form of restricted size, must create episodes of a duration and number no greater than is minimally sufficient to express the plot. Both kinds of writer episodise--although each does so in a different way.

In epic, the episodes grow out of the plot and it is their relation to the plot which prevents them from being mere interpolations. But since there is no clear limit on their size and number, they are likely to assume a semi-autonomous status; that is, they are enjoyed for their own sake as well as for whatever part they play in advancing the plot. Because episodes in epic have this sort of intrinsic interest, the skilled epic poet will ensure that they are both varied (1459b23-29) and astounding (1460a13-15).

It is easy to see how such episodes may be appropriate but not necessary; but does the same hold true of the episodes in tragedy? A tragedy's episodes are far less autonomous than those of epic; they exist predominantly to convey the plot, and may thus seem more "inevitable" than those of epic. However, that tragedy uses only as many episodes as it needs is no proof that the episodes it does use could not be replaced by others. This is why Aristotle deems it relevant to suggest two alternative methods by which the anagnō̄sis in Iphigeneia in Tauris could be effected (1455b9-12; also 1455a6-7). Of course, in

the case of a play like Oedipus the King, devising different episodes to express the same plot would be very difficult indeed; but this is more an indication that the play's plot is ingenious than that its episodes differ significantly from those of, say, Prometheus Bound. (To pursue our previous analogy: if a house can be built only with a certain material, this tells us more about the design of the house than it does about the nature of the material.)

In both tragedy and epic, then, episodes have no significant, independent structure. They must be appropriate, and probable as well (cf. 1455b10); in addition they ought to astound or divert us; but they have none of that necessity which characterizes the incidents that make up a plot. One may easily understand why Aristotle's discussion of such matters should lead Solmsen to detect a new, "empirical" turn in his ideas on drama. But the very lack of any structure in the nature of episodes should convince us that Aristotle is supplementing his early analysis rather than replacing it. If Aristotle is discussing the means by which an abstract pattern or action can be translated into concrete terms, his discussion is of considerable interest, even if it is fragmentary. On the other hand, if Chapters 16 to 18 are viewed as independent of the earlier arguments on unity of action (as, apparently, Solmsen seems to view them), they become grotesquely naïve.

The basic point which we have developed above--that Aristotle is concerned in Chapters 16 to 18 with the specific

terms into which a poet translates an abstract plot--may be used as a means for interpreting most of the other scattered observations that are to be found in this section of the Poetics. As Solmsen correctly notes, there is no deductive reasoning here, no appeal to fundamentals. But this must be seen as the logical result of a change from analysis of the necessary to examination of the merely appropriate. To say that the result is "empirical" is at once true and not very enlightening.

Let us consider the treatment of anagnōr̄isis in Chapter 16. We should begin by stressing that Aristotle is not examining the material of Chapter 11 from a new perspective; rather, he is dealing with a quite different problem. Chapter 11 is concerned with the place of anagnōr̄isis in the structure of plot, while Chapter 16 presents an enumeration of the various kinds of episodes that can be used to give expression to a recognition scene required in the abstract by the plot<sup>11</sup>. The final item in the list is particularly interesting:

The best of all discoveries, however, is that arising from the incidents themselves, when the great surprise comes about through a probable incident, like that in the Oedipus of Sophocles; and also in Iphigenia; for it was not improbable that she should wish to have a letter taken home. These last are the only Discoveries independent

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<sup>11</sup>It is instructive to compare this approach to anagnōr̄isis with the later discussion of desis and lisis, in which the problems involved in "episodising" a peripeteia are the subject. Peripeteia is far more central in the structure of a tragic plot than is anagnōr̄isis; more attention must be given to the nature of the particular plot involved; and therefore it is impossible to give a list of stock devices of the sort given here for effect anagnōr̄isis.

of the artifice of signs and necklaces. Next after them come Discoveries through reasoning. (1455a16-20)

In other words, the best discoveries are those which are an integral part of the plot, and thus in a class distinct from discoveries which could be changed without disturbing the pattern of action in the drama. Translation into episodes is inevitable; but the more completely their details are determined by the structure of the plot, the better the resulting play will be.

Of course, we do not invariably find so neat a parallel between an early treatment of plot and a later treatment of episodes. In Chapter 18, Aristotle condemns plays that contain an epic body of incident; and the basis of his criticism--that such plays are failures when performed (1456a10-20)--contrasts directly with an earlier castigation of the kind of play whose excessive number of incidents strains the plot (1451b34-38). But it is hard to say exactly what relation, if any, can be said to obtain between these two accounts. Similarly, instead of an emphasis on unity of plot (such as we find at 1451a30-35), we are told to maintain unity in our concrete handling of a play--specifically, in our use of the chorus, which "should be regarded as one of the actors" (1456a26). But once again, there is no clear relation between these kinds of unity. A play could be hopelessly episodic and yet have a fully participating chorus. So both these cases prove only half our argument. The specifics of drama are dealt with; but they are not presented as means for achieving the expression of a plot. Perhaps the difficulties which we have mentioned in the early

theory of unity prompted the study of the specifics of drama; then later this study may have been regarded as a sufficient object in itself.

The results are more encouraging when we turn to Aristotle's new classifications of tragedy and the parts of tragedy. We shall argue that the terms which Aristotle discusses in Chapter 18--desis, lisis and the four eidē of tragedy--reflect his interest in the complete play seen as an expression of an underlying principle of organization--the plot.

Solmsen makes the following remarks about the new terminology of Chapter 18:

The terms desis and lisis were not introduced in chs. VI-XIV, which claim, as we have seen, to contain a complete treatment of muthos. The enumeration of four eidē tragōdias: peplegmene, pathetike, ethike and probably (see 1459b 7ff.) <haplē> in 1455a 32 ff. can hardly be made to agree with the division of muthoi into two classes in X, and rather seems to be a correction made when the simpler classification did not appear to be sufficiently comprehensive.<sup>12</sup>

Much the same comment can be made on Solmsen's approach to this specific issue as can be made on his general approach to Chapters 16 to 18: he locates the problem with considerable accuracy, then proposes a solution which is not really adequate. We suggest that Aristotle has not "corrected" the division established in Chapter 10: given the purpose which it is intended to achieve--distinguishing two basic kinds of plot structure--it is quite satisfactory and there seems no reason why Aristotle should want to change it. The four eidē of Chapter

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<sup>12</sup>Solmsen, op. cit., p.193.

18 have quite a different function: they are meant to distinguish different kinds of complete plays. The early division of Chapter 10 is relevant to this new task, but not identical with it.

Aristotle's description of the four eidē runs as follows:

There are four kinds of Tragedy, the Complex, depending entirely on Reversal of the Situation and Recognition; the Pathetic (where the motive is passion),--such as the tragedies on Ajax and Ixion; the Ethical (where the motives are ethical),--such as the Phthiotides and the Peleus. The fourth kind is the Simple (1455b32-1456a2)<sup>13</sup>

There has been a vast amount of attention given to this passage<sup>14</sup>. The issues involved are so complex, and the text is in such lamentable condition, that it would be rash to claim any great certainty for one's views about this classification of tragedies. The interpretation which we offer can only claim

<sup>13</sup>I have used Butcher's translation. Bywater's suggestion that the fourth eidos is spectacle (opsis) has some paleographical justification (see Bywater, op. cit., p.250, ad 1456a2), but it seems to me to convert a potentially interesting method of classification into a trivial enumeration which does not reflect the level of argument displayed by the treatise as a whole.

<sup>14</sup>There is a lacuna in the text; the name of the fourth eidos has been lost, and there is no agreement on a satisfactory emendation. Nor is there wide agreement on the exact meaning or reference of either ēthikē or pathetikē. The passage is discussed at some length in every major commentary. The following articles also deal with the problem: L.A. Post, "Aristotle and Menander", Transactions of the American Philological Association, LXIX (1938), 1-42 (see esp. pp.1-18); also by Post, "Aeschylean Onkos in Sophocles and Aristotle", Transactions of the American Philological Association, LXXVIII (1947), 242-251; S.E. Bassett, "Ἡ δὲ Ὀδυσσεΐα . . . ἠθικόν (Aristotle, Poetics, XXIV, 1459b, 15)" in Classical Studies Presented to Edward Capps (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 3-13; W.J. Verdenius, "The Meaning of ēthos and ēthikos in Aristotle's Poetics", Mnemosyne, series 3, XII (1945), 241-257. See also note 15.

to present this part of Chapter 18 as consistent in approach and subject matter with Chapters 16 and 17 (with which we have dealt above).

First we must justify our belief that the fourth eidos is "the simple" (haplō). This emendation is strongly confirmed by the following remarks in Chapter 24:

Besides this, Epic poetry must divide into the same species as Tragedy; it must be either simple or complex, a story of character or one of suffering. Its parts, too, with the exception of Song and Spectacle, must be the same. . . . All these elements appear in Homer first; and he has made due use of them. His two poems are each examples of construction, the Iliad simple and a story of suffering, the Odyssey complex (there is Discovery throughout it) and a story of character. (1459b7-16)

This seems to be impressive evidence; but it has failed to convince many editors. Gilbert gives concise expression to the most commonly voiced objection:

If, then, there be a class of tragedies called simple because their plots are simple, their classification is negative. . . . It is convenient to say that one pathetic tragedy is complex and another simple, but that is different from making simplicity the reason for an independent class.<sup>15</sup>

This objection is based on a key assumption: that all four eide refer to possible dominant characteristics of a play-- i.e. to the qualities which would most impress a hypothetical spectator. This of course excludes the simple, since it is hard to see how one can be impressed by simplicity as such. But as we shall try to show, Aristotle's method of classification here is somewhat more complex than the above argument

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<sup>15</sup>Allan H. Gilbert, "Aristotle's Four Species of Tragedy (Poetics 18) and their Importance for Dramatic Criticism", American Journal of Philology, LXVIII (1947), 363-381. p.364.

assumes.

Let us recall Aristotle's account, presented in Chapter 17, of the proper way to construct a play. The poet, he said, should devise a plot, then "episodise" it. The completed play's action, which thus takes the form of a series of episodes expressing a plot, can be classified in one or both of two different ways: (1) by describing the nature of the plot; (2) by describing the dominant characteristic of the episodes.

Describing the structure of plot is no problem; Aristotle simply uses the division which he introduced in Chapter 10. The classification of episodes displays the same simplicity and logic as the classification of plots. In a tragic episode, we must be mainly impressed either by the suffering itself or by the character of the person who is suffering; therefore, episodes are best divided into the pathetic and the ethical.

From what has been said, it can be seen that the four eidē are not "independent classes"--if by this we mean classifications which tend to exclude one another. Of course a tragedy cannot be both simple and complex, and it is unlikely that it will be both pathetic and ethical; but one set of these terms not only does not exclude but actually requires the other set. As we saw above, a play may possibly be classified in only one way; but a fully adequate description of the same play requires two eidē, not one. This is why Aristotle calls the Iliad simple and pathetic, the Odyssey complex and ethical.

In short, Aristotle's four eidē are terms which give

us the means to classify the different ways in which the two kinds of plot relate to two kinds of episode. They originate, not in a haphazard and rather pointless classification of the tragedy of Aristotle's day, but in the concept, implicit in Chapter 17, of a complete drama; for this reason, they could conceivably be used (although they are not) as the basis for a detailed study of the reciprocal influences between plot and episode.

Desis and lisis are amenable to much the same kind of analysis as the four eidē. However, these two terms are used to designate--though not to analyze--a much more specific and difficult operation in the writing of drama: the translation into episodes of a change in fortune outlined in the plot. In our discussion above, we considered relatively simple cases of "episodising": our account suggested an untroubled correspondence between an abstract relation in a plot and an event on a stage. But a change in fortune, practically by definition, cannot be an isolated event; it has profound repercussions. In terms of episodising, this means that the poet, to translate such a change, must present in "the incidents before the opening scene, and often certain also of those within the play" (1455b24) a situation which the lisis will then alter in virtually every respect.

It seems to us significant that Aristotle does not move beyond naming this process and giving it a brief description; he does not discuss in detail how it can best be achieved. His silence on this point parallel his failure to pursue cer-

tain implications of the division of tragedy into four eide. Perhaps, in these brief, scattered notes, Aristotle did not feel compelled to attempt comprehensiveness. But it may also be that he regards the issues which he is raising in Chapters 16 to 18 as being open to only minimal scientific investigation. This seems to be at least part of the reason why he tells the poet to "put the actual scene as far as possible before his eyes", or "even act his story with the very gestures of his personages"; and why he finally observes that "poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him" (1455a21-34). The philosopher can enumerate the operations in which the poet must engage; he may even give some advice about the varying merits of different methods of achieving a certain end (such as bringing about an anagnēsis); but the farther the philosopher strays from the strict analysis of the unity of plot or of the elements of tragedy (such as character or thought) considered in the abstract, the less he will have to say.

The structure of the Poetics can only be understood if it is always remembered that plot, for Aristotle, is a central, organizing principle to which all other elements are subordinate. To this point, we have considered the implications of this view for Aristotle's account of the relation between events in a drama; we have still to examine the manner in which the primacy of plot affects the relations between the elements of tragedy---a matter which will be dealt with in Chapter III.

In Chapters 16 to 18 of the Poetics we find an approach to the action of drama which indicates an interesting shift of interest toward more concrete problems. But even at this concrete level, he does not give a naively quantitative analysis like the one offered in Chapter 12 (a section of the work which is at best an interpolation and may even be spurious). Instead, he takes some care to ensure that this new, empirical approach will be securely related to his more abstract former concerns.

It may be suggested that these chapters at once illustrate and make possible Aristotle's doctrine of the primacy of plot. They illustrate this primacy in two ways. (1) As the preceding discussion showed, the effectiveness of an episode is ultimately judged by its success in conveying a part of the plot. Even the semi-autonomous events of epic display this dependence: if the adventures of Odysseus were not parts of a plot, the Odyssey would be a travelogue, not an epic. (2) Not only the success of a drama, but also its susceptibility to rational analysis can be traced to the presence of a plot. As the conclusion of our investigations indicated, there is little that the philosopher can say about the mechanics of particular scenes in drama--and he would be able to say even less if he was not engaged in linking such particular scenes to a design which transcends such immediate details.

On the other hand, the distinction between plot and episode makes the primacy of plot possible by insuring its status as an abstract organizing pattern. The sharp lines of interrelated action so enthusiastically described in Chap-

ter 8 are rescued from their possible association with the trivial, mechanical precepts that often are the sole content of essays on well-made plays and novels. If Aristotle's concept of plot is understood in this abstract sense, his views on the comparative insignificance of all other parts of drama may at least be understood--although perhaps not accepted.

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## CHAPTER III

## THE ELEMENTS OF TRAGEDY

For two chapters we have been concerned primarily with plot, and this concern has by no means been exhausted. The present chapter is devoted to the study of all six of the elements of tragedy and the relations among them--but once again, plot will emerge as by far the most dominant factor. It therefore seems appropriate to begin by asking why Aristotle should want to place so great an emphasis on an aspect of drama to which few contemporary critics seem to attach a great deal of importance.

In Chapter 6 of the Poetics, Aristotle explains why plot should be regarded as the primary element in tragedy. He uses two basic kinds of argument. The first appeals to the nature of the object which tragedy must imitate:

Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. 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. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its Fable or Plot, that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing. (1450a16-23)

This argument is of course only as sound as its main premiss: that a man's happiness or misery, and even his character, all

depend on the nature of his actions. We may easily discern the presence of ideas which originate in the Nicomachean Ethics, where we are told that "moral virtue comes about as a result of habit" (1103a17), a statement whose corollary is Aristotle's belief that "we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts" (1103b1-2). So intimate a link between two of Aristotle's works cannot be ignored. However, we suggest that its significance cannot be fully assessed until we have examined his second basic argument for the primacy of plot--an argument which appeals to the manner in which any drama must be structured:

Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character. . . . And again: one may string together a series of characteristic speeches of the utmost finish as regards Diction and Thought, and yet fail to produce the true tragic effect; but one will have much better success with a tragedy which, however inferior in these respects, has a Plot, a combination of incidents, in it. And again: the most powerful elements of attraction in Tragedy, the Peripeties and Discoveries, are parts of the Plot. . . . We maintain, therefore, that the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot; and that the Characters come second--compare the parallel in painting, where the most beautiful colors laid on without order will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait. (1450a24-b3)

The analogy with which this passage ends is central to an understanding of Aristotle's meaning. Since all art is imitation, any work of art will be intelligible only if it represents something. Therefore, the most important part of a painting is its outline--without which there would of course be no portrayal. To state that plot is similar to such an outline is to state that only in the sequence of its incidents can a drama be intelligible--i.e. "about" something.

But what is the relation between this account of the structure of drama (which, in the ensuing discussion, will be called the "Argument from Structure") and Aristotle's first argument for the primacy of plot: his appeal to the nature of the object which Tragedy must imitate (which we shall call the "Argument from Imitation")?

It seems to us that this question can best be answered if we begin by noting that the Argument from Structure would be sound even if the Argument from Imitation were entirely rejected. Let us amplify this point. When Aristotle maintains that outlines are indispensable in a painting, it is clear that his remark is not intended to reflect profound metaphysical or ethical preconceptions: to anyone who believes that painting must represent something, the observation is simply common sense. This same common sense is, we suggest, the basis of the Argument from Structure. Millions of people who have never heard of Aristotle like a good story for the same reasons that they like a good (i.e. vivid or realistic) painting: because it presents a complete, easily discernable whole. Aristotle begins with this somewhat naive opinion; then following a method employed in many of his other treatises, he elaborates it into a complex ordered structure that involves unity, wholeness, probability and necessity<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>It should now be clear why Aristotle treats the unity and completeness of plot and the unity and completeness of an entire drama as virtually the same thing (see Chapter I): if everything in a work of art is subordinate to the task of imitation, and if imitation in drama can only be achieved through plot, it follows that everything in drama must be subordinate to plot.

The Argument from Imitation, on the other hand, may be seen as Aristotle's attempt to prove that plot is not merely a structural necessity, but also the most exciting and significant aspect of drama. In this argument, Aristotle attempts to show that happiness and misery, the grand themes of tragedy, originate from actions and hence must be represented in a drama by plot. The argument relies, as we have said, on the main tenets of Aristotle's ethical system--a system whose emphasis on virtue as activity makes possible a concept of "action" (praxis) which is far richer than any which is commonly used today. Butcher's remarks on the meaning of praxis are of considerable value:

Plot in the drama, in its fullest sense, is the artistic equivalent of 'action' [praxis] in real life. . . . Sometimes it is used for 'action' or 'doing' in its strict and limited sense; sometimes for that side of right conduct (eupraxia) in which doing is only one element, though the most important. Again, it can denote 'faring' as well as 'doing'. . . . Again, it is used by Aristotle of the processes of the mental life; and lastly, in some contexts it is almost synonymous with pathē.<sup>2</sup>

It is thus clear that the imitation of "action" need not result in any loss of the profundity which is often associated with an artist's delineation of the "qualities" of his characters.

Much of the extensive discussion which has surrounded Aristotle's use of praxis is not of primary importance to this thesis, which deals with his analysis of relations internal to the work of art, rather than relations between the work of art and the object which it imitates. But it is important for

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<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., pp. 334-335.

our purposes to note that many of these discussions of praxis have produced some confusion concerning Aristotle's reasons for assigning primacy to plot. Specifically, his estimate of the capacity of plot to convey profound emotion and high significance has often been regarded as the best explanation for his overwhelming concern with plot structure<sup>3</sup>. Under such circumstances, the Argument from Structure will receive only incidental attention; and it certainly will not be regarded as independent in character. The confusion is undoubtedly compounded by the fact that the Argument from Imitation, since it appears first in the text, can easily be felt to condition

<sup>3</sup>For example, in G.K. Gresseth, "The System of Aristotle's Poetics", Transactions of the American Philological Association, LXXXIX (1958), 312-335, we are told that "Aristotle was so dominated by his own philosophic concepts, particularly that of action, that he was unable to see drama in any other light than that of his own philosophy" (p.313). Not surprisingly, the Poetics is seen in Gresseth's paper as a feeble and somewhat implausible offspring of the Nicomachean Ethics.

House also presents a view which, contrary to Aristotle's repeated assertions, implies that plot is really intended to present character (op. cit., pp.68-81).

Olson, in the paper cited in our Introduction, suggests that Aristotle regards plot (in tragedy) as "a system of morally differentiated activities or actions" (op. cit., p.188)--which invites the truly odd conclusion that a combination of incidents without a suitable moral tone is not a plot.

Butcher presents a more balanced case. As we saw, he gives considerable attention to the Argument from Imitation; however, he is perceptive in his remarks on the Argument from Structure (see pp.345-346, op. cit.).

Else argues (op. cit., pp.251-263) that the whole passage (1450a15-b4)--including the section which deals (or so we have held) with the objects of imitation--is concerned only with the internal structure of plot. Such a view makes the whole passage directly relevant to the subject of our thesis--without thereby significantly affecting its conclusions; but the translation and interpretation required seem, at least to me, to be somewhat forced.

in some respect the Argument from Structure. (It seems to us likely that Aristotle regarded the Argument from Structure as so evident that he wished to begin with a much more difficult point: the relation between his rather technical concept of praxis and the sequence of incidents that imitate praxis in a drama.)

It is not easy for a modern reader, who is likely to regard the Argument from Imitation as much more suggestive than the Argument from Structure, to believe that Aristotle could introduce so intriguing a line of thought for no other purpose than to show, briefly and without elaboration, the potential of tragedy seen as an imitation of action. Nonetheless, we maintain that most of the diverse implications of praxis enumerated by Butcher and others have only an incidental relation to the study in the Poetics of the work of art in itself. We may support this contention by a review of our findings to this point in our thesis. In Chapter I, we saw that the requirement of necessity refers strictly to the internal structure of the work of art<sup>4</sup>; and concluded by noting that, for Aristotle, formal structural requirements (e.g. a preference for complex plots) precede any concern with matters of content (such as choice of theme). In Chapter II, we presented the view that in later additions to the Poetics Aristotle differentiates between an ab-

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<sup>4</sup>Aristotle also insists on probability. This requirement obviously has to do with more than the bare structure of the work; but we have argued that probability is not required in the "primary assumptions" of a drama or epic--which suggests that an emphasis on probability only insures that the spectator's incredulity will not interfere with his contemplation of the links between incidents. Thus the focus is still mainly on structure.

stract pattern of incident and the episodes which translate this pattern into a more concrete form. Finally, we suggested above that the Argument from Structure may well be based on a simple observation: that plot is the only truly imitative element in drama. In all these cases Aristotle emphasizes the structure of action; the nature and content of action is relevant only to the extent that it affects this structure<sup>5</sup>.

If we maintain that Aristotle proceeds from an appreciation of the profound content that can be present in an imitation of praxis to a demand for highly elaborated plot structures (rather than vice versa), we will be needlessly introducing a host of vague considerations that may do more to obscure than to illuminate Aristotle's rigorous, deliberately abstract analysis of the six elements of tragedy, and of the operation of plot.

It may be recalled that this account of Aristotle's reasons for assigning primacy to plot was undertaken as a preliminary to a study of the elements of tragedy. Our interpretation, which has made the Argument from Imitation peripheral, and that from Structure central, to any of Aristotle's analyses of the internal constituents of drama, has major implications for our study of the relations between these elements. Most importantly, it can now be seen that Aristotle's frequent statement that tragedy is the imitation of an action

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<sup>5</sup>For example, since the actions of tragedy must arouse pity and fear, certain kinds of plot are to be preferred to others (see Chapters 13 and 14).

must be understood to mean that plot, strictly speaking, is the only element which actually imitates; the other five exist for the purpose either of giving action added dimensions (Character and Thought<sup>6</sup>), or of providing the necessary "matter" which is to be organized by plot (diction, music and spectacle). John Jones's remarks on the analogy between plot and the outline in a drawing are most illuminating here:

. . . . Aristotle's analogy bears mainly upon the function of character: he wants to make the proposition that character serves action seem no less assured than is (for a Greek) the proposition that the only legitimate use of colour in painting is to support the finished likeness. He is saying that character is included for the sake of the action; he is not saying, or he is saying only incidentally, that character is less important than action. . . . It needs to be said that the plot-character dichotomy is radically false to Aristotle's understanding of Tragedy, that character, like colour, must be denied even the most primitive autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

On this view, a criticism of Aristotle like the one which R. P. Hardie presents in the following passage is fundamentally misconceived:

The expression or imitation of the praxis is called the muthos. But there are no special words for the genesis of ethos and dianoia. Hence both ethos and dianoia are used in a highly ambiguous way. . . .<sup>8</sup>

It would be unwise to underestimate the plausibility of Hardie's position. It seems to offend common sense to suggest, with Jones, that Aristotle does not believe that the

<sup>6</sup>To avoid possible confusion, Thought and Character, when considered as elements of tragedy, shall henceforth be capitalized.

<sup>7</sup>John Jones, On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p.31.

<sup>8</sup>R.P. Hardie, "The Poetics of Aristotle", Mind, n.s. IV (1895), 350-364. p.359.

elements of Character and Thought have as their chief purpose the imitation of character and thought; and we will be seriously overworking Aristotle's picture analogy if we regard it as sufficient proof of Jones's view.

In the study of the elements of tragedy which follows, one of our aims will be to demonstrate that Jones's position is preferable to Hardie's. To do so, we shall argue that the nature and scope of Aristotle's analyses of the elements (excluding plot) show that he could not have regarded them as having the capacity either to imitate an object or even to arouse in the spectator an interest distinct from his interest in the plot. We shall also show that relations among diction, Thought, Character, music and spectacle, while certainly present, are regarded as entirely subordinate to the relation which each element has to plot.

Since Aristotle's analysis of diction displays most plainly the characteristics which we shall detect in his analysis of Character, Thought, music and spectacle, it is with diction that our study will begin<sup>9</sup>.

It is well known that Aristotle displays at best a

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<sup>9</sup>We shall be examining not only Chapters 20 to 22 of the Poetics, but also Chapters 1 to 12 of the third book of the Rhetoric. Of course, a diction appropriate to poetry may not be appropriate to a speech, as Aristotle himself observes (Rhet., 1404b4-5); we must therefore be cautious in our use of evidence from the Rhetoric. However, since the two works do not present very different accounts either of the period or of metaphor, it seems legitimate to take advantage of the more detailed treatment of these matters in the Rhetoric.

lukewarm interest in diction:

The arts of language cannot help having a small but real importance, whatever it is we have to expound to others; the way in which a thing is said does affect its intelligibility. Not, however, so much importance as people think. All such arts are fanciful and meant to charm the hearer. Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry. (Rhet., 1404a8-10)

Indeed, he sometimes seems to suggest that diction is the forte of the poet who has nothing to say:

Elaborate Diction, however, is required only in places where there is no action, and no Character or Thought to be revealed. Where there is Character or Thought, on the other hand, an over-ornate Diction tends to obscure them. (Poet., 1460b2-5)

One can sympathize with the many critics and commentators who have concluded from such passages that Aristotle is almost devoid of any appreciation of style. This seems unlikely; at all events, Aristotle was capable of writing a poem of some literary merit<sup>10</sup> --which suggests that he could not have been completely oblivious to stylistic merits in poetry. However, it is certainly true that he was led by his awareness of the multiple functions of language<sup>11</sup> to regard poetic diction as a comparatively unimportant mode of expression.

Above all, his view of the relation between an idea and its expression is devastating in its effects. Diction is

<sup>10</sup>For a literary analysis of the poem, see John Crossett, "Aristotle as a Poet: The Hymn to Hermes", Philological Quarterly, XLVI (1967), 145-155.

<sup>11</sup>For a collection of all the passages in Aristotle relevant to this problem, see Richard McKeon, "Aristotle's Conception of Language and the Arts of Language", in Critics and Criticism, ed. by R.S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 176-231.

described in the Poetics as the means by which the object of dramatic imitation is represented (1449b33). Aristotle develops this apparent truism by presenting diction as a kind of inanimate clay which plot--the "life and soul" of tragedy--serves to organize. He never suggests that diction can significantly influence the form which a plot takes; indeed, his studies of art in the broad sense, in the Metaphysics and other works, display no awareness that the medium in which a craftsman or artist works will have any but the most trivial influence on the form which the final product assumes.

The view of the diction of tragedy as matter to be given form and meaning by plot is at least implicit throughout Aristotle's analysis. It is revealing, for example, to discover that he never speaks of a whole drama (or of a whole speech in the Rhetoric) in his discussions of diction, as he speaks of the design of the whole in his discussion of plot. For Aristotle, the largest units of diction are: the metaphor and the period<sup>12</sup>. Even his definition of a period echoes the description given in the Poetics of a complete plot: "By a period I mean a portion of speech that has in itself a beginning and an end, being at the same time not too big to be

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<sup>12</sup>By "period", Aristotle does not mean a sentence with several clauses--which is how the term is understood in later rhetoric. See George A. Kennedy, "Aristotle on the Period", Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, LXIII (1958), 283-288. Kennedy concludes that for Aristotle a period is "a twofold statement like an antithesis, though not necessarily involving opposition, since the two parts, or kola, can simply be divided instead of being opposed" (p.284). Such a unit would be somewhat more organized but scarcely longer than a normal English sentence.

taken in at a glance." (Rhet., 1409a35-37) In short, Aristotle, in his analysis of diction, does not have and sees no reason to devise a vocabulary for the study of any whole which is larger than a sentence. Such a vocabulary would be required only if diction were considered to have a significance beyond its assigned role as the passive embodiment of plot.

The comparison begun above between Aristotle's analyses of plot and of diction can be continued with profit. We find, as the last quotation anticipates, a parallel with the limits placed on the size of plots in Chapter 7 of the Poetics:

A period may be either divided into several members or simple. . . . A member is one of the two parts of [the former kind of] period. By a 'simple' period, I mean that which has only one member. The members, and the whole periods, should be neither curt nor long. A member which is too short often makes the listener stumble. . . . If, on the other hand, you go on too long, you make him feel left behind. . . . (Rhet., 1409b13-23)

In both cases, Aristotle is using one of his favorite ideas: the concept of rightness as a mean between extremes. In the case of plot, however, this recourse to the idea of the mean extends no farther<sup>13</sup>; the internal structure of plot is described in terms of probable and necessary links between incidents, and by reference to the purpose of eliciting pity and fear. On the other hand, Aristotle finds several uses for the mean in his account of the nature of a good style. We are told

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<sup>13</sup>The description of the proper tragic figure--an "intermediate kind of personage" who is neither of great virtue nor of great evil (1453a8)--does not really involve any significant use of the idea of a mean. See Chapter III.

that "alike in using epithets and in using diminutives we must be wary and must observe the mean" (Rhet., 1405b33). In addition, there is the well-known description of a proper style:

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. . . . On the other hand the Diction becomes distinguished and non-prosaic by the use of unfamiliar terms. . . . But a whole statement in such terms will be either a riddle or a barbarism. . . . (Poet., 1453a18-25)

As Hendrickson observes in a remark on a parallel passage from the Rhetoric (1414a27), this description is a quite subtle use of a simple idea--since what is really being required is the combination of two means<sup>14</sup>:

While conceivably the Aristotelian mean of style might be spoken of as a mikte lexis, it scarcely requires explanation that a mean would not result from a mixture of the two extremes [sc. the mean and the barbaric]. In this case each one of the elements which enters into the composition must also be a mean.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, metaphors too are subject to the rule of the mean, since they "must not be far-fetched, or they will be difficult to grasp, nor obvious, or they will have no effect" (Rhet., 1410b33).

This extensive recourse to the idea of the mean seems to us to proceed at least in part from the view of diction which Aristotle was said to hold. He would probably regard as need-

<sup>14</sup>There is a similar case in the passage above on the size of periods: both the constituent members and the period as a whole must be neither too long nor too short.

<sup>15</sup>G.L. Hendrickson, "The Peripatetic Mean of Style and the Three Stylistic Characters", American Journal of Philology, XXV (1904), 125-146; p.130, note 1. Hendrickson also notes that Aristotle describes the rhythm of a good prose style as a mean between the pronounced metre of verse and the sort of diction which is wholly unrhythmical (see Rhet., III, 8).

less and perhaps undesirable any analysis of diction--the "matter" of drama--that uncovered a structure so intricate that the plot and diction of a play would have to be mutually adjusted to one another. Instead, he presents the requirements for a diction which is merely appropriate--which avoids extremes that might prevent the actions of a drama from being adequately expressed. Aristotle's poet chooses the right kind of diction in much the same way as an architect chooses bricks that are neither too hard nor too soft, neither too large nor too small. Nowhere does Aristotle indicate an awareness that the poet may choose "materials" that influence the form of the complete work.

Aristotle's enumeration of poetic devices reflects, even more obviously than the stylistic rules which we have just discussed, the influence of a painfully limited concept of diction. In the Poetics, after a tiresome grammatical discussion which need not concern us here, he classifies the words that poets use:

Whatever its structure, a Noun must always be either (1) the ordinary word for the thing, or (2) a strange word, or (3) a metaphor, or (4) an ornamental word, or (5) a coined word, or (6) a word lengthened out, or (7) curtailed, or (8) altered in form. (1457b1-3)

This classification serves as the basis for what one critic has wittily termed a "culinary account of style"<sup>16</sup>. The poet, after deciding on the form in which he is going to write, is supposed to achieve the correct stylistic effect by mixing together words of various kinds in certain proportions:

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<sup>16</sup> Reuben A. Brower, "The Heresy of Plot", in Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature, op. cit., 157-174; p.165.

Of the kinds of words we have enumerated it may be observed that compounds are most in place in the dithyramb, strange words in heroic, and metaphors in iambic poetry. Heroic poetry, indeed, may avail itself of them all. But in iambic verse, which models itself as far as possible on the spoken language, only those kinds of words are in place which are allowable also in oration. . . .

(1459a8-12)

The incidental observations that accompany the general analyses we have been discussing give the same impression of a fundamentally inadequate approach to diction and style. For example, discussions of metre are restricted to the observation that hexameters are appropriate to epic, iambs to drama (Poet., 1449a21-27; 1459b31-1460a4). Seldom is there any development of potentially rewarding insights, such as the remark in the Rhetoric that "the beauty, like the ugliness, of all words may. . . lie in their sound or in their meaning" (1405b6-7). Above all--as might be expected of an analysis in which a period is the largest whole discussed--attention is confined mainly to particular felicities rather than to broad stylistic effects. Consider the following note on vividness:

It has already been mentioned that liveliness is got . . . by being graphic (i.e. making your hearer see things). . . . By 'making them see things' I mean using expressions that represent things as in a state of activity. Thus, to say that a good man is 'four-square' is certainly a metaphor. . . but the metaphor does not suggest activity. On the other hand, in the expressions 'with his vigour in full bloom' there is a notion of activity; and so in 'But you must roam as free as a sacred victim'. . . . (Rhet., 1411b21-29)

In our second chapter, we saw that the poet, in constructing a plot, should visualize the scenes he is trying to represent (see 1455a21-34); it now becomes apparent that when he turns to diction he will be concerned with particular, graphic items

rather than the broader situation. To Aristotle, diction involves a concern for minor details: for the clarity that "lies in calling things by their own special names and not by vague general ones" (Rhet., 1407a31); or for an antithetical period, in which "the significance of contrasted ideas is easily felt" (Rhet., 1410a20).

We have deliberately postponed our consideration of perhaps the most interesting--and frustrating--aspect of Aristotle's treatment of diction: his analysis of metaphor. We call it frustrating because we are led time and again to the brink of insight, only to see the development of the insight abandoned.

Of the eight kinds of words which Aristotle lists, only metaphor is classified into sub-species; and the method of classification used is most intriguing:

Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy. (1457b6-9)

This account contrasts remarkably with the general treatment of diction. An eloquent style is regarded mainly as a fancy way of expressing oneself (quite unsuited, as Aristotle dryly observes, to the teaching of geometry); but metaphor is presented as an extension of our normal patterns of thought. The use of metaphor enables us to cut across the normal classifications of things into species and genera--and to gain new and perhaps valuable insights in the process. It is therefore not surprising that Aristotle should value it highly:

But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of meta-

phor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars. (1459a5-7)

It is logical that Aristotle should give the most attention to the analogical metaphor--which provides the greatest scope for a comparison between dissimilars:

That from analogy is possible whenever there are four terms so related that the second (B) is to the first (A), as the fourth (D) to the third (C); for one may then metaphorically put D in lieu of B, and B in lieu of D. . . . Thus a cup (B) is in relation to Dionysus (A) what a shield (D) is to Ares (C). The cup accordingly will be metaphorically described as the 'shield of Dionysus' (D+A), and the shield as the 'cup of Ares' (B+C). (1457b16-22)

It can be argued that this rather dry account penetrates to the roots of our understanding of any extended metaphor--or of any pattern of imagery, no matter how elaborate. Indeed, it has been suggested that any theory of metaphor must begin, implicitly or explicitly, from Aristotle's analysis<sup>17</sup>. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not himself take advantage of the fine groundwork which he has laid, and for a reason which we have already encountered: an excellent diction, to Aristotle, is an accumulation of particular excellent effects, not an organic whole. His limited view of diction prevents him from considering symbolic structures or recurrent images that may extend across--and unite--an entire literary work. Even if such aspects of literature are not open to a rigorous examination (which is a debatable point), they could at least be described;

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<sup>17</sup>See Louis Mackey, "Aristotle and Feidelson on Metaphor: Toward a Reconciliation of Ancient and Modern", Arion, IV (1965), 272-285.

but it is clear that Aristotle is quite unaware of their existence. He is more concerned with warning the poet against far-fetched comparisons (Rhet., 1405a19-31); or with remarking on metaphor's capacity to surprise the hearer (Rhet., 1412a17-21). In fact, his appreciation of particular metaphors often degenerates into humorless explanation of the meanings of obvious figures<sup>18</sup>.

In any theory of literature, the analysis of diction ought to be accorded a prominent place. Anyone who wishes to discuss relations between whole and part in a literary work can hardly ignore that simple but crucial perspective from which such a work is viewed as an organized whole the constituent parts of which are its words. But it seems unlikely that this can be done without a concept of style--where by "style" we mean those aspects of diction at once more logically inter-related and more peculiar to any author than the mere sum of a number of artful devices could ever be. Aristotle cannot arrive at such a concept of style because to do so he would have to abandon his view that diction is the means, and no more than the means, by which the actions of a drama or epic are imitated. This is why he does not devise, with his usual ingenuity, a vocabulary<sup>19</sup> that would make possible a genuinely

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<sup>18</sup>See Rhet., 1413a18-22 for a particularly laborious example.

<sup>19</sup>Helen North observes, in "The Concept of Sophrosyne in Greek Literary Criticism", Classical Philology, XLIII (1948), 1-17: "It was Aristotle who set the precedent for using the word 'virtue' in literary criticism." (p.1) She is referring to Aristotle's use of the expression aretē lexeōs (Rhet., 1404b1; Poet., 1458a18). Her article shows that this analogy was used by later critics in the ancient world with considerable success. Aristotle of course leaves it quite undeveloped.

penetrating account of style, but instead confines himself to general rules of appropriateness and fragmentary bits of advice.

It may be recalled that, prior to our treatment of diction, we had set for ourselves the task of showing (1) that only the element of plot really has the capacity to imitate; and (2) that diction, Thought, Character, music and spectacle are more strongly related to plot than they are to each other. The first of these claims obviously needs no proof in the case of diction: for Aristotle, it is a means of imitation, not the imitation itself. However, there is a sense in which Aristotle's view of diction does not support our second contention. In the Poetics, diction is far more closely linked to Thought and Character than to plot. Diction and Thought are closely associated in Chapter 19; and in addition we find in Chapter 6 an explicit declaration that Character is revealed through diction (i.e. through what the personages say):

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.  
(1450b8-10)

It seems evident, then, that diction is directly related not to plot but to Character and Thought. But we shall argue that these latter two elements are, in the Poetics, so utterly subordinate to plot that any statement of their relation to diction is in effect a statement of the relation between diction and plot. Plot determines diction--but does so indirectly.

Let us begin our defense of this interpretation by examining Aristotle's views on Character.

Throughout the Poetics, Aristotle makes explicit statements about the respective roles of action and agent in the drama. In Chapter 2 he states:

The objects the imitator represents are actions, with agents who are necessarily either good men or bad--the diversities of human character being nearly always derivative from this primary distinction, since the line between virtue and vice is one dividing the whole of mankind. (1448a 1-3)

It should be emphasized that Aristotle is not saying that dramatists represent actions and character, but rather that they represent character because they are representing actions<sup>20</sup>.

This point is made again in Chapter 6:

But further: the subject represented also is an action; and the action involves agents, who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought, since it is from these that we ascribe certain qualities to their actions. (1449b36-1450a1)

And even more forcefully:

We maintain that Tragedy is primarily an imitation of action, and that it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents. (1450b2-4)

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that many studies of Aristotle's concept of Character become enmeshed in confusion because their authors cannot believe that he really means what

<sup>20</sup>As Jones pointedly observes: "This crucial inflexion of argument has not been acknowledged, either in close professional analysis, where stress falls on the 'subordinate significance' of character [Bywater, op. cit., p.166, ad 1450a15] and on the 'superiority of activities over states' [Else, op. cit., p.253], or in the general and popular expositions with their antithetical talk of Plot and Character, those capital-letter fixtures of commentary." (op. cit., p.31)

he says. Once again, Jones's remarks are most apposite:

Aristotle is assaulting the now settled habit in which we see action issuing from a solitary focus of consciousness--secret, inward, interesting--and in which the status of action must always be adjectival: action qualifies; it tells us things we want to know about the individual promoting it. . . . To our sense of characteristic conduct Aristotle opposes that of characterful action: the essence of conduct being that it is mine or yours; of action, that it is out there--an object for men to contemplate.<sup>21</sup>

If Aristotle's main interest is "characterful action", it is clear that Character will not have the specific, firm reference to "personality" which we might be inclined to give it. Aristotle seems to be saying that Character in a play is the name which we assign to the moral quality of the actions (i.e. the deeds or speeches) which we are contemplating:

There will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does reveals a certain moral purpose; and a good element of character if the purpose so revealed is good. (1454a17-19)<sup>22</sup>

Now to evaluate an action it is necessary to have some knowledge of the agent; and it is therefore likely that the moral quality of the action will tend to be identified with the moral quality of the doer of the action. This occurs in the Poetics; in fact, Aristotle often uses ēthos<sup>23</sup> (the Greek for "charac-

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p.33.

<sup>22</sup>It may be objected that this passage simply presents the truism that we can only determine a person's character--whether in life or in drama--by what he does or fails to do. But Aristotle cannot be referring primarily to such a process here; to maintain that he is, is to turn his position upside down, by implying that action in a drama sometimes exists for the sake of Character.

<sup>23</sup>The Greek ēthos is even more ambiguous than the English "character". Post lists thirteen uses of the word, among which are included both "moral and immoral behaviour" and "total personality of an individual". "Aeschylean ēthos in Sophocles and Aristotle", op. cit., p.247.

ter") to refer to the dramatis personae (see 1454a16). This second (and, as we maintain, derivative) use is certainly much more congenial to a modern reader; however, we believe that an analysis of the treatment of Character in Chapter 15 will show that Aristotle exhibits no interest in the "character" of a personage as such; the presentation of "character" results incidentally (if it results at all) from the process of imitating actions in a manner which makes moral evaluation of these actions possible.

Aristotle begins Chapter 15 by stating:

In the Characters there are four points to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. . . . 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. The second point is to make them appropriate. The Character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever. The third is to make them like the reality, which is not the same as their being good and appropriate, in our sense of the term. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout; even if inconsistency be part of the man before one for imitation as presenting that form of character, he should still be consistently inconsistent. (1454a16-28)<sup>24</sup>

It is illuminating to compare this approach to Character with Aristotle's treatment of diction. What we find in both cases is an absence of the sort of elaborate structuring which accompanies the analysis of plot. We saw that diction, on Aristotle's view, can achieve little more than particular felicities;

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<sup>24</sup>Bywater's translation must be used with caution; many of its renderings slant the passage towards a description of the personages rather than the quality of their behavior. See Else (op. cit.) for a more literal version. As one example, where the text has the laconic phrase, "triton de to homion", Bywater translates: "The third is to make them like the reality" (my emphasis). Compare Else: "Third is naturalness".

we now suggest that in a similar way Character does little more than bring to the particular actions of a play an appropriate moral and psychological tone. This second position is of course not as immediately convincing as the first. When we are told that a character must be good, we tend to think of what he is like, rather than what he does; and terms like "consistency" and "consistently inconsistent" suggest the idea either of a harmonious or of a divided personality. But Aristotle's examples of failures to observe his rules give a very different impression:

We have an instance of baseness of character, not required for the story, in the Menelaus in Orestes; of the incongruous and unbecoming in the Lamentation of Ulysses in Scylla, and in the (clever) speech of Melanippe; and of inconsistency in Iphigenia at Aulis, where Iphigenia the suppliant is utterly unlike the later Iphigenia. (1454a27-33)

Else makes the following perceptive remarks on this passage:

All the instances are concrete: they refer to particular speeches or actions, not to the portrayal of the given character en bloc. This is clear at once in the case of Odysseus (one lamentation) and Melanippe (one speech), and clear upon reflection in the case of Iphigenia; for hē iketeuousa refers to her long speech of supplication, lines 1211-1252, and tē husterā to the later one in which she announces her decision to welcome martyrdom, 1368-1401.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, if Aristotle says that a woman or a slave must be good, he is saying only that their actions, as represented in the drama, must be good; and if he demands that a character be

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<sup>25</sup>Op. cit., pp.464-465. Else goes on to show that the Menelaus example refers to a single speech in the Orestes (lines 682-715), rather than to a whole portrayal (pp.464-466). It is necessary to record that Else does not turn this interpretation to the purposes for which it is being used here.

at least consistently inconsistent, he can be assumed to require only that two actions of apparently conflicting moral and psychological tone must yet have certain important qualities in common. For example, it is noble for Achilles to avenge Patroklos and despicable for him to desecrate Hektor's body; but both actions display great passion.

At this point, we must consider a passage from Chapter 15 which might be offered as evidence against the interpretation which we have advanced:

The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavour always after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it.  
(1454a33-38)

The words "necessary and probable" have seemed to some commentators<sup>26</sup> to justify the conclusion that Aristotle requires of portrayals of characters the same unity and completeness as is required of the sequence of the incidents; that all the character's actions should work together to produce the impression of a whole, coherent personality. This is an inviting conclusion--particularly since it is much more plausible and interesting than what Aristotle actually says. The key point is this: there is nothing in the passage we have just quoted which lends any support to the view that probable and necessary connections exist between the elements of a character's person-

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<sup>26</sup> Butcher is one example: "Not only in the development of the plot but also in the internal working of character, the drama observes a stricter and more logical order than that of actual experience" (op. cit., p.165). He quotes 1454a33ff. to back this interpretation.

ality. Aristotle is describing something quite different: the relations between actions and ēthos. We are being told that, given a certain dominant moral or psychological quality in an agent, all the actions of that agent must be the probable and necessary outcome of that quality; and the text can be understood to suggest that such a quality can even set in motion a connected sequence of actions. But the qualities themselves are static and unstructured. There is a logic of action, in which Character always plays a critical part; but there is no logic of Character itself.

The following important passage from Chapter 13 also seems to pose some difficulties for our interpretation:

(1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of Tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves; so that there will be nothing either piteous or fear-inspiring in the situation. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment, of the number of those in the enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity; e.g. Oedipus, Thyestes, and the men of note of similar families. (1452b34-1453a12)

It is clear that there is no discussion here of the moral quality of particular actions. Aristotle is speaking of the agent who is to suffer a change in his fortunes. But there is no inconsistency here with our account of Character; because he is not prescribing for the tragic figure either a definite per-

sonality or a definite moral structure. Let us examine the passage more closely. To begin with, it should be stressed that his main purpose (stated explicitly at the beginning of the chapter) is to find out what the poet is to aim at, and avoid, in constructing his plots (1452b28); any concern for the tragic figure is entirely secondary. In his discussion, he shows that the tragic effect of a plot is destroyed whenever the goodness or badness of the tragic figures dominates the action. A successful tragedy will therefore avoid depicting characters who are obviously good or obviously evil. This can be done by presenting a hero who is "not pre-eminently virtuous and just". In Chapter 13, Aristotle is therefore describing a man whose moral stature will remain largely unnoticed. A character is not distinguished by being described as "not pre-eminently virtuous and just".

Of course, Aristotle does not wish the tragic figure to be a moral non-entity. As early as Chapter 2, we are told that the actions of a drama involve "agents who are necessarily either good or bad" (1448a2); in Chapter 15, it is stated that "Tragedy is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man" (1454b8); and in Chapter 13 itself, Aristotle goes on to say that the tragic figure should really be better than the "intermediate kind of personage" he has described (1453a17). But what Aristotle wishes to avoid at all costs is a tragedy in which the virtue of the tragic figure is so conspicuous that his defeat becomes the defeat of virtue itself. In short, he is interested less in the degree of the hero's virtue than

in the extent to which this virtue is emphasized; and what he seems to require is that it be emphasized as little as possible.

This interpretation of Chapter 13 is reinforced by the nature of the cause which Aristotle assigns for the tragic figure's downfall: it must result from a great hamartia. Early commentators believed that hamartia had reference either to a flaw in the character of the tragic figure, or to an act which betrayed at least some signs of moral culpability. But the vast majority of recent studies conclude that hamartia is Aristotle's term for "a wrong action committed in ignorance of its nature, effect etc., which is the starting point of a causally connected train of events ending in disaster"<sup>27</sup>. This is the purest possible form which subordination of character and emphasis upon plot can take. The tragic figure is the agent who, through no particular fault or merit in his character, sets in motion the sequence of events that leads to his own destruction. Thus, we arrive by a different route at the same conclusion to which we were led by the evidence of Chapter 15: that Character is radically subordinate to plot, and that the interest of a play must center in its action.

To sum up: those critics who have attacked Aristotle's approach to character have been right, but often for the wrong

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<sup>27</sup>J.M. Bremer, Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969), p.63. Bremer's work is the best--and the most exhaustive--available study of the subject. For the best recent defense of the interpretation of hamartia as culpable action, see P.W. Marsh, "Hamartia Again", Transactions of the American Philological Association, LXXVI (1945), 47-58.

reasons. It is not strictly accurate to say that character, in any significant sense of the word, is given an incorrect analysis in the Poetics; the truth is that it is simply ignored--just as style is ignored. As in the case of diction, we are given a list of "points to aim at"--points whose relations with one another (if any) are not studied. If goodness (in restrained amounts, of course), appropriateness, naturalness and consistency are judiciously combined, a suitable moral and psychological tone will presumably result. If this interpretation is correct, it follows that the element of Character (1) has no imitative capacity; (2) is related far more closely to plot than to any other element.

Let us now turn to Aristotle's treatment of the element of Thought (dianoia). It will be convenient to begin by giving a representative opinion on the use of this word in the Poetics:

Dianoia in the sense it bears in the Poetics is, like ēthos, an element in the personality of the dramatis personae. It is their intellectual capacity, as evinced in their language (or it may be, in their actions), and it is to be seen whenever they argue or make an appeal to the feelings of their hearers, in other words, when they reason or plead with one of the other dramatis personae in the same sort of way as a rhetor might do.<sup>28</sup>

Two observations seem in order here. (1) If, as Bywater maintains, both Character and Thought are elements in the personality of the dramatis personae, it becomes difficult to understand why Aristotle did not simply present one element--the

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<sup>28</sup> Bywater, op. cit., p.164, ad 1450a6.

personages--divided into two parts. Such a course would have been much simpler, and would have avoided the implication that thought and character are somehow distinct, independent aspects of personality<sup>29</sup>. (2) Bywater attributes to Aristotle the view that an intellectual capacity is an element in an individual's personality. Now if personality is understood to refer to those intellectual and spiritual characteristics which serve to identify someone, it seems clear that one gains knowledge of personality more from what a person thinks than how he thinks. Thus, on Bywater's account Aristotle's view of personality--assuming for the moment that he has one--is strange indeed.

We shall argue that Thought, like Character, is primarily a quality of the actions (i.e. the deeds and speeches) that make up a drama; it gives information about an agent's personality only incidentally, if at all. Of course, Thought originates in the personages--the agents "who must necessarily have their distinctive qualities both of character and thought" (1449b38)--but it is evident that Aristotle's main concern is the speech rather than the speaker:

Third comes the element of Thought, i.e. the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion. This is what, in the speeches in Tragedy, falls under the arts of Politics and Rhetoric; for the older poets makes their personages discourse like statesmen, and the moderns like rhetoricians. . . . Thought. . . is shown in all [the agents] say when proving or disproving some particular point, or enunciating some universal proposition. (1450b4-12)

We are told only that the appropriateness of whatever can be

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<sup>29</sup>A dichotomy of this kind does not exist for Aristotle in the sphere of practical action. See Nic. Eth., 1139a31-b5.

said will depend on who is saying it, as will the particular point which is being proved or disproved; it is hard to find in any of this the element of personality which Bywater seems able to detect with such ease. In this first passage, Thought seems to be simply the line of reasoning in some speech, or the content of some aphorism. As such, there is little to distinguish it from diction: it might often be difficult to say whether a particular phrase was a stylistic trimming or a "universal proposition", whether we were appreciating the stylistic arrangement of a passage or the order of its argument. Indeed, we have already mentioned the close connection between diction and thought.

When we turn to Chapter 19, we find that Aristotle's definition of Thought is not so limited:

Concerning Thought, we may assume what is said in the Rhetoric, to which inquiry the subject more strictly belongs. Under Thought is included every effect which has to be produced by speech, the subdivisions being,--proof and refutation; the excitation of the feelings, such as pity, fear, anger and the like; the suggestion of importance or its opposite. Now, it is evident that the dramatic incidents must be treated from the same points of view as the dramatic speeches, when the object is to evoke the sense of pity, fear, importance or probability. The only difference is, that the incidents should speak for themselves without verbal exposition; while the effect aimed at in speech should be produced by the speaker, and as a result of the speech. For what were the business of a speaker, if the Thought were revealed quite apart from what he says? (1456a33-b8)<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Butcher's translation. Some of Bywater's additions to the text are quite misleading here. For example, where Butcher translates "Under Thought is included every effect which has to be produced by speech", Bywater translates: "The Thought of the personages is shown in everything to be effected by their language" (my emphasis). The phrase "of the personages" corresponds to nothing in the Greek, and blurs Aristotle's obvious

"Under Thought is included every effect which has to be produced by speech." As a preliminary, we must ask who is being affected. Bywater seems to be right in answering: the other dramatis personae<sup>31</sup> --rather than the audience, which is affected only because it has become absorbed in the doings of the play. Thought, like all the other elements of tragedy, is meant to refer strictly to aspects of the internal structure of drama.

The idea that Thought functions in a drama primarily as a means by which the personages affect one another--a view which is at best only implicit in our first passage (1450b4ff.)--considerably alters our estimate of the role of Thought in drama. To understand how this is so, we must put our discussion into a wider context. A play is an imitation of action--and the actions involved are those of the dramatic personages. If these actions are to be linked properly to one another, what a personage does must be the probable and necessary consequence of something which has affected him. He can be so affected either by something which another personage says, or by an occurrence (such as Eurykleia's recognition of Odysseus) which does not involve speech. The former kind of effect will be much more common--and the element which achieves it is called

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interest in what is said as opposed to who is saying it. Potts and Else give translations similar to Butcher in this respect.

<sup>31</sup>As he rightly notes, if one argues that the reference here is to spectators, "One might just as well say that the arguments put into the mouth of a personage. . . are addressed to the spectators, and not to some other personage in the play." (Op. cit., p.256, ad 1456b1)

Thought. On Aristotle's first account, it would have been reasonable to presume that the element of Thought was found in general speeches only tenuously connected to the action of the play. This is no longer so; Thought, as the principle means by which personages affect one another, will be present in any critical scene in any drama.

A word may be in order concerning Aristotle's statement that "the dramatic incidents must be treated from the same points of view as the dramatic speeches" (1456b1-2). This passage has been subject to many confused interpretations. Both Lucas and Bywater<sup>32</sup> try to make it relevant to a discussion of Thought by maintaining, against Aristotle's explicit definitions (1456a36), that dianoia can manifest itself other than through speech. On our view, Aristotle is simply pointing out that the personages may be affected by things done as well as things said. At first glance, this seems to be an unutterably trivial remark; but an examination of the rest of the passage above shows that he is discussing an important by-product of the study of thought. Incidents, he tells us, "speak for themselves"; their effect is direct and needs no "verbal exposition". Eurydice's silent exit in the Antigone disturbs the Chorus far more than anything she could have said. But incidents must be "treated from the same point of view" as speeches; in other words,

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<sup>32</sup>See D.W. Lucas, Aristotle: Poetics, text by R. Kassel, with introduction, commentary and appendixes (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1968), p.196, ad 1456b2. Cf. Bywater, op. cit., p.257, ad 1456b2: "The dianoia of the dramatis personae may be shown in their acts; they may do things, just as they say things, with a view to exciting pity, fear, etc. . . ."

speeches are less effective dramatically but more open to analysis. If we are to understand dramatic incidents, we must present their effects as analogous to the more comprehensible effects of the spoken word.

The science that deals with affecting men through speech is rhetoric--to which, therefore, the subject of Thought "more strictly belongs". It should be stressed that rhetoric is thus relevant to drama only in the sense that in both oratory and tragedy intellectual and emotional effects need to be produced--in a judge at a trial, or in other dramatis personae, as the case may be. Nothing said by Aristotle provides convincing proof for the view, held by some writers<sup>33</sup>, that he considers oratorical and dramatic situations to be alike in any other respect. True, he observes that "the elder poets make their personages talk like statesmen, and the moderns like rhetoricians" (1450b7)--but this can be understood to mean only that a poet like Aeschylus makes his characters more distant and their passions loftier than does someone like Euripides. It is speculative--and most likely unjust--to impute

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<sup>33</sup>So in A.M. Dale, "Ethos and Diancia: 'Character' and 'Thought' in Aristotle's Poetics", AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association, No. 11 (September, 1959), 3-16: "The temptation to listen to the dialogue of Greek tragedy as to a series of set pieces with a few looser interludes must have been strong, and the temptation to write it as such was clearly growing. Small wonder then that Aristotle referred the budding dramatist to his Rhetoric to learn how to write tragic speeches." (p.14) Aristotle flatly repudiates such a view of tragedy on several occasions (1451b34-39, 1450a28). Nonetheless, Dale goes on to observe that such set pieces are found more often in the plays of Euripides than those of Sophocles--from which he concludes that Aristotle's preference for Sophocles is somewhat inconsistent.

to Aristotle the aesthetic insensitivity that would find little more than the give-and-take of a political debate or a law-suit in the final confrontation between Crestes and Clytaemestra in the Choephoroi.

Let us draw together our conclusions concerning the elements of Character and Thought. Neither is primarily intended to provide us with information concerning the dramatis personae, nor can the two of them plausibly be combined to produce anything like a unified "personality"<sup>34</sup>. They both exist "for the sake of the action": that is, they are ways of looking at that action. The element of Character, which is concerned with moral and psychological tone, provides insights into the nature of an action (whether that action be a speech or a deed). The element of Thought provides insight into the effect of speeches and gives us a pattern by means of which we can describe the effect of deeds. Thus, both Character and Thought are on our account radically dependent on plot, since both are concerned with matters relating to the particular actions that make up the whole. An overall design, held together by probable and necessary links, remains associated exclusively with plot.

Neither music nor spectacle need detain us long. Aris-

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<sup>34</sup>Note, in this connection, that Aristotle mentions cleverness as a quality, not of Thought, but of Character (see the reference to Melanippe, 1454a31). He never welds together Character and Thought to form a whole, as so many of his commentators seem eager to do.

totle deals with both in a single paragraph of Chapter 6:

As for the two remaining parts, the Melody is the greatest of the pleasurable accessories of Tragedy. The Spectacle, though an attraction, is the least artistic of all the parts, and has least to do with the art of poetry. The tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance and actors; and besides, the getting-up of the Spectacle is more a matter for the costumier than the poet. (1450b16-20)

In his only other significant reference to spectacle, he writes:

The tragic fear and pity may be aroused by the Spectacle: but they may also be aroused by the very structure and incidents of the play--which is the better way and shows the better poet. . . . To produce this same effect by means of the Spectacle is less artistic, and requires extraneous aid. Those, however, who make use of the Spectacle to put before us that which is merely monstrous and not productive of fear, are wholly out of touch with Tragedy. . . . (1453b1-10)

Only two points need be made concerning spectacle. (1) Spectacle is not necessary to a tragedy in the same way as are plot, Character, Thought and diction. These last four are necessary to its creation, spectacle merely to its performance. (2) Unlike diction, Thought and Character, spectacle cannot change with the turns of the plot<sup>35</sup>. The costumes contribute to the tragic effect, but only by way of static accompaniment.

Music is presented even more perfunctorily. We are told that it is a means of imitation (1449b34); but since it is merely one of tragedy's "pleasurable accessories" (although the greatest), it cannot be a means for imitating action, which is the main object of imitation in tragedy. So what object

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<sup>35</sup>To Aristotle "spectacle" has reference "merely to the visible appearance of the actors when got up in character by the skeuopoios or costumier (see on 6, 1450b20)" (Bywater, op. cit., p.162, ad 1449b33). See also Else, op. cit., pp.233-234, 277-279.

does the music of tragedy imitate? No answer is to be found in the Poetics; we must search for clues in the brief account of music given in the Politics. In that work we are told:

Rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these, and of the other qualities of character. . . . (1340a19-21)

If music imitates qualities of character, it will presumably do so, in a drama, in a manner consistent with the nature of the action being imitated. The relation between music and the action which it attends seems an interesting problem; but it is clear from Aristotle's designation of music as an accessory to tragedy that he was uninterested in such a relation and had a rather naive concept of its nature.

In the past three chapters, many interlocking aspects of Aristotle's theory of art have been studied. It may be useful to present in summary form our account of the structure which Aristotle discerns in tragedy.

(1) We begin with plot. Plot is the only element all the parts of which form an organized whole coextensive with the entire tragedy, rather than a sum; in the case of other elements, organization inheres only in particular parts. Plot is thus the only element which is given a structure sufficiently complex to allow for the development of an initial literary conception. Given these points, it is hardly surprising that plot, as we saw from the analogy with the outline of the picture, should be regarded as the basic source of a play's intelligibility. All the other elements are therefore parts of an

organized whole only insofar as they fulfill some function of the plot. Plot is only a bare account of the action<sup>36</sup>; the task of expressing and amplifying this account is carried out in various ways by the other elements.

(2) Episodes are a special case. They are discussed only in late, sketchy additions to the text. It must therefore be assumed that the term "plot", as used in the early chapters of the Poetics (1-15, excluding 12), refers to all the actions of a tragedy. Once the concept of an episode is introduced, plot becomes the comparatively abstract pattern of the work (like the outline of the Odyssey and of Iphigenia in Tauris in Chapter 17). The episodes are the specific actions through which the incidents making up this pattern are expressed: for example, the plot of the Iphigenia requires simply that Orestes recognize his sister; this end could be achieved, as Aristotle shows in Chapter 16, by several different kinds of episode. The episodes of a tragedy or epic therefore depend on the plot for their organization; however, unlike the other elements (excluding plot), they are imitations of action and therefore intelligible, in varying degrees, independently of the plot. Thus, the story of the Cyclops can be understood and enjoyed even if we do not know its place in the Odyssey. In the same way, we can appreciate the manner in which an artist paints a hand or a face even if we do not know the whole painting from which either was taken.

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<sup>36</sup>Just how "bare" the account is will be determined by our acceptance or rejection of the existence of episodes.

(3) The specific actions of a play--its episodes, to give the usage of the later chapters--must display (a) Character and (b) Thought. That is, the actions must be of a quality which (a) reveals a good or bad moral purpose; (b) makes it likely that the relevant personages will be affected in the manner demanded by the plot. Neither of these elements can be presented independently of an imitation of action; they are therefore dependent on episode and ultimately on plot. Further, they may contribute so incidentally to the play as to be virtually non-existent. This is the point of the famous remark which has embarrassed so many commentators: ". . . [A] tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character." (1450a24-25)

(4) As we noted, diction is closely associated with Thought (1456a33ff.). Further, Character is often revealed in the speeches of the personages, although it may not be revealed by their deeds (1450b8-10); diction must therefore be closely associated with Character as well. Such relations are not surprising. Moral qualities are often most tellingly conveyed by the connotations of words (thus, a man who has changed his mind may be said to have gone back on his word); similarly, the subtle inflections of discourse may strongly affect personages being addressed. In presenting Thought and Character, which are qualities of the action, diction is of course also discharging its main purpose: serving as the means for the imitation of action. As we saw, diction is for Aristotle the inanimate material that gains form and significance only from

the object for which it is the medium of imitation. All that is required of it is grammatical coherence and a degree of appropriateness that will help it to express the action.

(5) Music, like diction, is a means of imitation; but since it is regarded merely as a pleasurable accessory, it forms no necessary part of the tragic effect, but is instead only necessary when the play is performed. Whereas diction must be appropriate to the specific actions for which it serves as the means of imitation, music, as a mere emotional embellishment of the action, has to be appropriate only in a more general way.

(6) Spectacle, too, is necessary only for the performance of drama; but it has not even music's ability to change in emotional effect. Barring, say, a change in the masks of the players, the appropriateness of spectacle is of a totally static sort.

As can be seen, Aristotle's approach to the elements of tragedy is much subtler than it might at first seem to be. When we are told that a tragedy has six elements, it is easy for us to conclude that these elements are items whose combination is supposed to produce a tragedy. This view is unsound, even in L.A. Post's comparatively sophisticated formulation: "Aristotle means that the elements are chemically, not physically mixed; drama is not a sunthesis of these elements, but a krasis."<sup>37</sup> The six elements (with episode perhaps consi-

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<sup>37</sup>"Aristotle and Menander", op. cit., p.2. Post goes on to cite the theory of chemical combination advanced in De Generatione at Corruptione. It seems worth noting that the word krasis appears nowhere in the Poetics.

dered as a seventh) are better understood as structures of drama, presented in an order of declining complexity. We begin with plot, where the parts are related by probable and necessary links to the whole; descend to the "culinary account of style", where literary devices are simply mixed together; and conclude with spectacle, where "structure" is nothing more than the frightful grimace of a tragic mask.

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## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that Aristotle is supremely indifferent to quantitative divisions of drama: these are disposed of in Chapter 12--which may not even be a genuine part of the Poetics. He is interested chiefly in possible qualitative divisions of drama; and his analysis of them occupies over half of the Poetics.

As we saw in the last chapter, each element of tragedy involves a certain method of structuring all or part of the contents of a complete play. Plot deals with patterns of action; episodes with particular actions; Character and Thought with qualities of action; Diction with the words used to express action; music with embellishments; and spectacle with aspects of the actual dramatic production. These elements are in turn related to one another in the ways which we indicated in the summary that concluded Chapter III.

The strengths--and weaknesses--of Aristotle's account of tragedy all derive from the primacy which is given to plot. Plot is a kind of substratum to which everything else in a drama must relate. Unity is achieved in such a system at a high price, since the result is an inadequate analysis of every element save plot. (It is in fact surprising that, given this

model, Aristotle says as much about the other five elements as he does.) He never even considers the possibility that a work of art may have several elements, each with a structure that is coextensive with the whole work, each influencing and being influenced by all the others; he is therefore oblivious to patterns of imagery running through a play; to the philosophic themes (such as the relation between God and man) which contributes to the unity of many Greek tragedies; or to the possibility that tragedy may serve to present complete personalities as complex as those of Hamlet or of Clytaemestra.

Besides the factors which have already been mentioned, two reasons may be found for Aristotle's great emphasis on plot. The first, and most important, is the idea that art must be a kind of imitation. It is no part of our purpose to present a detailed study of mimesis<sup>1</sup>; above all, we need not try to determine how much "realism" is required in the art-work. It is sufficient simply to observe that any theory of imitation will be preoccupied with the object (whatever its level of reality) which must be imitated--and, therefore, with that element of the art work most directly involved in the imitation of such an object (for example, plot is central to the imitation of action). It is not surprising, then, that diction or symbolic patterns are not closely examined: these are not directly involved in imitation and hence are of minor importance.

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<sup>1</sup>For an excellent study of the contrasting uses of the idea of mimesis in Plato and Aristotle, see Richard McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity", in Critics and Criticism, op. cit., 147-176.

Indeed, it seems likely that any theory of art which gives them the attention they deserve would repudiate, either implicitly or explicitly, the theory that art is imitation<sup>2</sup>.

The second consideration which we wish to mention here explains why Aristotle should believe that art must be dominated by a single element. If art is imitation rather than expression, it can be viewed independent of the motives of the artist or the effects of art on a spectator; that is, if art is imitation, it must be, to a certain extent, given an autonomous structure. Now for a structure to be autonomous, there must be a single, dominant, organizing principle: if there were not, the structure would either fall apart, or be held together by external factors (such as, perhaps, references to a coalescence of imagery, action and character in the mind of the artist). Therefore, the work of art will be given a structure similar to that found in complex, autonomous natural objects--i.e. living things. Therefore, the theory of imitation in a sense requires that a single element predominate in a work of art; and if this is so, plot will be the best choice for such dominance in the case of drama.

The theory of imitation is no longer current today; and so Aristotle's perceptive awareness of its implications are to a degree irrelevant. But many aspects of his analysis raise issues which are still of considerable interest today.

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<sup>2</sup>McKeon's account of the decline of the concept of imitation after Aristotle provides a good example of this point (Ibid., pp.172-175.

He maintains that a work of art must have certain characteristics if it is to be intelligible. If we accept this assumption, and if we do not wish to retain a model in which plot functions as a substratum, we must either provide an alternative structure of intelligibility for tragedy or we must show that there is no way of predicting in advance that a certain artistic method will or will not produce certain effects.

Aristotle's belief that talk about the structure of a work of art should precede talk about its significance leads to an account of tragedy that is not entirely adequate even for Greek drama; but it does not seem implausible to maintain that this concrete approach to literature best explains the fact that the Poetics is still studied, while many other aesthetic theories that are far more inflated with significance have floated off into oblivion.

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