



Aristotle

Poetics



Aristotle

- ◆ Critical work & its nature
- ◆ Plan
- ◆ Observation on poetry
- ◆ Observation on tragedy
- ◆ Observation on comedy
- ◆ Observation on epic
- ◆ Observation on style
- ◆ Value of his criticism

The man

- Born in Stagira, Greece in 384 BCE
- Became Plato's student at 18 years old
- Subjected to Plato's philosophies
- Developed his own philosophies after Plato's death
- Died in Euboea in 322 BCE



Ethics

◆ Means Versus Goals

◆ We pursue the goals we have, because they are desirable.

◆ The means are the ways by which we achieve those goals.

◆ Sometimes, goals become means to other things: we want to get something so we can get something else.

◆ The one ultimate goal that we want to achieve, not for something else but for that goal itself, is **HAPPINESS**.





Politics

- ◆ Man is very sociable by nature.
- ◆ Man can better attain happiness by having a friendship with the government.
- ◆ The best form of government is one that best suits the people's character.
- ◆ Combining the best attributes of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy will create a more ideal type of government: a limited democracy.



Poetics

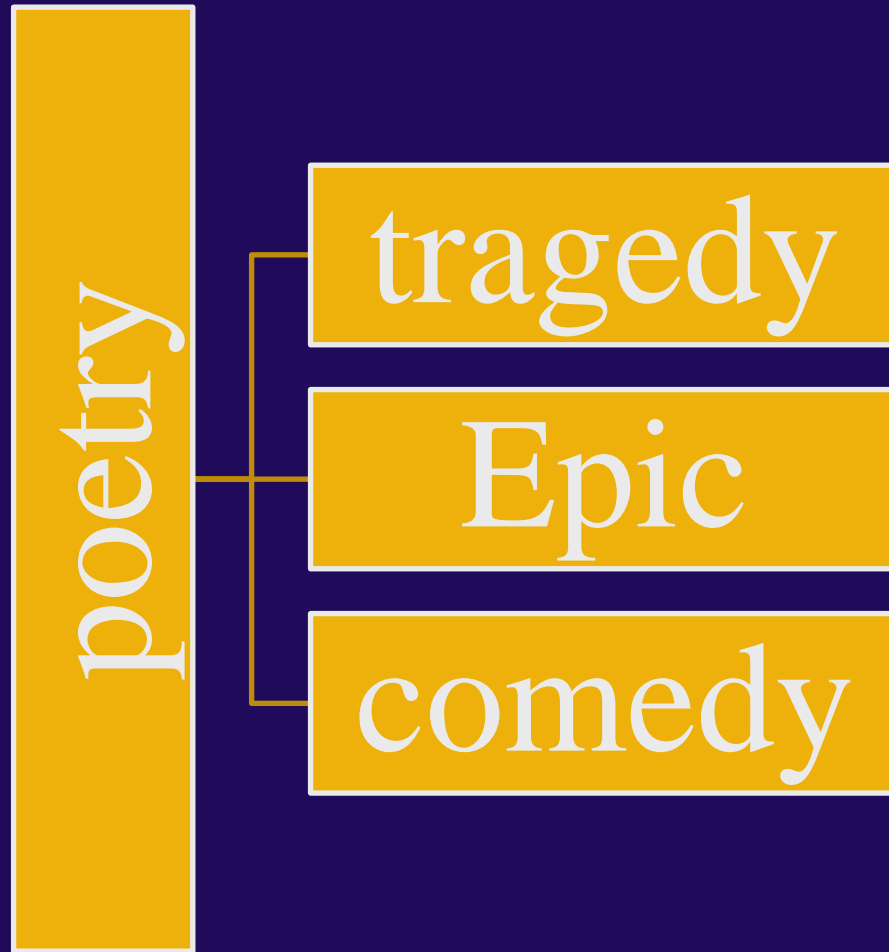
- ◆ The purpose of art is to imitate nature: an artist forms a work of art as nature would form it.
- ◆ Something beautiful is orderly and organized.
- ◆ A work of art should be soothing, cleansing, or exalting to the emotions.



Plan of poetics

- ◆ 50 pages treatise
- ◆ 26 chapters
- ◆ Believed to have a second part- which is promised in the first
- ◆ Lecture notes
- ◆ 1-4,25-poetry
- ◆ 5 comedyepic and
- tragedy in general
- ◆ 6-19- tragedy
- ◆ 20-22 – poetic diction
- ◆ 23,24 – epic poetry
- ◆ Last –comparison of poetry and tragedy

Family





Nature of poetry

- ◆ Justas plato: poetry is imitation
- ◆ Imitation makes man different from lower animals
- ◆ Poet a grown up child (**child –imitate-perceive**)
- ◆ But not twice removed from reality
- ◆ Reveals a universal truth –what should, could or how I felt it happened
- ◆ So poetry different from history



Aristotle's theory of imitation

- ◆ Mimesis is manifested in 'particulars' which resemble or imitate the forms from which they are derived.
- ◆ Thus, the mimetic world (the world of representation) is inferior for it consists of imitations which will always be subordinate to their original.
- ◆ Mimetic activity produces appearances and illusions that affect the perception and behavior of people. In *Republic*,



Aristotle's Concept of Mimesis

- ◆ Mimesis, a "natural" human inclination described as "inherent in man from his earliest days.
- ◆ A fundamental expressions of human experience within the world - a means of learning about nature that, through the perceptual experience, allow us to get closer to the "real".
- ◆ Mimesis not only functions to re-create existing objects or them.
- ◆ Mimesis creates a fictional world of representation in which there is no capacity for a non-mediated relationship to reality.



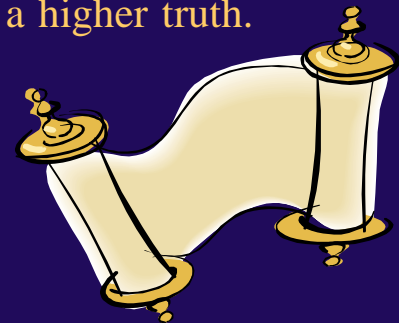


Continued, Aristotle's Imitation

- ◆ Art imitates not the mere shows of things, but the 'ideal reality' embodied in every object of the world.
- ◆ The process of nature is a 'creative process'; everywhere in 'nature there is a ceaseless and upward progress' in everything, and the poet imitates this upward movement of nature.
- ◆ Art reproduces the original not as it is, but as it appears to the senses.
- ◆ Art reproduces the external, according to the idea or image in his mind.
- ◆ Thus the poet does not copy the external world, but creates according to his 'idea' of it.

Aristotle's distinction between poetry and history:

- ◆ History tells us what actually happened; poetry what may happen.
- ◆ History expresses the particular, poetry the universal.
- ◆ Poetry rises from the particular to the general.
- ◆ Poetry is not mere imitation because it feeds on passion, but beneficial, cathartic.
- ◆ Poetry does not imitate the outer world of created things but “the creative force, the productive principle of the universe.”
- ◆ The poet imitates the creative process of nature, but the objects are “men in action”. Now the ‘action’ may be ‘external’ or ‘internal’.
- ◆ Poetry reproduces mainly an inward process, a physical energy working outwards, deeds, incidents, situation, rendering men, “as they ought to be”.
- ◆ Poetry may imitate men as better or worse than they are in real life or imitate as they really are.
- ◆ Tragedy and epic represent men on a heroic scale, better than they are, and comedy represents men of a lower type, worse than they are.
- ◆ Poetry is thus equated with philosophy in that both are means to a higher truth. In this way, he exhibits the superiority of poetry over history.





Function of poetry

- ◆ Pleasure is the goal of poetry
- ◆ Never mentions it obviously but yet it is very conspicuous
- ◆ -vely: he never states poetry and the other sister arts should teach
- ◆ But does not bar out teaching if it too can give pleasure – may then it can be dual purpose twice good.
- ◆ Aristotelean & greek view- aesthetic pleasure -higher life



Emotional Appeal

- ◆ Quick e- appeal
- ◆ Tragedy highest appeal – evokes pity and fear at undeserved suffering
- ◆ Plato - -ve makes us weak
- ◆ Aristotle +ve healthy because:
- ◆ Every one has such moments
- ◆ Accumulation and suppression is dangerous
- ◆ So purgation or catharsis purifies
- ◆ Relieves of excess
- ◆ Lifted out of self pity and selfish concerns
- ◆ “calm of mind all passion spent”-Milton



Tragedy - origin

- ◆ Poetry Imitates 2 action
- ◆ Noble acts of good- epic-for gods and kings
- ◆ Mean acts of bad – satire
- ◆ Epic –tragedy; satire- comedy
- ◆ Yet tragedy greater than epic according to aristotle



EVOLUTION OF TRAGEDY

- ◆ Aristotle stops short of saying that tragedy of his time is perfect. He listed three innovations:
- ◆ Initially a chorus of 50 men and boys and a narrator sang in honour of Dionysus.
- ◆ Aeschylus introduced a second actor and the dialogue became the focus of the poem.
- ◆ Sophocles added a 3 actor and a background scenery.
- ◆ Tragedy developed an air of seriousness.
- ◆ Tragedy developed a plurality of episodes/acts



Defnition for tragedy

- ◆ “Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude: in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions”



Defn. explained...

- 1- It involves mimesis.
- 2- It is serious.(suffering exciting pity or fear)
- 3- The action is complete with magnitude(internal and external)
- 4- Language with rhythm and harmony
- 5- Some bits are spoken in verse some are sung.
- 6- It is performed.(makes it different from epic)
- 7- It arouses emotions of pity and fear and accomplishes a catharsis



Defn. explained...

- ◆ Tragedies must have a beginning, middle and end. It doesn't include everything in the life of one character, just those events which further the plot.
- ◆ The best tragedies have complex plots, fearful and pitiable happenings, and should be good moving to bad. It doesn't make us feel the same when bad moves to good - not tragedy.
- ◆ Well knit means –beginning should lead to middle, middle to end



Defn. explained...


- ◆ Plot ‘it should be of a length which can be easily embraced by memory’ (Beauty not too short or too long proportion-Short won't stick in memory-Long can't explain detail)
- ◆ Must have artistic ornament
- ◆ **Difference betn. Epic and tragedy:**
Both deal with lofty subject and grand style of verse. Aristotle sees three differences.
 - 1- Tragedy is told in dramatic form and employs several kinds of verse and epic poetry employs only one,
 - 2-action of tragedy is confined to usually one day which is not the case in epic poetry.
 - 3-Tragedy has all the characteristics of epic poetry but it has some additional elements that are unique to it alone.

Components of tragedy

- ◆ Plot/Mythos (combination of incidents and action in the stories)
- ◆ Character (moral qualities of the agent)
- ◆ Thought (intellectual qualities)
- ◆ Diction
- ◆ Melody/ song
- ◆ Spectacle



Objects of mimesis



Medium employed



manner





Plot

- ◆ Aristotle asserted:

- that plot is the “life and soul of the drama.”

- that a plot should take a linear form proceeding from beginning to end.

- Known as the “arrangement of the incidents”
- For tragedy is imitation, not of men but of an action and of life, and life consists in action
- There cannot be tragedy without action-there might be without character



Character

◆ Aristotle:

--referred to this element as “the agent for the action.”

--considered this element the second most important theatrical element.

--believed it brought forth a plot

--asserted that it served as the embodiment of action on a stage and was a necessary element for identification with the play

Character determines men’s qualities, it is by their action they are happy or reverse





Thought

- ◆ Sometimes referred to as the “message”
- ◆ Usually understood as a universal or clear meaning to be comprehended by the audience
- ◆ Third, in importance as a theatrical element
- ◆ Aristotle called this “dianoia,” or “the process of thought.”
- ◆ Imitates mental and emotional reactions to the circumstances
- ◆ Sometimes the moral of a play



Diction

- ◆ This refers to the words used and their placement in the text of a play.
- ◆ Often, differences in diction within a play indicate differences in characters.
- ◆ Diction can also differ from playwright to playwright or play to play because of the playwright's purpose of language in each play.



Music

Aristotle's definition of music included all of the audio elements of theatre, not just instrumental or vocal.

- noises made by actors
- sound effects



Spectacle

- ◆ The visual element of theatre, Aristotle considered it the least important of the elements
- ◆ Aristotle believed well-written and well-performed theatre could even be enjoyed by the blind.
 - Radio drama is an excellent example of his assertion



Structure of the plot

1. The Unity of Action

2. The Unity of Time

3. The Unity of Place



The
Three
unities



The Unity of Action

- According to Aristotle a play should contain only a single plot or story line (the audience can remain focused on the idea that it presents rather than being confused with multiple messages and subplots).
- order
- Anything extra is unnecessary



The Unity of Time

- ◆ Audiences gain the most pleasure from plays in which the action occurs during a single and consecutive course of time.
 - more modern plays/literature that employ flashbacks and abbreviated scenes would not fit well into Aristotle's second unity.
- ◆ “Real time” performances in which the action reflects the actual time of the events would be most preferable.
- ◆ Single revolution of the sun or slightly more where as epic can have ages



The Unity of Place

- ◆ Greatest comprehension and audience empathy can be evoked if a play takes place in a single setting. Aristotle's theory asserts that using different settings would be too difficult to portray and would confuse the audience.
- ◆ The use of acts and scenes in contemporary theatre often indicates a departure from Aristotle's unities.

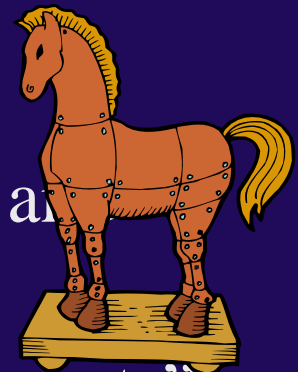
Contemporary Use of the Unities

- ◆ Some theatre thrives upon the abandonment of Aristotle's Unities in the modern setting. Audiences desire experimental manipulation of all of the unities, and this may be due, in part, to the more contemporary trend of writing and presenting information and stories in disjointed and fragmented forms.



Simple and complex plot

◆ Plot finally can be divided to **complication** and **denouement**



◆ There is often **peripetia** “reversal of events” (going from king to villain)(killed brother)— again must be necessary and probable, match the character and plot

◆ Another essential is **Anagnorisis** ‘Recognition’ or ‘discovery’ of a disguised character or action in plays may be handled differently.

- By token - lowest form (Odysseus scar), or the poet adds a device such as a letter to identify a character
- Recollection (seeing or hearing something reminds a character)
- better is Recognition based on reasoning $A=B$, $B=C$ therefore $A=C$. The best recognition arises from events themselves. (chathathu keejagananegil konnathu bheemanthane)





Tragic Hero

- ◆ Plot and transformation – a character moves from good circumstances to bad through a mistake of great weight and consequence [**Hamartia** (tragic/fatal flaw often hubris or great pride)].
- ◆ Pity and fear [**Catharsis**] may be engaged by performing an act knowing and wittingly (murder), by refraining from performing the deed (not saving someone), or by performing a fearful act unwittingly and then see the blood relationship (murder in Oedipus).
- ◆ Tragic characters must be a good, appropriate, likeness to human nature, and consistent. One must strive for the necessary or probable -- it is necessary or probable that a person do a thing.



Aristotle's Moral View of Poetry

- ◆ Aristotle was the first to distinguish aesthetics from morals.
- ◆ The end of poetry is a refined pleasure that never allows the moral purpose of the poet or moral effects of his art to replace the aesthetic end.
- ◆ the poet's primary function is to give pleasure.
- ◆ Aristotle allows for the presence of the evil characters in tragedy.
- ◆ The law of probability: Art's only requirement in Aristotle's view is to represent the universal, to adhere to the law of probability.
- ◆ The result is poetic truth that is more philosophical.



Definition of Tragedy

- ◆ “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *katharsis* of such emotions. . . .
- ◆ “Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Melody.”



Definition of Catharsis

- ◆ The end of the tragedy is a *katharsis* (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear.
- ◆ “purging,” a medical metaphor—tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear in order to purge away their excess, to reduce these passions to a healthy, balanced proportion.
- ◆ “pleasure” that is proper to tragedy, the aesthetic pleasure one gets from contemplating the pity and fear that are aroused through an intricately constructed work of art.



Elements of Tragedy

- ◆ 1) Plot: “the arrangement of the incidents”: i.e., not the story itself but the way the incidents are presented to the audience, the structure of the play.
- ◆ According to Aristotle, tragedies where the outcome depends on a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain of actions are superior to those that depend primarily on the character and personality of the protagonist.
- ◆ Plots that meet this criterion will have the qualities Aristotle's ideal plot structure, and *Plot of Oedipus the King*
- ◆ “a whole,” with a beginning, middle, and end.



Continued, Plot

- ◆ The beginning, (**incentive moment**), must start the cause-and-effect chain but not be dependent on anything outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are downplayed but its effects are stressed).
- ◆ The middle, or **climax**, must be caused by earlier incidents and itself cause the incidents that follow it (i.e., its causes and effects are stressed).
- ◆ The end, or **resolution**, must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are stressed but its effects downplayed); the end should therefore solve or resolve the problem created during the incentive moment.



Continued, Plot

- ◆ cause-and-effect chain leading from the incentive moment to the climax: “tying up” (*desis*), in modern terminology the **complication**.
- ◆ cause-and-effect chain from the climax to the resolution: “unravelling” (*lusion*), in modern terminology the **dénouement**.
- ◆ “complete,” having “unity of action.” (structurally self-contained, with the incidents bound together by internal necessity), each action leading inevitably to the next with no outside intervention.
- ◆ worst kinds of plots are “episodic,” in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence”; coincidences, irrational incidents



Continued, Plot

- ◆ The plot must be “of a certain magnitude,” both quantitatively (length, complexity) and qualitatively (“seriousness” and universal significance).
- ◆ Plot should not be too brief; or too long.
- ◆ Plot may be either simple or complex. (Complex plots are preferable to simple ones). Simple plots imply a “change of fortune” (*catastrophe*).
- ◆ *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* result in surprise.
- ◆ *peripeteia* occurs when a character produces an effect opposite to that which he intended to produce.
- ◆ *anagnorisis* is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined for good or bad fortune.
- ◆ The best plots combine these two as part of their cause-and-effect chain (i.e., the *peripeteia* leads directly to the *anagnorisis*); this in turn creates the *catastrophe*, leading to the final “scene of suffering”.



Character

- ◆ **2) Character:** In a perfect tragedy, character will support plot, i.e., personal motivations will be intricately connected parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions producing pity and fear in the audience.
- ◆ The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad.
- ◆ change “should come about as the result, not of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character.”
- ◆ Such a plot generates pity and fear in the audience.



Continued, Character

- ◆ *hamartia*, “tragic flaw,” closer to “mistake” than to “flaw,”
- ◆ In the ideal tragedy, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough.
- ◆ The role of the *hamartia* in tragedy comes not from its moral status but from the inevitability of its consequences.
- ◆ *peripeteia* is thus a self-destructive action taken in blindness, leading to results diametrically opposed to those that were intended (often termed tragic irony), and the *anagnorisis* is the gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking.



Character Qualities

- ◆ 1. “good or fine.” Aristotle relates this quality to moral purpose, it is relative to class: “Even a woman may be good, and also a slave, though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless.”
- ◆ 2. “fitness of character” (true to type); e.g. valor is appropriate for a warrior but not for a woman.
- ◆ 3. “true to life” (realistic)
- ◆ 4. “consistent” (true to themselves). Once a character's personality and motivations are established, these should continue throughout the play.
- ◆ 5. “necessary or probable.” Characters must be logically constructed according to “the law of probability or necessity” that governs the actions of the play.
- ◆ 6. “true to life and yet more beautiful” (idealized, ennobled).



Continued, Tragedy

- ◆ 3) Themes, are found “where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated.”
- ◆ little is said about thought, associated with how speeches should reveal character. However, we may assume that this category would also include what we call the **themes** of a play.
- ◆ 4). Diction is “the expression of the meaning in words” which are proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy.
- ◆ the stylistic elements of tragedy; particularly metaphors: “But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor; . . . it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances”



Continued, Tragedy

- ◆ 5). Song, or melody, the musical element of the chorus.
- ◆ Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be “mere interludes,” but should contribute to the unity of the plot.
- ◆ 6). Spectacle least connected with literature; “the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.”
- ◆ Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of spectacle, he argues that superior poets rely on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fear; those who rely heavily on spectacle “create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous”.