

ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

- I. Poetry is Imitation (μιμήσεις) (1447a.1-19).
 - A. Its medium of expression is universal aspects of life
 - B. Poetry imitates mental impressions
 - C. It is closer to reality than a particular situation because it is universal
- II. All arts differ from one another in: 1.) media, 2.) object, & 3.) manner (1447a.14-1448b.19).
 - A. Media (1447a.19-1448a.1). καὶ καὶ
 1. Poetry - with language (λόγῳ), rhythm (ῥυθμῷ), & harmony (ἁρμονίᾳ).
 - a. Epic - language & rhythm
 - b. Lyric - language, rhythm, & harmony
 - c. Tragedy & Comedy
 - i. Dialogues - language & rhythm
 - ii. Choral lyrics - language, rhythm, & harmony
 - d. Note: Poetry is not defined by meter but imitation of the universal.
Scientific subjects in verse are not poetry
 2. Dance - rhythm
 3. Musical instrument - rhythm & harmony
 - B. Objects of imitation (1448a.1- 18).
 1. Human beings in action
 2. Types of persons portrayed:
 - a. Better than average (βελτίους).
 - b. Average (ὁμοίως).
 - c. Worse than average (χείρους).
 3. Tragedy - higher than average
 4. Comedy - lower than average
 - C. Manner of imitation (1448a.19-1448b.2).
 1. Completely indirect imitation (straight narrative)
 2. Partly indirect and partly direct (epic)
 - a. Epic - narrative & speeches of character
 3. Entirely direct action (drama)
 - Aristotle draws a comparison between Sophocles and both Homer and Aristophanes. Homer and Sophocles both write about “good men” (σπουδαίους) whereas Aristophanes and Sophocles both write about men in “action and doing things” (πράττοντας ... καὶ δρῶντας) (1448a.26)
 - D. Artistic creation (1448b.3-19).
 1. Is instinctual in man
 2. Is enjoyable because...
 - a. Some things would be painful to see in life
 - b. We learn new things
 - c. We recognize what we have learned
 - d. There is joy in seeing technical perfection
- III. Origin and Development of Tragedy and Comedy (1448b.20-1449b.19).
 - “Both tragedy and comedy had their first beginnings in improvisation (αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς)” (1449a. 10).
 - A. Comedy
 1. Imitation of lower types of men.
 2. Their behavior is ridiculous
 - Aeschylus introduced a second actor and cut down the role of the chorus, Sophocles introduced three actors and painted scenery (1449a.15). Aristotle felt that tragedy

attained its “stateliness” (μέγεθος) when it moved away from its likeness to satyric drama (1449a.20). (See Horace *Ars Poetica*, 222). Part of this move involved a move from trochaic tetrameter to iambic. “...We most usually drop into iambs in our conversation with one another...” (1449a.25).

B. Tragedy

“Epic poetry agrees with tragedy to the extent that it is a representation in dignified verse, of serious actions (σπουδαίων). They differ, however, in that epic keeps to a single metre and is in narrative form.” (1449b.10).

1. Like epic in that it imitates men of a higher type
2. They differ in 1.) Manner of imitation, 2.) Epic - Direct and indirect narrative, & 3.) Tragedy - Direct action
 - a. Media of imitation
 - i. Epic does not have music or spectacle
 - b. Verse form
 - i. Epic - dactylic hexameter
 - ii. Tragedy - mixed
 - c. Length
 - i. Epic - is not fixed
 - ii. Tragedy - one day

IV. Analysis of Tragedy (1449b.20-1459a.15).

A. Tragedy defined (1449b.20-30).

1. Objects of imitation - serious action (πράξεως σπουδαίας).
2. Media - rhythm, language, and melody
3. Manner - direct action, not narrative
4. Purpose - to arouse pity and fear and produce a catharsis (κάθαρσιν) of these emotions

B. Elements of Tragedy: 1.) Spectacle (ὄψις), 2.) Music (μελοποιία), 3.) Diction (λέξις), 4.) Character (ἦθος), 5.) Thought (διάνοια), & 6.) Plot (μῦθος) (1450a.8-14).

C. Rank of Elements: 1.) Plot, 2.) Character, 3.) Thought, 4.) Diction, 5.) Music, & 6.) Spectacle (1450a.15-1450b.20).

“the plot is beginning and a sort of soul of tragedy” (ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγωδίας) (1450a.38).

D. The Plot (1450b.21-1455a.22).

1. There must be a complete whole: not too short or too long, allowing for change in the hero’s fortune (1450b.24-1451a.15).
2. There must be unity of action: one central theme (1451a.15-35).
3. Poetry is general truth (καθόλου) (1451a.36-1451b.34).
4. The worst plots lack cause and effect connects between episodes (1451b.34-1452a.10).
5. Tragic Plot (1452a.11-17)
 - a. Simple (ἅπλοϊ) plots - without reversal (peripety) or discovery (anagnorisis) (1452a.11-1452a.39).
 - i. Reversal (περιπέτεια) - change which leads to the opposite of the intended outcome (1452a.23-29).
 - In defining a “reversal” Aristotle gives as an example the messenger coming to cheer Oedipus who actually informs him about his condition (1452a.25). (see *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 934 & 1141).
 - ii. Discovery (ἀναγνώρισις) - change from ignorance to knowledge or love to hate (1452a.29-39).
Six types: (1454b.19-1455a.22).

- 1.) Signs (σημείων), tokens or marks on the person
 - 2.) Arbitrary direct inventions of the poet (αἱ πεποιημένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ)
 - 3.) Through memory (διὰ μνήμης)
 - 4.) Logical reasoning
 - 5.) Wrong sophistic reasoning which reaches the correct result
 - 6.) From incidents themselves (e.g. *Oedipus Tyrannus*)
- b. Complex (πεπλεγμένοι) plots - change of hero's fortune by reversal, discovery or both (1452a.17-20).
 - c. Description of elements of Greek drama: Prologue, Episode, Exode, Choral Song (Parode and Stasimon) (1452b.14-28).
 - d. Ideal character and plot (1453b.1-1454b.18).
 - i. Plot - complex, arousing pity and fear (1453b.1-1454a.15).
 - Not by simple disasters but incidents of the plot
 - From happiness to misery
 - Perfectly virtuous and just
 - Downfall does not come from vice
 - Downfall due to a great mistake (ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην) and error in judgment
 - Member of noble family (1453a.7-16).
 - ii. Character - (1454a.15-1454b.18).
 - 1.) good in their functions
 - 2.) true to type
 - 3.) true to life
 - 4.) consistent and unified throughout
 - iii. *Deus ex machina* must only be used to explain the past or future (1454b.1-8).
 - iv. Simple unhappy ending, not double ending (1453b.13-15).
- F. Suggestions for composition (1455a.23-1456a.32)
1. Complication (τὸ δέσις) is all that precedes the hero's change of fortune (1455b.24-31).
 2. Unraveling (τὸ λύσις) is all that follows the crisis to the end of the drama (1455b.31-32).
- Aristotle praised Sophocles and yet criticized Euripides in their use of the chorus, which he felt "must be regarded as one of the actors" (καὶ τὸν χορὸν δὲ ἓνα δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν, καὶ μῶριον εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου καὶ συναγωνίζεσθαι) (1456a.27).
- G. Observations on thought and diction (1456a.33-1459a.15).
1. Types of words in poetry
 2. Use of diction
 - a. Clarity without vulgarity
 - b. Avoid excessive metaphor and foreign words, nor straight prose
- V. Tragedy and Epic further compared (1459a.16-1460b.5).
- A. Likeness (1459b.8-16).
 1. Epic must be a complete whole
 2. Epic has same types - simple, complex, etc.
 3. Epic has the same parts - except melody and spectacle
 4. Epic uses reversal and discovery
 5. Epic uses the same thought and diction
 - B. Differences (1459b.17-1460b.3).
 1. Length

2. Meter
3. Objectivity of epic poet
4. Media
5. Combination of indirect and direct manner
6. More room for fantastic and improbable in epic

VI. Problems of literary criticism (1460b.6 -1461b.25).

- “Sophocles said that he drew men as they ought to be whereas Euripides drew them as they are.” (Σοφοκλῆς ἔφη αὐτὸς μὲν οἷους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ οἷοι εἶσιν, ταύτη λυτέον.) (1460b.34,35).

VII. Conclusion (1461b.26-1462b.17).

A. Is epic or tragedy more dignified? (1461b.26-27).

1. The charge that tragedy is vulgar is false (1461b.27- 1462a.4).
2. Degrading of tragedy is due to bad actors (1462a.5-11).
3. Tragedy can be read without being acted (1462a 11-14).

B. Because tragedy has everything that epic has in a more concise for it is superior (1462a.14-1462b.17).

“...obviously, since it attains its object better than the epic, the better of the two is tragedy.” (φανερὸν ὅτι κρείττων ἂν εἴη μᾶλλον τοῦ τέλους τυγχάνουσα τῆς ἐποποιίας.) (1462b.14,15).

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