

With the possible exception of Libeskind, Eisenman's work seems more in tune than the others with Jacques Derrida's brand of deconstructionist philosophy (Eisenman and Derrida collaborated on the design of an unbuilt vegetationless garden at a larger Tschumi La Villette project outside Paris). Eisenman came to recognize a paradox in architecture that he articulated as follows: "In order to be, it must always resist being. . . . This is the paradox of architecture. Thus, in order to reinvent a site . . . the idea of site must be freed from its traditional places, histories, and systems of meaning. This involves the dislocation of the traditional interpretation of its elements." Eisenman's work (his Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, for example) constitutes an architecture that is somehow removed from an unreinvented architectural milieu, one requiring an architect who will break with architecture's own hierarchical presuppositions. Eisenman's concern is not so much about whether good or interesting work can be produced within architecture's traditional presuppositions; rather, he is skeptical about whether a more "speculative," exploratory architecture, an architecture that investigates its own assumptions, can be designed within the limits of traditional tastes, beliefs, and principles. His architecture, like the collected works of other postmodernists, is less interested in provided answers to questions (e.g., what is a church? a bookstore? a home?) than in generating questions, conversations, about what such questions might mean and in what new ways they might be approached.

On Eisenman's view, modern architecture merely assumed the role of nonreferential "objectivity." However, "In reality . . . their 'objective' forms never left the classical tradition. They were simply stripped down classical forms or forms referring to a new set of givens (function, technology)." Some of Eisenman's strategies aimed to "surgically open up the Classical and the Modern to find what is repressed." His architecture is a recognition that the apparent essence/accident conception of architecture itself has generated certain binary oppositions, structure/ornament being one, privileging or celebrating one side of a duality while devaluing or repressing the other. In his projects, Eisenman has tried to work "between" the suspended domains of architecture's traditional oppositions, such as architecture/landscape, outside/inside, center/periphery, product/process, and stability/instability.

In several of his writings (for example, his work on metaphor), Derrida has turned his strategies to the structure/ornament hierarchy. In *The Truth and Painting* (1987), Derrida investigates the stance on ornament taken by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, in which the structure/ornament demarcation is a working assumption, ornament being merely a supplement to the primary work. Derrida's strategy is to problematize the "border" or *parergon* of the work, *ergon*, and what is outside the work (*hors d'œuvre*), in order to disturb the peripheral role of ornament as a mere adjunct, not an intrinsic constituent of a

work. It should be emphasized that Derrida tries to *suspend* rather than reject such oppositions, working during the "suspense" between the two. Hence, Derrida calls into question the inside/outside opposition in Kant's main work on aesthetics. But Derrida, who explores the architectural metaphor in philosophy generally, also sees the presence-presentation-representation hierarchy in metaphysics as analogous to the ground-structure-ornament connection in architecture, with similar devaluings, concealments, or repressions.

How these repressions are part of bourgeois taste, economic power, or anthropocentrism is not a topic from which architecture need be removed. Such an architecture would refuse to acknowledge the stability of the concept of architecture, which is buttressed by a grounding metaphysics of essentiality and which in turn allows for the misleading appearance of the timeless self-evidence of architecture's so-called essential features. "Deconstruction," Derrida has said, "is first and foremost a suspicion directed against just that kind of thinking—'what is . . . ?' 'what is the essence of . . . ?'" Again, the aim is to work *between* the oppositions generated by traditional architecture, thereby suspending the hierarchical privileging or monumentality of a traditional architectural essence that celebrates stability or comfort, function or structure.

In the sense that many aspects of Eisenman's work have embodied a refusal to build monumentality, his strategies can be understood as examples of what Gianni Vattimo has called *il pensiero debole*—weak thinking. Weak architectural thinking is, in a sense, architecture against architecture, that is, against architecture as a manifestation of wealth and power, as a teller of grand historical narratives, and as an architecture that builds in ways that attempts to celebrate the often repressive traditional values of gender, race, class, and so on, as they are displayed, fetishized, and passed on in enduring works of art.

Derrida reminds us:

This architecture of architecture has a history, it is historical through and through. Its heritage inaugurates the intimacy of our economy, the law of our hearth (*oikos*), our familial, religious and political "oikonomy," all the places of birth and death, temple, school, stadium, agora, square, sepulcher. It goes right through us (*nous transit*) to the point that we forget its very historicity: we take it for nature. It is common sense itself.

As Derrida puts it, the result of opening the closure of architecture, in a way that may take architecture to philosophical depths while helping to uncover the architectural metaphor in philosophy, would aid in "letting other voices speak." It would be a way of removing both the architect of tradition and the traditional history of architecture as a resistance in the investigation and embodiment of new ways of meaning. It would allow architecture to take its own place beside other art forms in the history of ideas.

The break from modern architecture was consistent with a general postmodern condition: eclecticism and diversity, multiplication of voice, repetition of previous forms, fragmentation and localization, a greater tendency toward textuality and self-referentiality, and an inclusion of play and accident. But the accomplishment of postmodern architecture and whatever followed it may have been to allow architecture to play with a full deck of strategies and to make it, again, vitally placed, in mind and body, within the culture of everyday life.

[See also Bauhaus; Derrida; Mies van der Rohe; Minimalism; Postmodernism, historical and conceptual overview article; and Wittgenstein.]

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DAVID GOLDBLATT

ARISTOTLE. [This entry comprises five essays on one of the principal philosophers to write on art long before the ages of art and aesthetics:

Survey of Thought
Aristotle on Mimesis
Aristotle on Form and Unity
Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity
Reception of Aristotle in Modernity

The first essay is a survey of Aristotle's philosophy as a whole and his poetics in particular. The next two essays discuss three major concepts in his poetics, mostly concerning tragedy: "mimesis" (imitation), "form," and "unity"—all of which have had a profound influence on the history of aesthetics. The final two essays concern the reception of his poetics in antiquity and modernity, respectively, where his influence in aesthetics has been significant despite the fact that he, like the Greeks and most other cultural traditions prior to the eighteenth century, did not have a concept of art or engage in what since the eighteenth century has been called aesthetics. See also Arab Aesthetics; Aquinas; Augustine; Comedy; Creativity; Metaphor; Morality and Aesthetics; Perception; and Representation.]

Survey of Thought

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) made substantial contributions to virtually every field studied in his day, including logic, metaphysics, history of philosophy, political science, history, ethics, poetry, music, rhetoric, biology, astronomy, physics, and theology. Some two hundred works were attributed to him in antiquity, most of which do not survive. Among the works on poetry attributed to him were *On Poets*; *Treatise on the Art of Poetry*; *Homeric Problems*; *Poetics*; *Victories at the Dionysia*; *On Tragedies*; *Didaskaliae*; *Hesiodic Problems*; *Cycle on Poets*; *Problems from Archilochus, Euripides, Choerilus*; *Poetical Problems*; *Poetical Explanations*. (See catalog of Aristotle's works in Barnes's Oxford translation.) Aside from some fragments, the only one of these works to survive is the first book of the *Poetics*. Aristotle's other extant works, however, can help to illuminate many topics in the *Poetics*. For example, *Rhetoric* and *On the Soul* contain material on the emotions, *Politics* discusses music, the biological works are helpful for an understanding of biological analogies in the *Poetics*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* contains numerous ethical examples taken from tragedy.

The *Poetics* is a short work, containing only forty-six pages in the standard Greek text (Kassel, 1966). The unique source is a single manuscript, codex Parisinus 1741, of the tenth or eleventh century. It is generally thought to be a late work, although this has been disputed. (See discussion in Halliwell, 1986, Appendix 1.) Internal evidence indicates close connections between the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*. The standard method of citing passages in the *Poetics* and other works of Aristotle is by page, column, and line number in Bekker's 1831 edition (e.g., 1450a2).

The *Poetics* presents numerous difficulties for the reader. There are many signs that our text is incomplete. The opening chapter announces a discussion of *poiētikē* in general, with its several genres, but our text deals almost exclusively with only two genres, epic and tragedy. The beginning of chapter 6 states: "Concerning the craft of imitation in hexameters [that is, epic], and concerning comedy we will speak later." Epic is discussed in chapters 23–26, but the promise to discuss comedy later in the *Poetics* is never kept. Moreover, there is some indication in manuscripts, and in other ancient and medieval sources, that a second book, including a discussion of comedy, originally followed. (For a recent attempt at reconstruction, and evaluation of the evidence for a second book, see Janko, 1984.) The text of the *Poetics* also contains numerous lacunae and other textual difficulties, many real or apparent inconsistencies, and frequent obscurities. Whether or not it is a series of lecture notes, as many scholars believe, it is certainly not a polished work written for the general public. The elliptical style leaves many terms and concepts in need of explanation. Aristotle notoriously fails to explain *katharsis* (catharsis), merely stating, in the definition of tragedy, that tragedy accomplishes catharsis. The explanations he does offer may be unclear. For example, Aristotle defines *peripeteia*, "reversal," as "a change to the opposite of the things done," but he does not say what kind of change is involved or who is affected by it. Moreover, the examples he provides are frequently drawn from works no longer extant. These and other difficulties have helped to create disagreement on virtually everything in the *Poetics*. The reader must keep in mind that all translations contain a large element of interpretation, that any statements by scholars about major issues are likely to be highly controversial, and that not everything that has been attributed to Aristotle is actually in the *Poetics*.

Poetics: Subject and Scope. The Greek title, *peri poiētikēs*, is more accurately translated as "On the poetic craft," although the word *poiētikē* is more inclusive than English "poetry." It is cognate with the verb *poiōin*, "to make," and is sometimes used by Aristotle to refer to the productive crafts in general. In the *Poetics*, it is not clear what specific crafts are included in *poiētikē*. After saying that he will discuss the kinds of *poiētikē*, Aristotle proceeds instead to a consideration of the kinds of imitation *mimēsis* (mimesis), including music, dance, and painting as well as "poetry." After these introductory remarks, however, the range of the *Poetics* is much narrower than that of "poetry," for this work deals primarily with only a single, highly formalized genre: tragedy. The works Aristotle discusses were all written during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE for performance at competitive dramatic festivals in Athens, at which many aspects of performance and composition, including the number of actors and choral singers, length of performance, and subject matter, were governed by explicit rules of competition, or by generally accepted conventions.

In evaluating his critical theories, it is important to remember that Aristotle's knowledge of the tragedies and of the dramatic festivals vastly exceeds our own. We now have, aside from a few fragments, only thirty-two complete tragedies by three authors (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides), but Aristotle had access to all or most of the entire corpus of hundreds of plays by numerous authors. It is generally agreed that our extant records of plays produced at the dramatic festivals are based to some extent at least on his lost *Didaskaliae*. The *Poetics* alone mentions some fifty plays by at least thirteen authors, and Aristotle's other works contain many more references. Aristotle's knowledge was also impressively detailed. For example, the text of line 727 of Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* is established by Aristotle's quotation in *Rhetoric* 3.1407b34–35.

The *Poetics* begins with a programmatic introduction of the subject matter: (1) the poetic craft studied in itself, (2) its forms and their powers, (3) how to organize plots, and (4) quantity and quality of parts (1.1447a1–13). Chapters 1–3 then provide a general discussion of imitation. Epic, tragedy, music, painting, and dance are all imitations, differing in three respects: objects imitated, medium, and manner of imitation. Tragedy imitates the actions of people who are better than us, in the medium of sound (words, rhythm, and harmony) and in the manner of enactment without narration. *Poetics* 4 discusses the causes and origins of imitation and the development of the poetic craft. Although Aristotle grounds the imitative arts in a human nature common to all, stating that the human being is the most imitative of all animals and that all people learn from and take pleasure in imitation, he holds that people with special aptitudes for imitation helped to create and perfect the different genres of poetry. Aristotle's outline of the development of poetry is partly historical and partly teleological. After an early improvisational stage, poetry divided into two branches, one of which led from hymns and encomia to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and finally culminated in tragedy. The other branch developed from blame poetry to Homer's lost *Margites* and ended in comedy. Chapter 4 also provides some tantalizing but puzzling clues to the more recent development of tragedy "from those leading off the dithyramb" and from a "satyric" origin. Chapter 5 begins with a brief discussion of comedy, and then compares epic and tragedy. In chapter 6, Aristotle turns to his main subject, tragedy. He defines tragedy as "imitation . . . by means of pity and fear accomplishing catharsis of these kinds of emotions." He then discusses the six qualitative parts of tragedy. These are, in order of importance: plot (*muthos*, "the composition of events"), character (*ēthos*, "that which indicates what kind of choice someone makes"), thought (*dianoia*, by means of which "people make a demonstration or reveal an opinion"), speech (*lexis*, "expression by means of language"), song, and spectacle. Aristotle distinguishes plot from character and stresses the primacy of plot. Plot is the imitation

of action, not of life or of human beings; it is, as it were, the soul, and the first principle of tragedy, whereas character is only second in importance, like the colors added to an outline drawing. Aristotle even asserts that there could be no tragedy without plot, though there could be without character. It is disputed how literally this last statement is to be taken, especially since chapter 6 also states that action is caused by character and thought.

With the exception of the brief and possibly spurious chapter 12, on the quantitative parts of tragedy (prologue, episode, exodos, parados, and stasimon), chapters 7–14 focus on the tragic plot. A good plot is one, whole, and complete, and proceeds from beginning to middle to end, according to probability or necessity. It deals with "the universal," as opposed to "the particular," which is the subject of history. The tragic plot moves either from good to bad fortune or from bad to good fortune. The three parts of the plot are *pathos* ("a destructive or painful event"), reversal (*peripeteia*, "the change to the opposite of the things done"), and recognition (*anagnōrisis*, "a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading either to friendship or to enmity, of those defined with respect to good or bad fortune"). All plots, both simple and complex, have *pathos*, but only the best plots, the complex, have reversal, recognition, or both. Chapters 13 and 14 give rules for the construction of plots, though the two accounts are difficult to reconcile with one another. In chapter 13, Aristotle writes that the best kind of plot is one like that of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, in which a stage figure goes from good to bad fortune, because of a mistake (*hamartia*), whereas plays that end happily are inferior. In chapter 14, however, the best kind of plot is said to be like that of Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, in which *philos* (the Greek word means "kin," or "friend") is about to harm *philos*, in ignorance of the relationship, but recognizes the relationship before acting. In this chapter, the *Oedipus* plot, in which *philos* harms *philos* in ignorance, and later recognizes the relationship, is only second-best. After a discussion of character in chapter 15, Aristotle returns to plot, discussing kinds of recognition (chapter 16), and more rules for composing plots (chapter 17).

Chapter 18 contains many miscellaneous remarks, the most important of which is the distinction between the two parts of a tragic plot: complication (*desis*), that part of tragedy from the beginning until just before the change to good or bad fortune occurs, and resolution (*lusis*), that part from the beginning of the change to the end. After a brief discussion of thought at the beginning of chapter 19, chapters 19–22 contain a lengthy, and often obscure, discussion of another part of tragedy, speech. This section deals with such topics as grammatical terms, usage, and metaphor. *Poetics* 23–24 discuss epic, constantly comparing it with tragedy. Chapter 25 focuses on poetical problems and solutions, and chapter 26 concludes our *Poetics* with a comparison of epic and tragedy, arguing that tragedy is superior.

Aristotle and Plato. Plato has a very low opinion of most poets and other imitators, holding that they are mere makers of images, products "third from the truth" on the ontological scale, and ethically base as well, capable of corrupting the souls of even the best people. He consequently excludes most poets from his ideal state, welcoming only the imitators of the good, who make hymns and encomia. Plato does, however, invite lovers of poetry to speak in prose on her behalf, if they can show that poetry is not only pleasant but also beneficial to cities and individuals (*Republic*, book 10). Many scholars believe that Aristotle takes up this challenge in the *Poetics*. They argue that Aristotle refutes Plato's ontological criticisms by attempting to show that the poet's art is a true *technē*, a craft with definite skills and goals, and objective criteria by which its products may be evaluated. Plato's ethical criticisms, it is held, are refuted primarily by Aristotle's theory of catharsis, according to which poetry purges, purifies, or clarifies undesirable psychic elements, rather than strengthening them. Although these arguments are plausible, it is important to recognize that they are based on inferences from few explicit statements in the *Poetics*. Aristotle gives rules, whether normative, prescriptive, or both, for a *technē* of poetry, and he connects imitation in general with a pleasure in learning that is characteristic of philosophers (chapter 4). He also holds that tragedy imitates people "better than us" (chapter 3), and appeals to a "better audience" (chapter 26). On the other hand, Aristotle never mentions Plato and he says little about the specific ethical, psychological, or intellectual effects that tragedy has on its audience. Although Aristotle was undoubtedly influenced by Plato's aesthetic views, his concerns in the *Poetics* are very different from those of his predecessor. Aristotle's primary goal is not to defend poetry on ethical or metaphysical grounds, but to give a detailed account of the specific ways in which each genre accomplishes its own goals.

Imitation (mimesis). Plato holds that imitations are mere images, like those produced mechanically and passively by a mirror. For Aristotle, however, imitation is a much more active and creative process, producing objects that have a kind of life of their own. Aristotle frequently uses biological analogies, comparing plot to a living animal, or to the soul of an animal. He also gives imitation an important role in education and learning, and he holds, as noted earlier, that it has an essential connection with human nature itself, because humans are the most imitative of all animals (chapter 4). Unfortunately, Aristotle nowhere gives a detailed theoretical account of imitation, but leaves us to draw inferences from scattered remarks in the *Poetics* and elsewhere. In the *Poetics*, imitation includes a wide range of activities. Among the imitative crafts are music, dance, painting, and poetry; among the objects of imitation are characters, emotions, and actions (chapter 1), and "things as they were or are, things as they are said and seem to be,

or things as they should be" (chapter 25). It is imitation rather than meter that makes the poet (chapter 1). Unlike the historian, who relates particular events that actually happened, the poet as imitator relates things that are probable or necessary (chapter 9). In other works (e.g., *Physics* 199a), Aristotle states that "craft imitates nature." Although Aristotle's concept, or concepts, of imitation are hard to pin down, it is clear that imitation is neither simply representation, nor representation plus similarity—although imitations in some sense stand for, and are similar to, the objects they imitate. Perhaps the best that can be said is that imitation is a human activity that, like natural processes, creates products with intelligible structures organized for the sake of an end (*telos*). [See the following article for an extended discussion of *mimesis*.]

Catharsis. Catharsis is the most widely known and discussed of all Aristotle's aesthetic concepts, and it is also the one about which he says least. In the *Poetics*, the term occurs only twice, once in the definition of tragedy as "imitation . . . by means of pity and fear accomplishing the katharsis of such emotions" (chapter 6), and once in chapter 17, where it refers to a ritual purification. The complete absence of explanation has led to much speculation about the philosopher's meaning. Some argue that a lost second book contained a discussion of catharsis. They see evidence for this in a statement in book 8 of Aristotle's *Politics*: "What we mean by katharsis we will state now in general terms, but again in the works on the poetic craft we will speak of it more clearly" (1341b). Others deny that this is a reference to our *Poetics*, and argue that, in any case, the subjects and goals of the *Politics* are very different from those of the *Poetics*.

Many translations and interpretations of the term have been proposed. The following categories are among the most important. (1) *Medical.* According to Jacob Bernays ("Aristotle on the Effect of Tragedy," in Barnes, Schofield, and Sorabji, 1979), catharsis is a *purgation* analogous to a medical purge. *Poetics*, book 8, where Aristotle compares catharsis to a medical treatment, is frequently cited in support of this view. (2) *Ethical.* According to G. E. Lessing (quoted by Bernays), catharsis is a *purification* of the emotions, by means of which undesirable elements are removed from them. In favor of an ethical view of catharsis, Richard Janko cites *Politics* 8, where catharsis is said to reduce excessive emotion, as well as many post-Aristotelian ancient sources in which poetry is said to produce ethical and intellectual virtue. (3) *Intellectual.* In the view of Leon Golden (1992), catharsis is an *intellectual clarification*. In support of his view, Golden cites chapter 4 of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle states that people learn by means of *mimesis*. (4) *Structural.* According to Gerald Else (1957), catharsis does not operate on the emotions but on the pitiable and fearful events of the plot. In favor of his view, Else cites the absurdity of holding that pity and fear can produce, homeopathi-

cally, a catharsis of pity and fear. Else is one of the few modern scholars to challenge the now dominant homeopathic interpretation. In the Renaissance, however, many scholars, such as Vincenzo Maggi, held that catharsis is not homeopathic but allopathic, in that pity and fear purge the soul of emotions unlike themselves: anger, greed, lust. I have recently argued for an allopathic view of catharsis (Before, 1992). In the complete absence of explicit internal evidence, all interpretations of catharsis must rest on a combination of inherent plausibility, consistency with the *Poetics*, and a judicious use of external evidence.

Hamartia. In chapter 13, Aristotle states that the best plot represents someone changing from good reputation and good fortune to bad fortune, not because of vice, but because of a great *hamartia*. Aristotle does not explain *hamartia*, but merely cites Oedipus as an example. Because his statement is ambiguous, it is disputed whether the Oedipus example illustrates the whole pattern, including *hamartia*, or only the fall from good fortune. Although *hamartia* is often identified with the "tragic flaw" of pride, this is not what the Greek term means, for *hamartia* is cognate with the verb *hamartanō*, "miss the mark," and it refers to a mistake, whether intellectual, ethical, or both. Most scholars agree that *hamartia* in the *Poetics* cannot be a seriously vicious error, for Aristotle states that a vicious person cannot arouse pity, and he explicitly contrasts vice and *hamartia*. There is disagreement about nearly everything else, however. *Hamartia* is taken to refer either to a nonvicious ethical error, or to an intellectual mistake, or to include both kinds of errors. Aristotle's example, Oedipus, raises new difficulties, for there is no agreement about the nature of Oedipus's mistake in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Those who argue for the ethical interpretation of *hamartia* argue that Oedipus's irritable temper led him to kill his father, or that his skepticism about the oracle is impious. Others argue that his error is instead purely cognitive, a failure to recognize his parents. Still others deny that Aristotle connects Oedipus with *hamartia* at all, and argue that he is merely cited as an example of a person who changes to bad fortune from great good fortune. Whatever *hamartia* means, it is clear that it is not an essential part of every play, but is found only in some plays with unhappy endings.

Influence of Aristotle's Poetics. The *Poetics* was lost sometime during antiquity. No indisputable trace of its influence is found in Hellenistic literature or in such Roman aesthetic works as Horace's *Ars poetica*. After its reappearance in Renaissance Italy, however, the *Poetics* has been the single most influential work on aesthetics in the Western tradition. Every study must in some way take its ideas into account, whether to accept, reject, or adapt them. Nor is the influence of the *Poetics* limited to aesthetics. Catharsis as a psychological term has become part of our everyday speech. The idea, now widespread in many fields, that stories or narratives are an important way of constructing real-

ity undoubtedly owes much to Aristotle's views on the primacy of plot. On the other hand, textual difficulties and conceptual obscurities in the *Poetics* can easily lead to misunderstandings about what the philosopher actually says. Although the three "unities" of French seventeenth-century drama are often thought to be derived from Aristotle, only unity of action is firmly grounded in the text; unity of place has no foundation in the *Poetics*, and unity of time is based on a controversial interpretation of an obscure passage. The common view that every Aristotelian "hero" has a "tragic flaw" is based on a very questionable interpretation of *hamartia*. The pyramid, drawn on many a high-school blackboard, of action rising to a climax and falling to a catastrophe is often associated with Aristotle's distinction between complication and resolution. However, Aristotle does not mention a dramatic climax, and he has no concept of rising and falling action. The pyramid is derived from Gustave Freytag's imaginative adaptation of Aristotle (trans., *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*, New York, 1894). *Catharsis* is commonly used today to refer to a relief, produced by art or therapy, from painful, excessive, or unhealthy emotional states. This idea is not derived directly from Aristotle, but from a Freudian interpretation of the *Poetics*. Freud was no doubt influenced by his father-in-law, Bernays, whose "purgation" theory of catharsis is only one of many. Finally, modern attempts to apply Aristotelian principles to modern genres, such as the novel or the film, often fail to take into account the fact that the philosopher was not concerned with all possible kinds of literature, but with a very limited range of genres, and that in most of the *Poetics*, he was dealing with only the single genre of Greek tragedy. [See also Katharsis; Plato; Poetics; and Tragedy, article on Greek Tragedy.]

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Aristotle on Mimesis

Aristotle's *Poetics* opens with an analysis that differentiates tragic drama from other species of poetry and music as distinct forms of *mimēsis* (mimesis), while leaving mimesis itself in the dark. Its meaning begins to emerge when Aristotle turns to consider the natural source of the art of poetry and locates it in a distinctively human imitative capacity: the living being who is at once the unique possessor of logos—language and reason (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b30–98a4)—and the "political animal," whose potential is to be realized by living together with others (*Politics* 1253a3–10), is at the same time "the most mimetic" of all animals (*Poetics* 4.1448b7). That this is no mere coincidence is suggested by the twofold notion of mimesis in which the roots of the poetic art are to be found.

On the one hand, from childhood on we are inclined to imitate and the first things we learn are by imitating (4.1448b4–8): the process by which we acquire our native language, or that by which we form our dispositions of character, testifies at once to our being by nature imitative, sociable, and potentially rational. In such behavioristic mimicry, we assimilate ourselves to another; a certain distance, on the contrary, is required for the natural experience associated with mimesis in another sense, that is, the special pleasure that accompanies contemplation of an image.

Even, or especially, when the object of such a representation is in itself something painful to see—such as "shapes of the most dishonorable beasts," Aristotle suggests, or corpses—there is a peculiar pleasure in contemplating the most precise possible likeness of it (4.1448b9–12). Aristotle explains this experience by referring, once again, to learning, which is most pleasant, he grants, not only to philosophers but even to others—to whatever small extent they share in it; only this kind of learning, productive of pleasure, is not a matter of habituation, but the recognition that results from seeing an image and inferring. "This is that" (4.1448b12–17). Aristotle suggests what is at stake in such a recognition when, in *Parts of Animals*, he encourages the study even of "the more dishonorable animals," which, however repulsive to perception, furnish immense pleasure to one who is able to "recognize the causes," that is, one who is by nature philosophical; for if we appreciate images

of such creatures that manifest the artfulness of the craftsman, surely we should enjoy contemplating the organism itself, where nature exhibits the beautiful through the fittingness of parts to whole and the absence of chance (*Parts of Animals* 645a6–24). Tragic drama, if it is analogous, would produce its peculiar pleasure by transforming the ugliness of the action it represents; unless a sequence of events could have in itself the teleological design of an organism, tragedy would accomplish this transformation, not by the uncovering of a hidden order of nature, but by the construction of one through its mimetic art.

Although our experience of contemplative pleasure may be as natural as our imitative inclination, the mimetic representation that produces it is not. The subordination of one of these senses of mimesis to the other—the natural to the artful—guides the argument of the *Poetics* as it moves through three stages. In the first, an analysis differentiating the species of poetry within the genus of mimetic art (chapters 1–3) prepares for a genetic account of tragedy and comedy as expressions of the distinctive natures of the poets (chapters 4–5). Once tragedy has been differentiated from the outside and observed in its coming into being, the argument moves, in a second stage, to analyze its “being” or “substance” (chapters 6ff.), as determined by plot, the internal principle that makes the mimetic work one and a whole. The seemingly self-enclosed mimetic work has, however, as a third stage of the argument reveals, a function (*ergon*) that involves its effect on the spectator (chapters 13–14); but this effect, far from reinstating the mimetic assimilation of ourselves to another, results, rather, from our contemplation at a distance of the beautifully constructed plot.

It is the first stage of the argument of the *Poetics* in which mimesis as a natural inclination for imitation is most at home. Employing, like other species of poetry and music, rhythm, harmony, and logos as the means by which its mimesis is carried out (chapter 1), tragedy is separated from epic on the basis of the manner in which the poet expresses himself—in drama he never speaks in his own voice but remains hidden behind his characters (chapter 3), and from comedy on the basis of the character type that is the object of the poet’s mimesis (chapter 2), for “the imitators imitate those acting” (1448a1). This ambiguous statement might seem to fit best the actors on stage, in their impersonation of dramatic characters. “The imitators” must refer in the first place, though, to the poets, for it is to a difference in their natures that the split between two kinds of drama is being traced: at the outset, the more serious poets represented beautiful actions and characters, the inferior poets actions of the inferior (4.1448b24–26). But insofar as the characters of tragedy are divided from those of comedy in being “better than us” or worse, while both may have to be in some respects “such as ourselves” (2.1448a1–5, 15.1454b9–12), it is we, the audience, who provide the standard; if we in turn, then, emulate, in the case of tragedy, the

superior figure through which the poet has already projected his own nature, we too would count as imitators who “imitate those acting” and mimesis would proceed, not just from the real person to the fictional image, but in the opposite direction as well.

The notion of a mimetic chain that passes from the poet through his dramatic character to the spectator (cf. Plato’s *Ion* 535c–536d) disappears almost without a trace once the argument of the *Poetics* turns, in its second stage, to the question of what tragedy is in itself. The primary sign of this turn, for that reason, is a change in the identification of the object of mimesis: tragedy, according to the definition of its being, is the representation of an action and it is only because it is the mimesis of a *praxis*, Aristotle argues at this point, that tragedy must represent those who are acting (6.1450b3–4). What makes the drama’s representation of an action one, complete, and a whole is the “arrangement of the incidents” or plot (*muthos*). Character must be as subordinate to plot, therefore, as color is to outline in a painted representation. Plot is the “end” (*telos*) of the drama (6.1450a21–22) because it is “as it were, the soul” of it (6.1450a37–38), and the soul, according to Aristotle, is the same in a sense as the whole animal whose life principle it is.

In unfolding the ways in which plot confers on a sequence of events a unity and completeness analogous to that of a single organism, Aristotle makes it clear that tragedy’s mimetic representation cannot be a passive “mirror of nature.” The limits plot sets on the action it represents—a beginning that does not follow from anything else and an end from which nothing else follows—constitute a frame imposed by art that no sequence of incidents in life would seem capable of supplying. The action that plot represents is rendered beautiful not only by its order, but also by its magnitude: whereas events in life are apt to be like the very small animal, of which our view is confused, or like one so gigantic that we cannot take in the whole, the mimesis of action in tragic drama aims at a magnitude that makes manifest its articulated parts and the whole to which they belong (7.1450b34–1451a6). By its own logic, plot binds together the sequence of incidents it represents in accordance with necessity or probability (9.1451a36–38): probability seems to be a standard for the correspondence of the representation to our expectations about reality—how certain sorts of persons would act in certain sorts of situations—whereas necessity must be a standard for the coherence of the representation in itself, of which no part could be transposed or removed without destroying that whole. Because in reality chance is ineliminable, and even the improbable has its place, both principles serve to transform the contingency of life into the teleological design of the mimetic work. This transformation makes poetry the mimesis of that which could or would happen, and in this respect “more philosophical” than history, whose proper object is that which has actually happened (9.1451a36–b7).

The account of tragedy as a self-contained whole, with plot as its internal *telos*, is initiated by the formal definition of tragedy as the representation of action (chapter 6), for which Aristotle claims to have gathered up the material from the preceding discussion. Nothing prepared, however, for the concluding element of that definition, which establishes not what tragedy is but what it does, in “accomplishing through pity and fear the katharsis of such passions” (6.1449b27–28). In this function lies tragedy’s power to “lead souls” (*psychagogoi*, 6.1450a32–34). The introduction of this function in the definition of tragedy anticipates a third stage of the argument, in which the mimetic work comes to be understood in some relation to its audience, and it is this relation that in fact provides the requisite criterion for evaluating the formal whole of tragic plot.

In the midst of criticizing episodic plots, which violate the principles of probability or necessity, Aristotle recalls that tragic plot must be a mimesis, not just of complete action, but of that which is fearful and pitiable. That requires a sequence of incidents arranged one as the consequence of another, but at the same time contrary to expectation. Aristotle offers, in illustration, the story of the statue of Mitys at Argos: while being contemplated by the murderer of Mitys, it suddenly fell on his head and killed him. Even what does come about by chance, Aristotle comments, seems most wondrous when it appears to have occurred in a providential way (9.1452a1–11). The most beautiful construction of such a sequence of incidents is the accomplishment of a privileged plot structure—“complex” as opposed to “simple.” Its distinctive features are “reversal,” when the action turns not just on a change of fortune—every drama has that—but on a moment that leads to precisely the opposite outcome from what was intended by it, and “discovery,” when the logic of events that brought about that unintended result comes to be recognized by the character involved in it (chapters 10–11). In a complex plot, the action of the whole, in which the tragic character’s intention is embedded, reveals who he is in a way that his own intention could not; such a plot, in being mimetic of pitiable and fearful things, accomplishes most beautifully the function of tragedy (13.1452b30–33).

Plot can be the *telos* of drama without sealing it off from any relation to its audience because it is the arrangement of the incidents in itself, ideally, that contains tragedy’s power to “lead souls.” The effect produced on the spectator, referred to in the definition of tragedy, without further explanation, as a matter of “catharsis,” seems to be one with, or necessarily accompanied by, the “peculiar pleasure” tragedy aims to produce “from pity and fear through mimesis” (13.1453b10–14). If, in actual experience, pity is a luxury that the state of fear precludes (*Rhetoric* II.8), what allows both to affect us together must be our perspective as spectators, who identify with the tragic character enough to fear while standing back to pity what we think of as his un-

deserved suffering. The mimetic assimilation of oneself to another is not entirely suppressed, then, by plot as the representation of an action; it is the natural response that has been harnessed in the service of plot, so that tragedy can achieve the function of arousing its peculiar pleasure. Such a pleasure was illustrated, originally, by the experience of contemplating the precise image of a repulsive animal and coming to recognize, “This is that”: this ugly and unintelligible creature is beautiful when mind discovers its hidden design or order. If the tragic character, in his discovery, comes to recognize his unintentional crime as belonging to some design of the gods or fate, what the spectator discovers, with his double vision, is not that, or not only that, but the design of the plot as the product of the mimetic art of the poet.

[See also Mimesis; and Plato, article on Mimesis.]

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Aristotle on Form and Unity

Concepts of form and unity are fundamental to Aristotle’s understanding of mimetic works of art and our experiences of them. His remarks on the subject are terse but pregnant: they convey a position whose mature poise renders it a still valuable and influential reference point in aesthetics. Some of these remarks, however, have often been considered too

much in isolation, with the result that Aristotle's stance has frequently been misconstrued as formalist, where that denotes a doctrine of self-sufficient form that is independent of representational, referential, or expressive value.

In the general terms of Aristotelian philosophy, form is what makes an entity essentially what it is. Form is the structure or organization that gives something its specific nature and allows it to fulfill its function. But since the world is not encountered simply as a collection of discrete individuals, form can also be grasped as that which makes something a certain *kind* of thing (a man, a tree, a tragedy). Form is a property of particular things, but a property that embodies the common nature of classes of things. Aristotle sometimes uses a work of art to illustrate this area of his thought: he distinguishes, for example, the form that makes a statue a recognizable artifact from the material of which it is made (*Physics* 7.3, 245b9–16, *Metaphysics* 7.7, 1033a5–23, 1035a1–9). To apprehend a statue is not to identify its physical composition but to perceive the intelligible design that it possesses. We should therefore expect Aristotle, when addressing representational art in its own right, to treat form not as an autotelic principle, but as a major dimension of how mimetic works, both as particulars and as instances of types (genres), can be meaningfully interpreted. That is indeed what we do find.

Aristotle's most explicit remarks on artistic and aesthetic form occur in the *Poetics*. Especially illuminating is the following: "A beautiful object, whether an animal or anything else with a structure of parts, should have not only its parts ordered but also an appropriate magnitude: beauty consists in magnitude and order, which is why there could not be a beautiful animal which was either minuscule . . . or gigantic. . . . So just as with our bodies and with animals beauty requires magnitude, but magnitude which allows coherent perception, likewise plots require length, but length that can be coherently remembered" (*Poetics* 7.1450b34–51a6).

This compressed passage allows us to observe several key aspects of Aristotle's thinking. First, form is a principle that applies equally to artifacts and to organisms; but that hardly makes Aristotle an organicist, since he conceives of artistic form not as developing quasi-spontaneously from within, but as imposed by the maker's rational control: "by art/craft (*technê*) come the things whose form is in the soul [of the maker]; and by 'form' I mean the essence and primary substance of things" (*Metaphysics* 7.7, 1032a32–b2, cf. 1.6, 988a2–4). Second, not all forms are beautiful, but only those whose structure is matched by an appropriate size or scale. Scale, as *Politics* 7.4, 1326a33–b5, makes clear, is related to function; that is why Aristotle states the appropriate size for tragedy in terms of its defining concern with certain kinds of human happening ("the size which permits a transformation to occur . . . from adversity to prosperity or prosperity to adversity," *Poetics* 7.1451a12–14). Third, the conditions of beauty do not amount to an a priori prescrip-

tion; they are extrapolated from the parameters of human perception and judgment: a gigantic animal cannot be beautiful insofar as *we* cannot see beauty in it (because "contemplation of it has no cohesion, but those who contemplate it lose a sense of unity and wholeness," *Poetics* 7.1450b39–51a2). Finally, unity is construed as nothing other than wholeness and perfection of form.

Form, then, is simultaneously an intrinsic property of a work of art and the unifying principle of its representational nature. To discern form is to discern significance. But whereas some modern aestheticians have used "significant form" to denote a completely autonomous aesthetic feature, independent of reality in general and fitted for disinterested contemplation, the significance of form within Aristotelian aesthetics is inseparable from the mimetic character of works of art. For reasons rooted in the Greek tradition, Aristotle scarcely reckons with purely abstract artistic or aesthetic features (though *Poetics* 4.1448b18–19 alludes to their existence). Form consists of an organization of parts, but an organization that functions as the bearer of meaning. The form and unity of a work of art cannot be explicated, on Aristotle's model, without at least implicit reference to the world. Thus unity is not a self-contained condition, but implies a certain kind of imagined reality: "Just as in the other mimetic arts [including music, dance, and the visual arts] a unitary mimesis has a unitary object, so too the plot [of tragedy], since it is mimesis of an action, should be of a unitary and indeed whole action" (*Poetics* 8.1451a30–32). The object of mimesis need not be some identifiable particular in the world; indeed, the finest poetry, which is Aristotle's main concern, aspires to the philosophical condition of conveying universals (*Poetics* 9.1451b5–10). But the point remains that form and unity inside the work of art constitute a structure whose intelligibility connects it to the world outside the work. In a passage of the *Politics*, Aristotle states that pleasure and pain in the experience of mimetic art are closely related to pleasure and pain felt toward actuality, and he writes: "For example, if someone enjoys contemplating a portrait of someone for no other reason than the depicted form, he is bound to find it pleasant to contemplate the person who is the subject of the portrait" (*Politics* 8.5, 1340a23–8). Although the example is deliberately simple, and ignores the possible complexity of aesthetic pleasure (cf. *Poetics* 4.1448b10–17), it confirms that the form of a representational work, and the way in which it is interpreted, cannot be divorced from the kind of reality that is the subject of the work.

In the case of tragedy, where Aristotle puts his principles most fully into practice, form and unity are analyzed as features of plot (*muthos*). Aristotle calls plot "the first principle and, as it were, soul of tragedy" (*Poetics* 6.1450a38–9): just as soul is the "form," the organizing principle, of a natural body (*De anima* 2.1, 412a19–21), so plot is the essential form of a tragedy. When discussing tragic plot, Aristotle

makes many technical points about the shapes of plays: he distinguishes "simple" from "complex" plots, for example, and employs concepts such as "reversal," "recognition," "episode," "complication," and "dénouement." But these and other details are all defined in terms that call for reference to the human subject matter of drama: what counts as an episode, for example, depends on the judgment of what is or is not integral to a certain sequence of action. Moreover, the identification of generic components and plot patterns is subordinate to the guiding thesis that unity of plot, beauty of tragic form, is constituted by the representation of "a unitary object," that is, an action that can be followed and understood as a coherent pattern of events (of the appropriate, fear-and-pity-inducing kind). That is why Aristotle repeatedly invokes the criteria of "necessity and/or probability" (*Poetics* 7.1451a12–13), for these supply the standards of causal, logical, and explanatory connection by which we find, or fail to find, intelligibility in human life and the world in general, and by which the dramatic representation of action must consequently also be appraised.

To judge artistic form is not, however, to measure it in some straightforward way against common or average reality. On the contrary, Aristotle repeatedly allows for divergence between the representational field of mimesis and ordinary experience of the world: the life of a particular individual, for instance, may lack the degree of unity that is desirable in a tightly knit plot structure (*Poetics* 8.1451a16–19); and the mimetic arts as a whole are not restricted to depicting types of reality that are known to have occurred (*Poetics* 9.1451b4–5, 25.1460b8–11). This means that what will count as necessary or probable depends very much on both generic conventions and the particular context. The application of criteria of coherence or unity will always start from relationships within the work itself, and will accommodate the genre-related expectations of consistency that cultural tradition has established. But coherence in a mimetic art will ultimately, on the Aristotelian account, require reference to canons of sense that cannot themselves be exclusively artistic: the interpretation of form and unity must draw on notions of what the world is really like.

Everything said so far points to the conclusion that a distinction between form and content is difficult in Aristotelian terms. Of course it is possible to generalize content discursively, in the sense that we can speak, say, of a myth that has been used by several poets, and comment on the different forms that they have given it. Equally, works on different subjects can, at a certain level of abstraction, be considered as having the same, or very similar, form: hence Aristotle's remark that "it is right to count plays as different or the same principally by plot: that is, 'the same' means having the same complication and dénouement" (*Poetics* 18.1456a7–9). But in the case of any given work, form and content will be closely interlocked. This is implicit in the concept of a

tragic plot structure, which is defined as "the mimesis of the action. . . . the construction of events" (*Poetics* 6.1450a3–5). In the strictest sense, the form of a tragedy is its plot-structure—the design embodied in its depiction of a nexus of action.

Unity is not something over and above form; it is completeness and perfection of form. In the case of tragedy, completeness is defined in terms of the sequence, "beginning, middle, and end" (*Poetics* 7.1450b26–7), and in elucidating this formula Aristotle again invokes the principles of necessity and probability. What matters for unity of structure and form is not just *any* sense of closure, but a certain sort of plausibility, a plausibility based (for drama) on the connections between a play's constituent events. True beauty of form entails the integration of the parts; it cannot be achieved by individual or discrete elements: "a painter would never allow a figure to have a foot that was disproportionate, however beautiful it might be in itself" (*Politics* 3.13, 1284b8–10). Proportion, *summetria*, is an important source and aspect of beauty (cf. *Metaphysics* 13.3, 1078a36–b1), but the discernment of aesthetic proportion rests on cognitive attention to a work's figurative, narrative, or dramatic substance.

The views presented here amount to a paradigmatic model of "closed" form, in the sense of form that leaves little room for open-ended or unresolved significance. But the closed form that Aristotle advocates is not an ideal of autonomy or independence but of complete and lucid intelligibility. In this light, it is a mistake to interpret Aristotle as a prescriptive formalist in aesthetics, because to do so overlooks the link between his concepts of form and beauty and his mimeticism. The subtlety of Aristotle's position has long suffered, moreover, from confusion with certain reductive and rule-bound products of neoclassicism, especially the Renaissance doctrine of the three unities. Aristotle can fairly be said to have emphasized one kind of unity at the expense of others, but he did so not through doctrinaire inflexibility but from a considered perspective on aesthetic understanding. Schiller was therefore right, in his letter to Goethe of 5 May 1797, to contrast Aristotle both with those who overvalue purely external form in art and with those who ignore form altogether.

[See also Formalism.]

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Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity

Aristotle's aesthetic theory, now rightly recognized as lying at the root of modern aesthetics, semiotics, and art theory, was taken at face value in antiquity as applying only to literature, and specifically poetry. It was known during most of antiquity not from the *Poetics*, his difficult lecture notes (in two book rolls), but rather through other works of his, now lost, principally the dialogue *On Poets* in three "books." Indeed, his lecture notes were mostly unpublished until Cicero's time, whereas his dialogues always circulated widely, being, like Cicero's dialogues, popularizing works intended for a general audience. Even so, the *On Poets* contained, as well as biographical material about poets, an account of Aristotle's own poetic theory, overlapping considerably with parts of the *Poetics*. From a refutation in the *On Poems* IV of the Epicurean poet and aesthetic theorist Philodemus (c.110-35 BCE), we now know that it (a) distinguished between comedy and tragedy according to the characters represented (cf. *Poetics* 2), (b) argued that tragedy is superior to epic (cf. *Poetics* 5), and (c) claimed that tragedy achieves its effect through speech, not through song (*melos*). Elsewhere in *On Poems* Philodemus summarizes (d) Aristotle's theory of tragic and comic catharsis, another topic of the *On Poets*, as the Neoplatonists reveal (see later in this article). From other fragments we know that in it Aristotle (e) defined poetry according to mimesis, as including mime and Socratic dialogue (cf. *Poetics* 1), (f) discussed faults in poetry, using some of the same examples as in *Poetics* 15, and (g) reviewed the origins of the major poetic genres, including epic, elegiac, and didactic verse, dithyramb, tragedy, and comedy (cf. *Poetics* 4-5, but with poetic quotations and more historical detail).

Aristotle's dialogue was fundamental to literary biography and scholarship in the Hellenistic period, which was dominated by Peripatetic approaches; above all, the Homeric and tragic critic Aristarchus (d. c.144 BCE) was deeply Aristotelian in his assumptions and procedures. Yet it is uncertain even whether he knew Aristotle's *Homeric Questions*, a major work of literary interpretation of the Homeric epics (in six or nine "books"). The *On Poets* was also basic to early Hellenistic poetics, together with the cognate views of Aristotle's contemporaries Heraclides Ponticus and Theophrastus. Heraclides, however, argued that Homer aimed at both truth and entertainment, a crude dichotomy that Aristotle avoided, and Theophrastus drew a distinction between poetry and truth; also, the latter's definitions of the major genres lack the overarching cohesion of Aristotle's. The *On Poets* is lost, so

we cannot reconstruct its influence in detail; nonetheless, it is clear that there was eventually a strong reaction against Aristotelian aesthetics. Thus, the scholar-poet Callimachus (d. c.240 BCE) favored epic over tragedy, shorter over longer poems, and small topics over bigger ones, but still upheld Aristotelian ideals of unity and representation.

That the Hellenistic period was rife with multifarious critical theories has recently become clear from the writings of Philodemus, whose *On Poems*, in which he critiques them, is at last being reconstructed. Radical theorists generally went to one extreme or the other of the polarities that Aristotle had balanced so skillfully. Thus, Eratosthenes (c.274-194 BCE) held that the purpose of Homer's poetry was sheer entertainment, discounting the element of learning in Aristotelian *katharsis* (catharsis) through *mimēsis* (mimesis). Neoptolemus of Parium (c.200 BCE), on whose theory Horace is alleged to have based the *Ars poetica*, recast Aristotle's views in a more rigid manner, dividing poetics into *poesis* (plot construction), *poema* (versification), and *poetes* (the composer); this method of treating the subject, effectively separating form from content, became widespread. Others, the so-called *kritikoi* (Andromenides, Pausimachus, and Heraclodorus) broke completely with Aristotelian mimesis by arguing that the excellence of a poem lies solely in its sound, which can be appreciated by the trained ear alone; the sense is irrelevant. Some felt that word choice was paramount, others word order, but all insisted on that basic separation of form from content that Aristotle's theory had transcended. Crates of Mallos (d. c.150 BCE) advanced a similar theory, combining it with a search for allegorical interpretations of Homeric poetry.

By about 50 BCE, a reaction in favor of Aristotelian theory began, marked by the work of Philodemus. As an Epicurean, Philodemus insisted that poetry must bring pleasure, but he combatted euphonist theories vigorously; it is the mind that must be pleased, not the ear. For him, as for Aristotle, form and content are inseparable; if the words are altered, so is the sense. But the sense matters more. Philodemus's pupils included the greatest poets of Augustan Rome—Virgil and Horace. Under his influence, Virgil combined the attention to fine detail characteristic of Hellenistic poetry with an Aristotelian conception of great literature as being about significant human action to create the *Aeneid*; and Horace, in his *Ars poetica*, made an Aristotelian case for the need for Roman tragedy to match that of the Greeks, both in grandeur and in polish. The *Ars poetica* is thoroughly Aristotelian in its principles, although such direct parallels as there are may derive from Aristotle's *On Poets* rather than his *Poetics*. However, Pseudo-Longinus's *On the Sublime* may also be Augustan in date; although it takes the same side as Horace in calling for great, if imperfect, literature, it displays few signs of Aristotle's influence.

This revival of Aristotelian aesthetics had little to do with the publication of Aristotle's lecture notes, including the en-

tire *Poetics*, by Andronicus of Rhodes (c.50 BCE). The *Poetics* always had a limited circulation, and the corrupt state of its text confirms that it was rarely read; moreover, no Greek or Roman scholar ever wrote a commentary on it. Between the Augustan age and the third century CE, traces of Aristotelian aesthetics are rare. Aristotle's lecture notes began to be studied intensively in the philosophical schools, however, which eventually ensured their survival at the expense of his other works. The latest author who knew the *Homeric Questions* is Porphyry (c.234-304 CE). The *On Poets*, but not the *Poetics*, is still cited by Macrobius (c.430 CE) and Proclus (412-485 CE). The Neoplatonists attempted to reconcile the teachings of Plato and Aristotle while upholding the spiritual value of such classics of pagan literature as the Homeric epics. Proclus accepted that poetry was a mimesis of universals, but not in Aristotle's sense of generalized patterns of human action; instead, poetry could imitate the Platonic Forms directly.

The Neoplatonists also supply our clearest information about Aristotle's theory of tragic and comic catharsis. Aristotle's response to Plato's attack on poetry had also been a response to Plato's hostility to the emotions. In his *Ethics*, Aristotle argues that a disposition can be developed to feel emotion correctly, that is, in the proper circumstances and to the right degree; emotions, combined with understanding, then become a guide to right action. Poetry need not induce us to indulge emotions that should be suppressed, as Plato held (*Republic* X 605d-606d); on the contrary, it can help to habituate us to feel the correct emotional responses, and thereby to approach the mean between the extremes, where virtue lies. Here Aristotle's theory of mimesis is crucial: by watching a representation of the actions and sufferings of others, we can benefit from experiencing emotions that could be harmful if they were based on reality—painful feelings like pity and fear in the case of serious genres like tragedy and epic, and pleasant ones like laughter in the case of nonserious genres like comedy and invective:

When listening to representations (*mimēseis*), everyone comes to share in the emotion, even apart from the rhythms and songs in themselves. Since *mousikē* (i.e. literature and music) happens to belong among pleasant things, and virtue is concerned with feeling delight correctly and loving and hating correctly, clearly one should learn, and become habituated to, nothing so much as judging correctly, i.e. feeling delight in decent characters and fine actions. Rhythms and songs contain especially close likenesses (*homoiomata*) of the true natures of anger and mildness, bravery, self-restraint and all their opposites, and of the other character-traits: this is clear from the facts—we are moved in our soul when we listen to such things. Habituation to feeling both pain and delight in things that are like [reality] is close to being in the same state regarding reality.

(Aristotle, *Politics* VIII.5, translated by R. Janko)

We would hardly recognize this as the theory of catharsis mentioned in *Poetics* 6 and *Politics* VIII.7 if we lacked the

testimonies of Philodemus, Iamblichus (c.280-340 CE), and Proclus:

A poet represents a complete action. . . . Poetry is useful with regard to virtue, purifying, as we said, the [related] part [of the soul]. (Philodemus, *On Poems*, papyrus 1581, frag. I Nardelli)

By observing others' emotions in both comedy and tragedy, we can check our own emotions, make them more moderate and purify them. (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* I.11)

It has been objected that tragedy and comedy are expelled [from Plato's *Republic*] illogically, if by means of them one can satisfy the emotions in due measure and . . . keep them tractable for education. . . . It was this that gave Aristotle and the defenders of these kinds of poetry in his dialogue against Plato most of the grounds for their accusation against him.

(Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Republic*; Kröll p. 49)

Aristotle's equally important theory of comedy has also remained obscure until very recently. Remarks by him prove that he discussed catharsis, comedy, and the kinds of humor in *Poetics* book 2. Although quoted by Porphyry, book 2 now survives only in a brief, anonymous, and untitled summary, the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, in a Byzantine manuscript of around 920 CE, together with a fuller text of a limited portion of it in manuscripts of Aristophanes. Book 2 resembled book 1 in structure, including a recapitulation of the theory of mimesis, a definition of comedy, a distinction between comedy and invective (like that between tragedy and epic), and a survey of the qualitative and quantitative parts of comedy, which are the same as those of tragedy. It focused on humor rather than plot as the main feature of comedy, however, replacing the discussion of unity with that of the different types of humor. As *Poetics* 3 leads us to expect, Aristophanes is here the leading comic poet, as good as Homer and Sophocles in their respective genres, who attains a mean between the excessive buffoonery of earlier poets and the seriousness of later ones. Comic laughter concerns errors of body or spirit that are not painful or destructive (cf. *Poetics* 5). Comedy achieves a catharsis of the emotions concerned with pleasure, leading, for instance, to a mean between buffoonery and boorishness (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* IV 1128a4-7, b5-9), or to that between boastfulness and understatement. Aristotle's discussion of the purpose of comedy and tragedy, catharsis, corresponds to his account of the origins of those genres in *Poetics* 4-5. The identification of this summary as deriving from *Poetics* book 2 is controversial: critics complain that parts of it are too like Aristotle, and other parts too unlike him, but they cannot have it both ways, and a better identification has yet to be advanced.

The full text of *Poetics* book 2 evidently disappeared in late antiquity; because the Neoplatonists placed the *Poetics* last in the corpus of Aristotle's *Organon*, it was vulnerable to loss. *Poetics* book 1 survived to be translated into Syriac, probably around 700 CE, and thence into Arabic by Abū Bishr Mattā in

932 CE. It became influential in the Islamic world, with commentaries by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980–1037 CE) and Ibn Rushd (Averroës, 1126–1198 CE). The Greek text survives in only two Byzantine manuscripts, one tenth-century, the other fourteenth-century, in date. Although William of Moerbeke had translated it into Latin in 1278 CE, it remained unknown in the West until the Aldine edition of 1508 CE. Book 2 remained wholly lost until the discovery of the *Tractatus Coislinianus* by J. A. Cramer in 1839 CE.

[See also Katharsis; Mimesis; and Poetics.]

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RICHARD JANKO

Reception of Aristotle in Modernity

The *Poetics* of Aristotle has exerted its influence in the twentieth century in two important ways: first, as the subject of continuing scholarly inquiry that, after centuries of debate, has begun to reach a significant degree of consensus in the interpretation of key concepts; and second, as an important guide and stimulus for modern critics who are sympathetic to Aristotelian doctrine. Thus, Aristotle's famous definition of tragedy has taken on a different interpretative shape in the twentieth century from the one that dominated discussion in earlier centuries. The italicized phrases in the definition below have especially significant theoretical importance and have profited from insightful interpretation or reinterpretation by modern scholars:

Tragedy is a representation (*mimēsis*) of an action involving characters worthy of respect (*praxeōs spoudaia*) and one that is complete and has magnitude; it is presented in language that has been made pleasurable by each of the kinds of pleasurable enhancement separately employed in the various parts of the play; it is a representation of characters acting and is not presented through narration; by means of *pity and fear* it accomplishes the *katharsis* of such emotions.

At the center of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy as well as at the core of the modern reinterpretation of Aristotelian literary theory is the key concept of *katharsis* (catharsis). In this regard, as Kevin Crotty, writes (1994, p. 15, n. 32): "A consensus seems to be forming that tragic catharsis has to do with the increased understanding, or 'clarification,' of the emotions brought about by the tragic performance and the experience of emotion in response to it." The history of this significant interpretative development represents one of the major advances offered by twentieth-century scholarship in our understanding of Aristotelian aesthetics.

In his important edition of the *Poetics* published in 1909, Ingram Bywater included an appendix on the various translations of the term *katharsis* that had appeared from 1527 to 1899. Two interpretations of the term almost exclusively control these translations: *medical purgation* and *moral purification*. A thorough examination of medical purgation as a homeopathic or allopathic process has been made by Elizabeth Belfiore (1992). In 1979, Donald Keeseey noted that many modern critics of tragedy had abandoned Aristotle's

key critical term because they found the dominant philological interpretations of catharsis totally unpersuasive as an account of tragic effect. He was, however, also able to report on the development of a new "cognitive" interpretation of catharsis that then was only known to him through the work of L. A. Post and Leon Golden, but which, in time, has won additional adherents. Such cognitive views of catharsis, Keeseey (1978–1979) writes, were "in most respects consonant with several main lines of modern criticism" and would, "if accepted, make Aristotle's 'catharsis' once again a respectable critical term." Keeseey specifically cites John Gassner, who had argued that "enlightenment," which brings about "an understanding of cause and effect," was the decisive feature of catharsis. Other critics, not mentioned by Keeseey, also recognized an important cognitive goal in artistic experience. Francis Fergusson identified "perception" as the climactic stage of the audience's aesthetic experience; James Joyce used the term *epiphany* to describe the point at which an audience discovers the inner coherence of a work of art; and Austin Warren used the phrase "rage for order" to designate the goal of the poet and the aspiration of the reader of poetry.

In 1991, Mathias Luserke edited a series of nineteenth- and twentieth-century interpretative essays on the nature of catharsis. His volume reflects the powerful influence of Jacob Bernays, who revived the "purgation" theory of catharsis in the nineteenth century and extended its influence widely. The contributions of Schadewaldt, Flashar, and Pohlenz, included in Luserke's work, which he correctly judges still to be highly influential, operate in the shadow of Bernays's emphatic insistence on the role of medical purgation in the aesthetic response to tragedy. Luserke, however, included in his anthology two twentieth-century studies (Leon Golden, "The Clarification Theory of *Katharsis*" [and] Christian Wagner-Salzburg, "'Katharsis' in der Aristotelischen Tragödiendefinition") which argued for catharsis as "clarification."

What has occurred in the twentieth century in regard to catharsis is analogous to what Thomas Kuhn has called a "paradigm shift" in the natural sciences. Kuhn pointed out that scientific theories maintain their influence so long as their explanatory power remains broad and powerful. Whenever data are discovered that begin to subvert the explanatory power of a theory, and this happens with a certain regularity in the natural sciences, the possibility opens up for new theories to supplant the previously orthodox one. Not finding any definition of catharsis in the *Poetics* itself, scholars, over several centuries, sought guidance from (1) the use of that term in Aristotle's *Politics* to mean "medical purgation" and (2) the process of "purification" of such emotions as pity from excess and deficiency that is described in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The "purification" theory has had few defenders, but the interpretation of catharsis as "medical purgation" has been extremely popular.

Gerald Else (1957) called attention to serious weaknesses in this theory when he pointed out that the medical interpretation derived from the *Politics* "is inherently and infeasibly therapeutic" and "presupposes that we come to tragic drama . . . as patients to be cured, relieved, restored to psychic health." Else correctly asserts that there is not a single word in the *Poetics* to support such a view.

Although Else offered persuasive criticisms of the "purgation" theory, the view he himself presented of catharsis as a substitute for it has not gained wide acceptance. The interpretation that has emerged to challenge the dominance of "purgation" and "purification" is the "clarification" theory, which has its roots in philology, Platonic aesthetics, the history of medicine, and psychoanalytical theory. Crotty, cited earlier as discerning a developing consensus for the interpretation of catharsis as "clarification," lists Golden, Halliwell, Janko, and Nussbaum among the adherents of that view. Several uses of the term *katharsis* in Greek texts testify to the fact it bears the meaning "intellectual clarification," but an especially powerful demonstration of this fact is found in Plato's *Theaetetus* 230 D–E, where *elenchos*, the Socratic process of cross-examination, is described as the "greatest and most authoritative of all forms of *katharsis*." That *katharsis*, in the sense of "intellectual clarification," best meets the requirements of Aristotle's argument about the essential nature of poetry in the *Poetics* is clearly seen from his statement in chapter 4 that the fundamental pleasure and final cause of all artistic activity is the pleasure of "learning and inference." Neither "purgation" nor "purification" are close rivals to "clarification" in establishing a relevant and consistent bond with this requirement. Support for the clarification theory has also been provided by the work of the medical historian Pedro Lain Entralgo (1970) and the psychiatrist and classical scholar Bennett Simon (1978). Lain Entralgo persuasively argued that catharsis must be understood as an intellectual phenomenon rather than a somatic one because the "agent of tragic catharsis is not a material purgative, nor even a melody, but rather that airy, invisible, material and immaterial reality that we call the 'word'" (p. 235). Simon linked the cognitive aspects of tragedy and psychotherapy when he wrote that in drama "the tragic figures in the plays struggle with their relationships and obligations to those in their past, present, and, future. The audience acquires a new sense of the possibilities in being human and in coming to terms with forces that are more powerful than any one individual," while "in therapy we also expect an enlarged view of the possibilities that are open in relationships to the self and to others" (p. 144).

Mimēsis. In the twentieth century, much work has been done by Else, Koller, D. W. Lucas, McKeon, Sörbom, and others in unraveling the meaning of *mimēsis* (mimesis) in Greek philosophical thought. Lucas (1972, Appendix I, pp. 258–272) extrapolates from this material an accurate view

of Aristotle's doctrine of mimesis by correctly noting that the term can be rendered in different contexts as "imitate, represent, indicate, suggest," or "express." He accurately perceives that for Aristotle the appropriate mimetic form for a work of art is a "causally united structure" and understands that when the parts of a work of art are "in a necessary causal relationship with each other and the whole," then the work of art "reveals something about the nature of the action under the conditions obtaining in our world" (my emphasis). When one speaks of mimesis in the *Poetics*, then, one must understand a representation involving a causally connected sequence of action that leads to some sort of epiphany or clarification. This would be fully consistent with Aristotle's assertion in chapter 4 of the *Poetics* that the essential pleasure of mimesis is the intellectual pleasure of "learning and inference."

The translation here of the phrase *praxeds spoudaias* as "an action involving characters worthy of respect" follows the perceptive judgments of Lucas (p. 66) and Rostagni (1945, p. 32), who connect it to Aristotle's explicit identification of tragedy as a mimesis of superior kinds of human beings in his discussion of tragic character in chapters 2 and 4. The far more common translation of the phrase as "serious action" is based on a distinction between serious and nonserious literature that Aristotle nowhere makes in the *Poetics*.

Pity, Fear, Hamartia. Aristotle himself explicitly discusses the nature of pity and fear in chapter 13 of the *Poetics*. Pity, he says, refers to the emotion we feel when we observe someone unjustly suffering misfortune, and fear to the emotion we experience when we observe that it is someone like ourselves who suffers this unjust misfortune. Lucas (1972, Appendix II, pp. 273–275) recognizes that pity is an easily understood and widely shared emotion. Aristotelian "fear" (*phobos*), he correctly notes, is an experience that reveals "the precariousness of the human condition" and makes "men fear for themselves." What must also be connected to this discussion is the term *hamartia* (treated by Lucas in Appendix IV, pp. 299–307), which has been subject to considerable dispute but whose precise meaning in Aristotle's *Poetics* has been significantly clarified by twentieth-century scholars such as van Braam (1912), Hey (1927), Bremer (1969), and Dawe (1967). These scholars have shown that *hamartia* in the context of Aristotle's definition of tragedy cannot mean what it often means in other contexts: "a flaw of character." A serious "flaw of character" would subvert the status of the tragic protagonist, who must remain "worthy of respect" (*spoudaios*) to earn pity and fear in Aristotle's sense of those terms. Aristotelian *hamartia* must, rather, represent an intellectual error that could cause a fall from happiness to misery as required in tragedy without undermining the moral stature of the tragic hero.

Aristotelian Influence in the Twentieth Century. In addition to the scholarly reassessment of key terms in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, a strong neo-Aristotelian move-

ment within the field of literary criticism and theory has emerged in the twentieth century. This movement arose in the mid-1930s among a group of scholars at the University of Chicago in the departments of English, Philosophy, and Modern Languages. The most prominent of the originating members of this group were R. S. Crane, W. R. Keast, R. P. McKeon, E. Olson, N. Maclean, and B. Weinberg. A manifesto stating their beliefs and demonstrating their methods was issued in 1952 and edited by R. S. Crane. The "Chicago School" was attracted to the *Poetics* by its rigorous methodology and because Aristotle, in Crane's words, "made available, though only in outline sketch, hypotheses and analytical devices for defining literally and inductively, and with a maximum degree of differentiation, the multiple causes operative in the construction of poetic wholes of various kinds and the criteria of excellence appropriate to each" (p. 17). Neither they nor their second- and third-generation successors as neo-Aristotelian critics felt compelled to follow the strict "word" of Aristotle. Unlike the scholars discussed in the first part of this article, who have striven to understand the precise meaning of Aristotle's actual text and doctrine, the neo-Aristotelian critics have labored under a generalized Aristotelian inspiration with the license to adopt, adapt, or modify Aristotelian positions as they find it useful or necessary.

Great progress made in the twentieth century in developing a consensus on the interpretation of the key terms catharsis, mimesis, *hamartia* in the *Poetics*, although by no means is there yet universal agreement on the meaning of these concepts. On the basis of the work that has been done, it is very likely that continuing progress will be made in understanding the original significance of the aesthetic doctrines of the *Poetics*, just as it is most probable that neo-Aristotelian critics, by their skillful adaptations of Aristotelian theory, will continue to find new and imaginative ways to maintain the vitality and authority of that theory.

[See also Katharsis; and Mimesis.]

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ARNHEIM, RUDOLF. [To explore the work of Arnheim, a contemporary psychologist of art, this entry comprises two essays:

Survey of Thought Dynamics of Art

The first is an overview essay about Arnheim's psychology of art and its relationship to aesthetics. The second essay is by Arnheim, who here introduces a basic idea—dynamics—through which he proposes to understand some features common to all the arts. See also Perspective; and Tribal Art.]

Survey of Thought

Rudolf Arnheim (b.1904) has been a long-standing proponent of a perceptualist approach to (primarily visual) art

based on Gestalt psychology. His central work is *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*, published in 1954 and revised in 1974. Arnheim uses the central thesis of Gestalt psychology—visual organization—as a guide to the fundamental meaning of the work of art. Every work, whether figurative or nonfigurative, has what Arnheim calls a "structural skeleton," and the configurations that constitute this skeleton disclose the work's meaning. "Structure" and "organization" have both phenomenal and physical meanings, for in Gestalt psychology's drive toward a kind of monism within which value may be naturalized, perceptual states have been hypothesized to bear a formal or "isomorphic" structure to the underlying brain processes supporting them.

Arnheim's approach mitigates against obscure iconographic symbolism because this is seen to deal only in accidental, historical significances rather than "universal" spontaneous symbolism. For Arnheim, in fact, a true symbol is something that tells us something about its referent through its own appearance. Confronted with an *Annunciation*, for example, Arnheim would care little about the attributes of the angel and the Virgin; more interesting would be their bearing to one another, whether they share the same space, the means by which the artist might differentiate their realms. Arnheim's theory raises several problems for aesthetic theory. As a primarily psychological theory, how relevant is it to aesthetics? Is Arnheim's understanding of the nature of art useful? Are his theories of expression and representation enlightening? And, finally, can a perceptualist approach do justice to the variability of the historical reception of art?

Arnheim always identifies himself as a psychologist and perhaps shares the natural scientific antipathy to philosophical hairsplitting of his teachers, Max Wertheimer (1880–1943) and Wolfgang Köhler (1887–1967). As a specifically psychological theorist, what can Arnheim contribute to the *philosophy* of art? Arnheim might have helped matters if he had underscored the gestalt idea that phenomenological description is a necessary propaedeutic to psychological explanation. Regardless of his conclusions, Arnheim's writings could then be situated in a broadly phenomenological tradition, and, like phenomenological aestheticians, this descriptive phenomenology could be subjected to ontologizing. Gestalt psychology, however, has a delicate relation to the phenomenological/physical distinction. When Arnheim points to the "stresses" and "strains" in visual configurations, he is appealing to phenomenological facts, but when he appeals to brain dynamics underlying such percepts, it seems to undercut the authority of the phenomenological (Beardsley, 1980).

Although Arnheim has reflected on such problems (1966, pp. 51–73), the purported novelty of speaking in both objective and psychological senses has to be addressed. He might have relied on the efforts of Maurice Mandelbaum