

## Sucking the Juice without Biting the Rind: Aristotle and Tragic *Mimēsis*

Sheila Murnaghan

**A**RISTOTLE'S *POETICS* is one of the most authoritative and influential—and one of the most problem-ridden and unsatisfactory—works in the history of criticism: at once our most honored guide to the reading of Greek tragedy and a text that itself offers many problems of interpretation. For centuries, theorists and critics of tragedy have routinely grounded their arguments in Aristotle's formulations and terminology. And in many respects, Aristotle is an obliging authority, providing a handy definition of the genre and a series of suggestive labels for tragedy's main elements: *pathos* (suffering), *peripeteia* (reversal), *anagnōrisis* (recognition), *hamartia* (error), and *catharsis* (purification? purification? intellectual clarification?).

On the other hand, it is not always easy to apply the precepts of the *Poetics* to actual tragedies. Terms such as *hamartia* and *catharsis* are neither transparent in meaning nor equally applicable to all plays, and they have been most fruitful when mistranslated, as "tragic flaw," or "homeopathic cure." The overall theory in which those terms are found is obscured by silences and contradictions. More generally, the *Poetics* situates tragic action in a philosopher's universe, a secular and intelligible world devoid of tragedy's most powerful features: divine incursions into human affairs, unsolvable conflicts, events that human beings cannot understand or control. Many of Aristotle's most astute critics see him as denaturing tragedy by rationalizing it,<sup>1</sup> and others have chosen to treat the views expressed in the *Poetics* as extensions of Aristotle's philosophical positions rather than as insights into tragic practice. One recent commentator goes so far as to divide students of the *Poetics* into two camps: "those who care about tragedy and those who care about Aristotle."<sup>2</sup>

There is, in fact, a deep affinity between the argument of the *Poetics* and actual Greek tragedy, but we cannot locate that affinity by trying to elicit a coherent formula from the text and then applying it to every extant play. Rather we must understand Aristotle's theory as his own response to the fundamental challenge posed by the genre of tragedy, the challenge of presenting unacceptable experience in acceptable

form. The specific solutions Aristotle found to that challenge constitute not an exhaustive definition of the genre, but rather examples of how one might come to terms with the inherent problems of writing tragedy. To the extent that his solutions are contradictory, they point us to contradictions within the genre, and we will learn more from attending to Aristotle's paradoxes than from trying to argue them away. Despite his assured and systematic manner, Aristotle is truest to tragedy when he, like a character in a tragic plot, is caught in a dilemma.

The most glaring contradiction in the *Poetics*—"a deep dilemma in the theory of tragedy"<sup>3</sup> and the greatest obstacle in the way of eliciting a coherent theory from the text—is the contradiction between what is said in chapter 13 and what is said in chapter 14 about the best kind of tragic plot. In chapter 13, Aristotle goes out of his way to insist that the best kind of tragic plot includes an unhappy outcome: in the best plots, a character who is not morally bad suffers a fall into misfortune. Along with others whose stories fit this pattern, he mentions Oedipus, the hero of what often appears to be Aristotle's favorite play, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles; he criticizes audiences who prefer plots with happy outcomes; and he labels Euripides the most tragic of playwrights because so many of his plots end unhappily.

But in chapter 14 Aristotle ranks the type of plot exemplified by the *Oedipus Tyrannus* as only second best, behind a type most modern readers cannot see as tragic. In this new version of the best plot, a terrible *pathos* of the kind proper to tragedy, an act of violence between people who are related to one another, does not occur. Such an event is on the verge of occurring, but a recognition scene intervenes to prevent it, and the unhappy outcome toward which the plot was moving is averted: "someone about to do something irremediable through ignorance undergoes recognition before doing it."<sup>4</sup> This is a plot from which *pathos* is absent; it lacks what seems to be the essence of tragedy not only for Aristotle's puzzled exegetes, who variously invoke "romance" or "melodrama" as more appropriate labels, but for Aristotle himself, who has ended the previous chapter by relegating to the realm of comedy those plots in which "nobody is killed by anybody" (*P* 13.1453a38–39).

A number of explanations of the preference expressed in chapter 14 for plots in which *pathos* is averted by recognition rightly point out that such plots are not entirely devoid of *pathos*: if tragic actions are not present in actuality, they are present in prospect. Those prospective actions can have a comparable effect on the audience, arousing in them the emotional response proper to such actions while also sparing them the depiction of horrific and polluting events. This point is well stated by Gerald Else:

If the deed of horror to come is presented so vividly that we imagine it already performed, but then is cancelled before the blood has actually flowed, the pathetic effect is all the purer. The poet has enabled us, so to speak, to suck the juice without biting the rind. He has given us a *pathos*-in-essence, free from the actual goriness that would otherwise attach to it: an *idea* of the *pathos* which does duty for the thing itself . . . if the poet can achieve this *tour de force*—can communicate the full emotional impact of a *pathos*—without giving us one—he has achieved the ultimate so far as *pathos* and its related parts are concerned.<sup>5</sup>

Else's comment shows how a preference for recognition before action is not a departure from Aristotle's concern with *pathos*, but a logical extension of it, although Else is surely wrong to conclude that, for Aristotle, such a plot is better because a violent act is even more powerful if it is not actually represented. Aristotle seems well attuned to, and very much concerned about, the emotional impact of violent acts that are actually represented, and this concern generates the preference expressed in chapter 14 for violence that is not represented.

Else's characterization of a plot centering on unrepresented violence as involving the substitution of an idea for the thing itself points to the real attraction of this plot for Aristotle: the way in which an action that is strongly evoked but not actually performed replicates an essential feature of all *mimēsis*, or imitation. Any *mimēsis* is an evocation of an action that does not really happen, that is not really performed, that only gives the illusion of actually taking place. Thus any *mimēsis* shares the most salient feature of Aristotle's best kind of tragic plot, the plot in which "the deed to come is presented so vividly that we imagine it already performed" and the poet gives us "an idea of the *pathos* which does duty for the thing itself." In other words, Aristotle's ideal plot recapitulates within the play the kind of event that the play itself constitutes. Not only does the play imitate an action, but the action it imitates dramatizes the way imitation works. The play's contents include an element normally confined to its form: the fact that the action imitated is not actually taking place.

Accounts of *mimēsis* vary according to whether they play up or play down the inevitable difference between an imitation and the object or action that it imitates.<sup>6</sup> In Aristotle's version, this gap between object and imitation is foregrounded as a key element of *mimēsis*. In the opening chapter of the *Poetics*, he proposes a categorization of literary genres that equates *mimēsis* with fiction,<sup>7</sup> and throughout the treatise he stresses the idealizing capacity of *mimēsis*, its ability to portray things as they ought to be rather than as they are (*P* 2.1448a4–6, 16–18; 25.1460b11, 32–35).

Aristotle's insistence on the distance between imitation and object is

dictated by his project of defending tragedy. For tragedy is characteristically about events that ought not to happen, actions that people should not take, experiences that people do not want to have. In Aristotle's own formulation, which is representative although not exhaustive, tragedy focuses on acts of violence between *philoï*, "close friends or relatives" (*P* 14.1453b19–23), actions that compound the horror of death and physical suffering with the violation of ties that are supposed to be secured by their sanctity and their basis in nature. Such actions transgress against the rules of culture, which exist in part to protect people from just such experiences.

Not only are the events imitated in tragedy themselves unwanted, but imitations of them often inspire distaste and suspicion. This is not just because they are unpleasant to witness, but because of fears about imitation, which is thought to have magical powers. Magic itself is often based on imitation—a magical spell mimics in words the fertility it causes or pins stuck in a wax doll represent in advance the assaults to be suffered by a real human victim—and this efficaciousness may be seen as an inevitable consequence of imitation, whether it is sought or not. Drama, as a form of imitation that involves performance, is particularly likely to be ascribed this literally performative power. It is therefore not surprising that civilized structures are often wary of a genre like tragedy that imitates dangerous and disruptive events, or that a theorist of tragedy like Aristotle should need to address the fear that tragedy replicates and perpetuates those experiences that civilization tries to exclude from its bounds.<sup>8</sup>

For us, anxiety about the power of imitations to repeat themselves in real life centers on pornography, in print and on film, and on violence on television. In ancient Greece, that anxiety centered on performed poetry, especially drama. Wherever it surfaces, this concern tends to involve two intertwined models of how behavior is transmitted from art to life. One is a didactic model based on the assumption that people learn behaviors from representations; seeing an imitation gives them an idea that they then put into practice. This didactic model is often bound up with a less rational and scarier notion of a kind of psychological alteration brought about by the experience of spectatorship, expressed through metaphors of contagion, contamination, or possession. In fifth-century Greece, this provocative vision of a psychological takeover through art was characteristically embraced and celebrated by the sophist Gorgias as he evoked the enchanting power of *logos* in his *Encomium of Helen*: "I both deem and define all poetry as speech with meter. Fearful shuddering and tearful pity and grievous longing come upon its hearers, and at the actions and physical sufferings of others in good fortunes and in evil fortunes, through the agency of words, the soul is wont to experience a suffering of its own."<sup>9</sup>

The ability of represented events to repeat themselves in life becomes an issue for tragedy in particular in Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs*.<sup>10</sup> There tragedy is judged in terms of its didactic function, its role in molding Athenian citizens, and Euripides is faulted for his portrayal of events that lead the members of his audiences to behave badly—a defect not unrelated to his connections to sophists like Gorgias. In the opening rounds of his competition with Aeschylus, Euripides is made to define a successful tragic poet as one who makes people better (1009–1010) and then is taken to task for portraying women in the grip of illicit passions such as Phaedra and Sthenoboea whose stories have, as a consequence, been played out in the lives of his contemporaries (1048–1051). Aeschylus and Dionysus go on to blame the contents of Euripides' plays for the degenerate character of the Athenian population, which is said to be disputatious, disrespectful of authority, and out of shape (1069–1098). While Dionysus' reasons for his final choice of Aeschylus over Euripides are hard to pinpoint, it seems clear that the dangerous effects of Euripides' subject matter play a major role in his decision.

A more serious and thoroughgoing account of the subversive effects of tragedy—and one that is especially important for Aristotle's *Poetics*—is that of Plato in the *Republic*. Indeed it seems clear that Aristotle's defense of tragedy in the *Poetics* was framed as a response to Plato's attack in the tenth book of the *Republic*, where Socrates envisions himself regretfully but firmly dismissing poetry from the ideal city he is in the process of constructing.

While Socrates' ban applies to all forms of poetry other than hymns to the gods and praise of good men, and while Plato has several, quite complexly related objections to poetry, it gradually becomes clear that his greatest quarrel is with tragedy and with tragedy's power to recreate in the lives of its audience the undesirable experiences it imitates. Plato's assimilation of poetry in general to tragedy is signaled by his assertion that poetry characteristically imitates undesirable behavior or, as he formulates it, the inferior part of the soul.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, he focuses particularly on lamentation and grief as the experiences imitated in poetry—experiences that naturally accompany the violent and disruptive events of tragedy.

Plato's focus on grief as the subject of poetry allows him to advance a particularly subtle and complicated version of the claim that being a spectator in a theater can dangerously replicate the undesirable experience being imitated,<sup>12</sup> because grief is a species of dramatic action that is easily assimilated to the largely passive experiences of the spectators who watch a play. It becomes easier to argue that the presentation of undesirable action in the theater will inspire members of the audience to perform the same actions themselves and thus will corrupt them if that action already resembles the characteristic behavior of spectators.<sup>13</sup>

For Plato, grief is an inappropriate response to suffering because it is a continuation of the misfortune that inspires it—a useless perpetuation of pain that stands in the way of a cure. A spectator's sympathetic response to the suffering of tragic characters is thus a willing abandonment to an undesirable condition, which only perpetuates it further. "Even the best of us, when we hear Homer or some one of the other tragedians imitating one of the heroes who is suffering and drawing out a long speech in his grieving, or chanting and beating his breast, we take pleasure and, abandoning ourselves, we follow along, sympathizing and encouraging, and we praise as a fine poet the one who especially acts on us in this way" (605c10–d5).

The spectator is here characterized as virtually joining in the action (*hepometha*, "we follow along") and as wanting it to occur (*spoudazontes*, "encouraging"). The result of this participation is that he is more likely to replicate in his own life actions he had previously spurned as appropriate to a woman: this is the danger that lies behind the pleasure of praising and pitying "another man who, claiming to be a good man, grieves immoderately," a pleasure that seems innocuous, "on the grounds that one is seeing another's sufferings and this carries no shame for oneself." "For I think few are capable of reckoning that what someone enjoys in the case of others must have effects for himself: as he cultivates pity where they are concerned it becomes difficult to check it in the case of his own misfortunes" (606b1–8). Here, paradoxically, the spectator's awareness that what he is seeing is not actually happening to him only makes it more likely that in the future it will.

Plato's condemnation of poetry sets the terms for Aristotle's defense of it, and the argument of the *Poetics* is marked by several different responses to the claim that viewing an imitation is tantamount to experiencing what is imitated. One of these responses is rebuttal, and both Aristotle's account of *mimēsis* and his identification of *catharsis* as the proper effect of tragedy involve the counterclaim that seeing an imitation of something is very different from seeing the thing itself.

Early in the *Poetics*, Aristotle champions *mimēsis*, claiming that all people have an innate love of imitation that stems from the capacity of imitations to convey general truths (denied to *mimēsis* by Plato) that is grounded in imitations' distinction from the objects they imitate; as a result of this distinction, viewers of imitations do not surrender themselves to the experience represented but have an entirely different experience, one of learning.

There are things that we see in their actual state with distress, yet we take pleasure in viewing the most accurate representations of them, for example the forms of the most detested animals and corpses. The reason for this is that

learning is not only the greatest pleasure for philosophers but equally for others, although they participate in it in a more limited way. They take pleasure in seeing representations because it happens that as they view them they learn and draw conclusions about each thing, for example that this thing is that sort of thing. (P 4.1448b11–17)

The claim that the emotional response evoked by a *mimēsis* of something dreadful is a beneficial experience different from the response one would have to the thing itself reappears in explicit connection with tragedy in the notion of *catharsis* as the effect achieved by a tragic performance. *Catharsis* is a key element in Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, as is clear from its position in the definition of tragedy he gives in chapter 6, where tragedy is characterized as "through pity and fear accomplishing a *catharsis* of such *pathēmātōn*." But one of the chief puzzles of the *Poetics* is the discrepancy between the obvious centrality of *catharsis* to Aristotle's thinking and the absence of any explanation of what it is. What clarification is to be found comes from a passage in the discussion of musical education in the *Politics*<sup>14</sup> which is, by Aristotle's own admission, a sketchy account. An exact understanding of what Aristotle means by *catharsis* may elude us,<sup>15</sup> but, even without one, we can recognize that he has in mind an effect that is beneficial, transformative, and discontinuous with what causes it. The element of *catharsis* in the experience of viewing a representation means that that experience changes the emotional disposition of the spectator for the better, as really experiencing what is represented could not.

In the *Politics* passage, Aristotle specifies that *catharsis* brings about a change for the better in people who are subject to strong emotion. For those who are possessed by *enthousiasmos*, religious ecstasy, the experience of orgiastic music can leave them "restored as if having found healing and *catharsis*" (8.7, 1342a11–12). And to the extent that everyone is susceptible to emotions—notably, he specifies pity and fear—"it happens to all that there is some *catharsis* and they are lightened through pleasure" (8.7, 1342a14–15). *Catharsis* is like a medical intervention in the course of a disease, or like the removal of a weight from someone who is burdened; it alters the course of an emotional response so that it is no longer continuous with what produced it. In this way *catharsis* is crucial to Aristotle's answer to Plato, allowing him to deny the damaging equation between the experiences of dramatic characters and their onlookers that figures in Plato's condemnation. "Cathartic compositions" offer "pleasure without harmful consequences" (8.7, 1342a15–16). Like *mimēsis*, *catharsis* produces a *tour de force*, removing emotion by evoking it.

These two related notions—the idea that a *mimēsis* affects its audience

differently than would the object imitated and the idea that *catharsis* is the effect created by tragedy—allow Aristotle to present as desirable and admirable an art form filled with unnatural deaths and other acts of violence. They allow him to defend a genre in which people regularly kill their own relatives, and in which—as in what is described in chapter 13 as the best kind of tragic plot—a person who is not morally bad is nonetheless plunged into misfortune through the commission of a terrible crime. It is one of the great achievements of the *Poetics* that Aristotle is able to find a solution to objections so compelling and enduring as Plato's, arguing successfully against powerful and persistent fears about the dangers of imitation. At the same time, Aristotle himself also registers those fears. At points in the text he can be observed acknowledging and making accommodations to the very objections to imitative poetry that his own arguments dismiss, making room in his theory for concerns he would seem to have banished from it.

Much of Aristotle's vocabulary for poetry's effect on its listeners betrays a sense that works of art transmit the experiences they portray to their audiences. In chapter 6, he evokes the effect of tragedy with the verb *psuchagōgeo* and its cognate adjective *psuchagōgikon*, a verb which means to impose a movement on a soul, as in ghost-raising, or more metaphorically in persuasion, and which suggests a concept of art's effect close to that of Gorgias.<sup>16</sup> To describe the undesirable effect on an audience of the kind of plot that should be avoided (the downfall of an unexceptionably good man [*P* 13.1452b36] or the knowing murder of a relative [*P* 14.1453b39; cf. 14.1454a3]), Aristotle uses the word *miaion*, which is usually translated here weakly as "morally repugnant," but really means "polluted" and thus "dangerous" and "contaminating."<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle further registers a sense of continuity between an action imitated and the act of observing it through his efforts to circumscribe and moderate the dreadful actions imitated by tragedy. He makes those actions resemble the experience he has shown to be beneficial, the experience of being a spectator. This point brings us back to the issue with which I started, the significance of the second version of the best tragic plot introduced in chapter 14. For that plot, in which "someone about to do something irremediable undergoes recognition before doing it," incorporates within itself the changed course, the paradox of painful events that bring pleasure and profit, and the gap between seeing and doing that, for Aristotle, make watching a dramatic performance a beneficial experience.

In the ideal plot of chapter 14, *anagnōrisis*, or recognition of identity, becomes the central event of the drama. In the history of criticism, Aristotle's stress on *anagnōrisis* has generally been invoked to support a



vision of literary plots as centering on moments of insight, occasions when characters are forced to confront suppressed or unwanted truths about themselves or the world.<sup>18</sup> But that vision does not correspond to Aristotle's reasons for making *anagnorisis* so central to his most favored plot. What really interests Aristotle about *anagnōrīsis* is the way that recognition can forestall *pathos*, the way it can prevent an act of violence from taking place, and the way it supplants that act of violence as the main event of the play. This function is clear from Aristotle's summary of the plot of Euripides' *Merope* as an example of the best kind: "Merope is about to kill her son, but doesn't kill him and recognizes him instead" (*P* 1454a5–7).

A plot of this kind places at its center, not an act of family violence, but the realization that such an act was about to take place. The experience dramatized is not a certain action, but the perception that such an action might have occurred. As a consequence, the characters in the play become similar to spectators, who by seeing a play become aware of dreadful experiences, who learn that such things can happen, but do not actually undergo those experiences.<sup>19</sup> In such plots, tragic events come close enough to happening that, like the depictions of repellent animals cited in chapter 4, the play instructs its audience about what can happen. But by keeping those events prospective rather than actual, such a plot protects its audience from exposure to characters who act transgressively or suffer unjustly.<sup>20</sup>

If a character in a play is brought up short by a recognition scene and desists from an act of violence, he or she does not present the audience with a bad example of someone acting and suffering as they themselves should wish never to act or suffer, but rather with an image of their own instructive experience as spectators. The intervention of a recognition scene creates a gap between evocation and fulfillment that protects a play's characters from contamination by actual violence and suffering as the comparable gap caused by the play's status as *mimēsis* protects the audience from that same contamination. Both characters and audience become aware of the possibility of horrific, polluting actions, but do not actually experience them.

Aristotle also heightens the similarity between tragic characters and spectators by stressing cognition as an element of the audience's experience much as he stresses recognition as an element of the tragic plot. In general, Aristotle's conception of what happens to an audience has a much greater cognitive or intellectual dimension than Plato's.<sup>21</sup> As noted above, his defense of *mimēsis* centers on the claim that seeing an imitation is an educational experience. Specifically in connection with tragedy, Aristotle stresses the intelligibility of the successful tragic plot,

the way it places events within a comprehensible causal pattern so that even if they occur unexpectedly (*para tēn doxan*), they occur because of one another (*di' allēla*) (P 9.1452a4).

Aristotle further assimilates characters and spectators by emphasizing recognition as an aspect of spectatorship. In chapter 4 the learning derived from viewing an imitation is a form of recognition: "They take pleasure in seeing representations because it happens that as they view them they learn and draw conclusions about each thing, for example that this thing is that sort of thing" (P 4.1448b11–17, cf. *Rhet.* 1.11, 1371b8–10). In connection with tragedy, he defines the experience of fear, one of the two emotions with which audiences respond to tragedy, as involving a kind of recognition of kinship: in chapter 13, he specifies that fear is an emotion aroused by the misfortunes of someone *homoios*, "similar," presumably someone in whose place a spectator can imagine being.<sup>22</sup>

The function of at once evoking and withholding tragic events that is built into Aristotle's favored plot of averted violence is also a key feature, although in a less concrete form, of his second best plot, the kind represented by the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which "people unknowingly perform a dreadful act, then afterwards recognize the relationship" (P 14.1453b30–31). This is, of course, the ideal plot of chapter 13, now identified as including an episode of recognition. In such plots, tragic events do occur, but under carefully contrived circumstances in which the relationship between the participants that makes those events tragic is effectively removed, cancelled by the characters' ignorance of another's identities. When the action occurs, it is merely an encounter of strangers; it only takes on its proper horror later, when the family relationship is brought to light.

The functioning of such a plot points up how thoroughly the appeal of *anagnorisis* for Aristotle is tied up with its precondition, *hamartia*, a lapse of some sort that in this context particularly connotes ignorance of identity.<sup>23</sup> *Hamartia* is only referred to twice in the *Poetics*, but it performs the key function of explaining how characters who are not morally bad can come to be involved in transgressive and polluting acts. Thus it is invoked in chapter 13 to define the proper relations between the moral condition of the protagonist and the misfortune that befalls him: "someone who is not outstanding in virtue and justice, but who does not fall into misfortune through maliciousness and villainy, but rather through some *hamartia*" (P 13.1453a8–10). *Hamartia* makes tragedy acceptable by exonerating the characters tragedy imitates, protecting tragic characters, and by extension the spectators who identify with them, from the evil that attaches to their actions.

Even if *anagnōrīsis* does not occur in time to forestall an act of *pathos*,

as in the best type of plot, the *hamartia* that precedes *anagnōrīsis* drains that act of significance and transfers its horror—its capacity to evoke pity and fear—to the discrete, subsequent act of recognition. In either case, the central event of tragedy becomes an experience of cognition rather than a transgressive act, as transgressive action is displaced into the realm of the notional, existing only in prospect of retrospect. The shedding of kindred blood becomes something that almost happens or, as in the case of Oedipus, something that happens without anyone knowing it; the revelation of that near catastrophe, or of that unrecognized crime, can be sufficiently shocking and terrifying to convey the horror of the action—in a successful tragedy it must be—but it nonetheless occurs at a significant, mitigating distance from the actual performance of the deed. While the favored plot of chapter 13 has been demoted when it reappears in second place in chapter 14, it has also been refined through its association with *hamartia* and *anagnōrīsis* so that it hardly differs in this salient characteristic from the plot of averted misfortune that deposes it from first place.

The way these two kinds of recognition plot achieve the same goal of banishing violence between *philoī*, but at different levels of abstraction—one by literally excluding it from the plot and the other by excluding it from the moral implications of what does occur—reflects a close connection between what are presented as technical issues of plot construction and moral issues. The recognition scene, which Aristotle treats as a means of achieving effects of surprise, actually restricts the moral universe of tragedy: as Aristotle conceives of it, tragedy becomes a demonstration that people only want to kill their relatives when they do not know who they are.

Aristotle wants tragedy to be so constructed as to deny a central tragic insight: that people can want to harm those they are expected to love most, or even those whom they do love most.<sup>24</sup> He does not altogether rule out plots in which people knowingly harm their *philoī*, but he does marginalize them through his favored activity of ranking. In the hierarchy of types established in chapter 14, he ranks such plots no higher than third, citing the episode in which Medea in Euripides' *Medea* kills her own children. He further relegates such plots to the periphery of his theory by attributing them to *hoi palaioi*, "earlier playwrights," assigning them to a period when, according to his teleological vision, tragedy had not yet fully acquired its definitive form.

Predictably, Aristotle ranks lowest of all those plots in which characters knowingly intend to harm their *philoī*, but then do not carry out their intention—again citing a powerful episode from extant tragedy, Haemon's failed attempt to kill his father in Sophocles' *Antigone*. In explaining this view, he reverts to the position and terminology of

chapter 13, labeling such a plot *ou tragikon*, "not tragic," because *apathes*, "without *pathos*" (P 14.1453b29).<sup>25</sup> When the action in prospect is so alien to his moral vision, he rediscovers the importance of actual *pathos* and retreats from the claim implied in his choice of best plot that a prospective action can be as powerful as an actual one. In contradicting himself here, Aristotle betrays an ongoing awareness of the heightened impact of an event that is actually presented and not just evoked, an awareness that recurrently conflicts with his desire to expel actual performance from drama.

The most glaring contradiction of the *Poetics*—the contradiction between the best plot of chapter 13 and the best plot of chapter 14, with which this discussion began—turns out to be only the clearest manifestation of a contradiction that is basic to the thought of the *Poetics* and that is actually found within both of those plots: a contradiction between tragedy's need to present forcefully and convincingly extreme and horrifying acts and its need to keep those acts at a distance, denying in one way or another that they are really taking place. Defending tragedy, Aristotle adopts two contradictory strategies that are allied as responses to these conflicting demands. He endorses tragedy's evocation of horrific events under the controlled, distanced conditions of imitation, and he delimits the contents of tragedy so that it itself carries out the work of containing, controlling, and distancing its own contents.

The contradictory impulses that shape the *Poetics* can be found at every level of expression. Many of Aristotle's most suggestive formulations are inherently paradoxical. Events are most capable of arousing pity and fear when they happen *para tēn doxan di' allēla*, "unexpectedly because of one another" (P 9.1452a4), an expression that unites the shock of the abnormal with the reassuring realization that the abnormal is in accord with logic. Similarly, poetry is defined as presenting *pithanon adunaton*, "credible impossibility" (P 25.1461b11), which simultaneously affirms and denies the truth of poetic imitations.

Often Aristotle's own thought follows the pattern of the tragic plot, raising a possibility only to put it at a distance, whether at the level of the phrase or of the larger argument. For example, when *hamartia* is first mentioned, it emerges to counter evocations of evil and baseness that have just been called forth through litotes, "not through maliciousness and villainy . . . but through some error" (P 13.1453a8–10). The initial definition of *pathos* similarly begins by listing distinct instances of painful experience and then trails off into a comforting vagueness: "such as deaths out in the open, and physical sufferings, and woundings and everything else of that kind" (P 11.1452b12–13).<sup>26</sup>

Within the larger structure of the treatise, the treatment of *pathos* follows a similar pattern: once it has been mentioned in chapter 12,

along with *anagnōrisis* and *peripeteia*, as one of the three parts of the tragic plot, *pathos* remains oddly out of view for the rest of the discussion, while *anagnōrisis* and *peripeteia* are thoroughly elaborated.<sup>27</sup> Thus Aristotle gives *pathos* the same treatment in his text that, in his view, it ought to receive in tragedy. And, finally, this recurrent structure is also rehearsed in the progression from chapter 13, where Aristotle conjures up a dreadful misfortune, to chapter 14, where he reformulates it out of existence with the help of *hamartia* and *anagnōrisis*. The change in course represented by the progression from chapter 13 to chapter 14 of the *Poetics* implicitly recapitulates the changed course that is intrinsic both to an audience's experience of cathartic poetry and to the shape of the ideal tragic plot. Thus Aristotle reenacts in his theory the plot he prefers for tragedy.<sup>28</sup>

This tendency on Aristotle's part to turn his theory into a version of tragedy is only one manifestation of his constant project in the *Poetics* of replacing tragic actions with ideas that reflect them. As we have seen, this project is manifested in Aristotle's preference for a plot that substitutes knowledge of a near catastrophe for the catastrophe itself, and in his championing of a concept of *mimēsis* that stresses the difference between the imitation and the act imitated. It is also registered in Aristotle's attempt to dispense with the actual performance of a play. He downplays *opsis* or "spectacle" as an element in tragedy, claiming that the same effect can be gotten from reading a text of the play or even by hearing a summary of its plot (*P* 14.1453b3–7, cf. 6.1450b16–20; 26.1462a11–13, 17–18). And finally, the composition of the *Poetics* itself fulfills this goal. As an account of tragedy, the text substitutes an idealized, sanitized description of what tragedy should be for actual plays. In effect, the *Poetics* proposes a widening series of ameliorating substitutions: the substitution of imminent events for actual events; the substitution of an imitation of those imminent events for an experience of them; the substitution of reading or hearing about that imitation for a performance of it; and finally the substitution of a theoretical discussion for the plays themselves.

The surface composure of the *Poetics* is undoubtedly disturbed by Aristotle's conflicting impulses to defend tragedy's presentation of horrific events and to devise strategies by which those events are alluded to but never quite performed. But if the text is therefore pervaded by contradiction, that does not disqualify it as a description of actual tragedy. The contradictions of the *Poetics* are conditioned by the nature of tragedy itself, which has the paradoxical mission of giving acceptable form to unacceptable actions, of presenting the unrepresentable. As tragedy's apologist, Aristotle unsurprisingly vacillates between stressing tragedy's power to shock and terrify—to evoke what seems unrelievedly

horrific—and stressing tragedy's capacity to remedy, or undo, or distance that horror. His consequently unstable theory corresponds to the precarious and volatile model that tragedy itself must follow if it is to succeed and to be accepted within civilization.

Tragedy must represent forcefully and persuasively the most painful and transgressive things that human beings can do or suffer, and yet it must not present them so forcefully that they seem incapable of being contained. In fulfilling this mandate, tragedy always runs a double risk, on the one hand of trivializing and denaturing tragic events, on the other of making them seem so compelling—of making the momentum toward them seem so unstoppable—as to raise the fear that what is presented in the theater will spill over and contaminate the audience, causing those events to proliferate in real life. When it avoids both risks, tragedy can claim a double achievement of at once making visible and yet not really presenting the events it portrays. In this way it represents a *tour de force* that crystallizes an essential feature of *mimēsis* itself.

The close connection that really does exist between Aristotle's conception of tragedy and actual tragic practice can best be appreciated by focusing, as in the preceding argument, on the unstated affinity between the tragic plot as Aristotle conceives of it and tragic form. Aristotle's account of the contents of tragedy undoubtedly omits much of what is most powerful and unsettling in the actual plays: divine forces working unpredictably on human life, outbreaks of the irrational, characters so filled with murderous rage toward their *philoī* that they are not at all deterred from violence by knowing who their victims are. But the corpus of Greek tragedy contains many plays that do have happy endings and that do act out a substitution of recognition for *pathos* or some comparable displacement. And, at the level of form, tragedy does answer to Aristotle's conception of *mimēsis* as mediated representation rather than direct enactment.

Tragedy is notable for the indirectness with which it presents the main events of the myths it dramatizes. The most harrowing events of tragic plots—deaths, acts of violence, and other disasters—typically occur offstage and are presented in some mediated form, often through a messenger's speech. Tragedy communicates to its audience through a complex mixture of seen and unseen experiences,<sup>29</sup> and offers in this way a series of implicit commentaries on civilization's attempts to acknowledge and yet distance those actions and accidents that it places outside its bounds.<sup>30</sup>

The characteristic indirectness of Greek tragedy is usually understood in technical terms, as a way of dealing with the difficulty of presenting such events directly in a classical theater—an open-air space that lacked such equipment as lights, curtains, and trap doors.<sup>31</sup> But locating a

technical source for this phenomenon should not mean denying its close link to tragedy's thematic concerns and social function.<sup>32</sup> As this discussion has shown, the technical conditions of theatrical presentation are by no means incidental to the nature of tragedy.

The extant examples of Greek tragedy manifest the same combination of evocation and distancing of *pathos* that Aristotle implicitly seeks in describing and defending tragedy as a genre. However this phenomenon was thought of by classical playwrights and their audiences, it remained an indispensable constituent of the form. Indirectness of presentation may be an especially marked feature of our earliest examples, such as Aeschylus's *Persians*, which concerns itself with the virtually unstageable subject of a naval battle; but it persisted as tragedy became a more naturalistic form.

The persistence of indirection and its link to other than solely technical considerations is well illustrated by the two versions of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. The first version presented a transgressive situation—not violence between relatives, but its inverse, erotic desire between relatives—directly. Phaedra met her stepson Hippolytus on stage and declared her desire to him directly. Clearly this episode was technically presentable, but it proved unacceptable to its audience. Euripides felt compelled to contrive a new version, the version we now have, in which Phaedra's desire is communicated to Hippolytus indirectly, by her nurse acting as her intermediary, in a scene that takes place offstage.<sup>33</sup>

A further sign of the deep affinity between Aristotle's model and actual tragedy can be found in the unexpected resemblance of that model to a feature of tragedy that Aristotle wholly overlooks, its relationship to ritual. Aristotle's rationalized, secular, quasi legal vision of tragedy leaves no room for the ritual dimension that contemporary scholars are increasingly identifying as a major element of the genre. Aristotle pays no attention to the ritual setting of tragic performance, underplays the role of the gods in tragic plots, and gives an account of the origin of tragedy that is resolutely literary. And yet the plot he sees as the soul of tragedy (*P* 6.1450a37) functions much as does ritual, especially the kind of ritual that, like tragedy, is designed to address human involvement in violence and unnatural death, namely sacrifice.<sup>34</sup>

Like imitation in Aristotle's view, sacrifice is a practice that defines what it is to be human. Like a tragic *mimēsis*, a sacrifice is an enactment of human violence toward other human beings that does not really take place, in this case because the violence is displaced onto an animal rather than a human victim. Here too the occasion is controlled by a principle of substitution according to which a simulation of an event is put in the place of its actual occurrence. Most of those for whose benefit the ritual takes place participate vicariously, as spectators rather than as

direct participants. Those who do participate directly are protected from responsibility for a brutal action by a scenario through which the sacrificial animal is made to act transgressively and thus to earn its violent death, and by gestures suggesting the animal's ultimate regeneration, which Karl Meuli suggestively labeled a "comedy of innocence" (*Unschuldskomödie*).<sup>35</sup> These devices for indemnifying the participants in a sacrifice are strongly reminiscent of the contrivances of Aristotle's tragic plots: *hamartia*, which assures the innocence of the character who performs a violent act, and *anagnōrisis*, which rescues the victim from the fate for which he or she appears destined—both of which seem to belong more properly to comedy.<sup>36</sup>

One of the most salient differences between ritual and tragedy is that the scripts of plays are not preordained as are the procedures of rituals. The contents of tragedy are fluid and can always threaten the equilibrium of the genre by seeming insufficiently distanced, contained, or ritualized, as happened with the first version of the *Hippolytus* and other plays of Euripides (including some, like the *Bacchae*, that presented human beings as sacrificial victims). Aristotle's ambivalence about whether it is desirable for tragic drama actually to present tragic action points us to the ongoing dilemma that a tragic playwright confronted each time he constructed a new tragic plot, and shows how central to a play's meaning is the negotiation it carries out between allowing us to see what terrible things can happen and shielding us from being exposed to them directly.

#### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

#### NOTES

1 For example, Stephen Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition and Tragedy* (New Haven, 1983), pp. 81–90; Paul H. Fry, *The Reach of Criticism* (New Haven, 1983), pp. 11–46; Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory: The Problem of Conflict Since Aristotle* (Princeton, 1988), pp. 94–162; Stephen Halliwell, "Plato and Aristotle on the Denial of Tragedy," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 30 (1984), 49–71. For a more tempered statement of ways in which Aristotle's theory fails to match extant tragedy, in the context of a highly sympathetic reading of the *Poetics*, see Martha Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 10 (1992), 107–59.

2 Ruth Scodel, review of Elizabeth Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasure*, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (online), 4, no. 1 (1993), 1.

3 Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), p. 33.

4 Aristotle, *Poetics*, with Introduction, Commentary, and Appendixes by D. W. Lucas (Oxford, 1972), 14.1453b34–36; hereafter cited in text as *P* by chapter, page, line number.

5 Gerald Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 451. Other statements of the same view include Thomas Twining, *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry* (London,



1812), 2:126–29; Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 180–81; John Moles, “Notes on Aristotle, *Poetics* 13 and 14,” *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 29 (1979), 86ff. For a discussion of other explanations, see Moles, 82–85. These are essentially two: the first, going back to Lessing, is that chapter 13 defines the best overall plot, while chapter 14 is concerned only with the best scene; the second, going back to Bywater, is that Aristotle for one reason or another changed his mind between writing chapter 13 and writing chapter 14.

6 In the classical Greek tradition this variation is evident in the meanings of *mimēsthai* and its cognates, which encompass many forms of resemblance, including deceptive impersonation of another person, the following of a pattern of behavior, the depiction of a general character type through music and dance, and exact reproduction of a specific model. Some scholars have tried to arrange this spectrum of meanings into a diachronic scheme, tracing a development from the looser correspondence found in mime or dance to the more exact correspondence exemplified by naturalistic painting. See Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art* (Uppsala, 1966), for the argument that the original context of *mimēsis* (and the origin of the term) is the mime (*mimos*); H. Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike* (Bern, 1954), for a comparable argument that finds the origin of *mimēsis* in Pythagorean ideas about music and its role in ethical education. For sensible remarks on the dubiousness of such schemes and a helpful classification of pre-Platonic uses of the vocabulary of *mimēsis*, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 109–16. See also Gerald Else, “‘Imitation’ in the Fifth Century,” *Classical Philology*, 53 (1958), 73–90, 245, which includes a critique of Koller's thesis.

7 On the centrality of fiction to Aristotle's conception of *mimēsis*, see Thomas Twining, “On Poetry Considered as an Imitative Art,” reprinted in *Aristotle's “Poetics” and English Literature* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 60–64.

8 On the ongoing force of this concern, see Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 29–31.

9 Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen*, par. 9. Translation by George Kennedy in *The Older Sophists*, ed. Rosamond Kent Sprague (Columbia, S.C., 1972), pp. 30–67. On Gorgias's conception of the psychic processes involved in this reaction, see Charles Paul Segal, “Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 66 (1962), 99–155. On the magical dimension of Gorgias's ideas, see Jacqueline de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp. 3–21. As Segal points out (pp. 127–18 and nn. 103–5), the awareness of how art affects the soul of the listener that Gorgias here applies to poetry has affinities to, and probably derives in part from, notions about the emotional and ethical effects of music (itself, of course, an element in ancient Greek poetry), particularly those of Damon. See also Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike*, pp. 157–62. On Greek ideas about the role of music in forming ethical character, which play a large role in the poetic theories of both Plato and Aristotle, see Warren D. Anderson, *Ethos and Education in Greek Music* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

10 Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, in *Comedies*, II, ed. F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart (Oxford, 1907); hereafter cited in text by line.

11 Plato, *Republic*, in *Complete Works*, IV, ed. J. Burnet (Oxford, 1957), 604e1–605a6; hereafter cited in text by page and line number.

12 On this aspect of Plato's thought, see Paul Vicaire, *Platon: Critique Littéraire* (Paris, 1960), pp. 203–4; Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*, pp. 121–24. Outside the *Republic*, see esp. *Ion* 535e1–6; *Laos* 656b1–10.

13 Similarly, Plato's initial definition in the *Republic* of what poetry imitates stresses characters' emotional responses to their own actions even more than those actions themselves: “men performing actions either by force or willingly, and as a result of their actions thinking they have fared either well or badly, and in all this either grieving or rejoicing” (603c4–7).

14 Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1957), 8.7, 1341b32–1342a16; hereafter cited in text.

15 For references to and discussions of the various possible interpretations, see Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, pp. 225–26 n. 14; Richard Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London, 1984), pp. 139–42; Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 184–201; Jonathan Lear, "Katharsis," *Phronesis*, 33 (1988), 297–326, rep. in *Essay on Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton, 1992), pp. 315–40; Donald W. Lucas, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 272–90.

16 Although, as Lucas, *Aristotle's Poetics*, points out in his comment on this passage, the word is surprisingly absent from Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*. On this term and its Gorgianic connotations, see Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 64 n. 24; 189.

17 Robert Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 3–4; Arthur W. H. Adkins, "Aristotle and the Best Kind of Tragedy," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 16 (1966), 95–96. This sense is brought out well in Richard Janko's characterization of "*to mieron*" as the opposite of *catharsis* (*Aristotle on Comedy*, p. 142). Thomas Gould, noting that this is Aristotle's only known use of the term, connects it with Plato's strictures in *Republic* 10 against poetry as corrupting the soul of the listener (Thomas Gould, *The Ancient Quarrel Between Poetry and Philosophy* [Princeton, 1990], pp. 17–18).

18 On this tradition of fruitful misreading, see Terence Cave, *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 179–219.

19 On Aristotle's tendency to assimilate the experiences of dramatic characters and those of spectators, see Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition and Tragedy*, pp. 89–90; John Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (New York, 1962), p. 58. Because of this tendency, Gerald Else's famously idiosyncratic claim that *catharsis* should be located within the dramatic plot rather than in the experience of the spectators, while most likely wrong as a literal interpretation of the *catharsis* clause, involves a transference that is entirely in keeping with the underlying logic of the *Poetics*. See Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, pp. 224–32, 423–50; and now also *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, ed. Peter Burian (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986), pp. 156–62.

20 This displacement of *pathos* into a realm of unrealized possibility is a subtler version of a method Aristotle often relies on to limit what an audience is shown: the regulation of which parts of a larger story are actually dramatized and which remain *exō tou dramatos*, "outside the play," or *exō tou muthou*, "outside the plot." The kinds of events Aristotle recommends keeping out of sight include antecedents and consequences of the action that are unavailable to ordinary human intelligence and thus must be announced by omniscient divinities (*P*15.1454b2–6), and anything irrational or illogical (*P*15.1554b6–8; 24.1460a27–32). On this feature of the *Poetics*, see Deborah H. Roberts, "Outside the Drama: The Limits of Tragedy in Aristotle's *Poetics*," in *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 133–53.

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle recommends a similar combination of vivid evocation and temporal displacement when giving advice on how to arouse pity in an audience: speakers are urged to use histrionic methods, "placing before their eyes [pitiable events] on the verge of happening or just having happened" (*Rhet.* 2.8, 1386a34–35).

21 Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 25, 73–81. For a theory of *catharsis* that allies it closely to cognition, see Leon Golden, "Catharsis," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 93 (1962), 51–60, and now *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis* (Atlanta, 1992).

22 This sense of similarity between listener and sufferer is even more pronounced in the fuller discussions of pity and fear found in the *Rhetoric*. Cf. *Rhet.* 2.5, 1383a8–12; 2.8, 1386a25. Aristotle effectively defines an audience's response to tragedy as an expression of *homonoia*, the like-mindedness that creates bonds of *philia* and links good men together in a community (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.6). On *homonoia* as an attribute of tragic characters in Aristotle's model, see Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory*, pp. 126–36.

23 On the connotations of *hamartia*, see Jan Bremer, *Hamartia: Tragic Error in the Poetics of Aristotle and in Greek Tragedy* (Amsterdam, 1969); Lucas, *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 299–307; Martin Ostwald, "Aristotle on *Hamartia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*," in *Festschrift für Ernst Knapf* (Hamburg, 1958), pp. 93–108; T. C. W. Stinton, "Hamartia in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy," *Classical Quarterly*, n.s. 25 (1975), 221–54.

24 On Aristotle's unwillingness to accept that good characters can perform base and evil actions under the pressure of circumstances, see Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-Sufficiency," 156–58.

25 This contradiction is sometimes removed by taking *apathēs* to mean "not productive of tragic emotions," rather than "without an act of violence or suffering." But, as John Moles points out, this would be contrary to Aristotle's usage, especially in the *Poetics*, "Notes on Aristotle, *Poetics* 13 and 14," 87.

26 Fry, *The Reach of Criticism*, p. 18.

27 See B. R. Rees, "Pathos in the *Poetics* of Aristotle," *Greece and Rome*, 19 (1972), 1–2. Aristotle's paradoxical treatment of *pathos* makes it equally correct to say that *pathos* is in his theory "the basic, indispensable 'part' of the tragic plot" (Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, p. 229) and that "he might happily have wished it away" (Fry, *The Reach of Criticism*, pp. 18–19).

28 This affinity between Aristotle and a tragedian is beautifully, if unconsciously, captured by Bywater in his explanation of the discrepancy between chapters 13 and 14, where he glosses what happens in the *Poetics* in terms that could apply to a tragic plot: "It is his somewhat tardy recognition of the necessity of avoiding 'to miaron' that has caused this change of view" (Ingram Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* [Oxford, 1919], p. 225).

29 See Amy Marjorie Dale, "Seen and Unseen on the Greek Stage: A Study in Scenic Conventions," *The Collected Papers of A. M. Dale* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 119–29; Klaus Joerden, "Zur Bedeutung des Ausser- und Hinterszenen," in Walter Jens, *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (Munich, 1971), pp. 369–412.

30 Thus the full significance of tragedy depends on the dynamic between what is made visible and what is kept out of sight: to claim either that what happens offstage is unimportant, as Oliver Taplin does, or that what happens offstage is what tragedy is really about, as do those whom Taplin is arguing against, is to give only a partial account of the form. See Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 25–27.

31 See, for example, Peter Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions in the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 134–38; J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport, Conn., 1980), pp. 136–37.

32 See, for example, John Jones's comments on the significance of the mask in Greek drama (Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, pp. 44–45).

33 On the two versions of the *Hippolytus*, see William S. Barrett, *Euripides, Hippolytus* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 10–45.

34 For a review of the extensive literature on ancient Greek sacrifice and its relationship to tragedy, see Helene P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 17–64.

35 Karl Meuli, "Griechische Opferbrauche," *Phyllobolia für Peter von der Mühl* (Basel, 1946), pp. 185–288.

36 This parallel could also apply to the actors in the play as well as to the characters they portray. Plato in *Republic* 3 treats the experience of actors as a form of contamination, but Aristotle does not respond to this concern, perhaps because he so thoroughly discounts the performance aspect of drama in general. For the hypothesis that the lack of overt violence in Greek tragedy was, in fact, an outgrowth of its ritual origins and responded to a religious taboo on even feigned violence by actors, see Roy C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and Its Drama*, 4th ed. (Chicago, 1936).