Philip, invited Aristotle to tutor his heir, Alexander, who was then about 13 years old. Aristotle perhaps finished tutoring him around 340, and probably lived in Macedonia or Stagira and completed *Rhetoric.* In 335, when Alexander ascended the throne and departed for his campaigns in Asia, Aristotle returned to Athens and began his own school at the Lyceum. There, he taught poetics, Rhetoric, politics, ethics, and metaphysics, and probably also worked on his famous treatises like *Politics, Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Poetics.* After the death of Alexander in 323, when public sentiment against Macedonia was rising, Aristotle left Athens to live in Chalcis on the island of Euboea, where he died in 322.

Aristotle's intellectual achievement is stupendous. He was the first genuine scientist in history. He was the first author whose surviving works contain detailed and extensive observations of natural phenomena, and he was the first philosopher to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between observation and theory in scientific method. He identified the various scientific disciplines and explored their relationships to each other. He was the first great teacher to organise his lectures into courses. In that sense, the Lyceum was the first academic institute in which a number of scholars and investigators joined in collaborative inquiry and documentation. He was also one of the first persons in history to build up a library, a systematic collection of works to be used by his colleagues and his posterity.

Aristotle believed that the life of the philosopher was not reclusive and scholarly but absorbed with public affairs. Many Aristotelian scholars tend to state that only about a fifth of Aristotle's prodigious 150 speculated works survived and transmitted, usually imperfectly through manuscript copies during the Middle Ages. His treatises are often seen as obscure, because they were available only in libraries for study by other scholars, and not to be copied for reading by general readers. Another important aspect of his works is that they are study guides rather than polished works, which is mainly because of the abrupt transitions, frequent repetitions, and short hand references to other works or writers. Most of them are also particularly difficult to date, since they were probably composed and revised over an extended period.

His Works :

Aristotle's early works were written mainly in the form of dialogues that obviously show marked influences of his teacher Plato. His more mature works, however, depart from Plato's model in a number of significant ways. Stylistically, he replaces the literary approach with systematic expositions of particular subjects, more in the form of technical manuals, than dramatic accounts. He uses analysis as his method, which means examining objects by studying their component parts, and through differentiation and classification. Philosophically, looking at nature and the objects of the real world, Aristotle grounds his research on a more pragmatic basis than Plato. In so doing, he tacitly rejects Plato's fundamental concept of transcendental ideas or Forms that govern and generate reality. In his own terms, Aristotle often works from induction, drawing his general conclusions from the particular objects he observes, where as Plato usually works from deduction, drawing particular conclusions from his general metaphysical concept of being. Such differences between Plato and Aristotle help both students of philosophy and criticism to have a better grasp of various important aspects of early Greek criticism.

As you will read in this unit, *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method, which parallels that of his examinations of biology or zoology. He turns to the various categories of human artifacts, differentiating those made in language and eventually focusing on poetry and especially on the species-specific traits of epic and tragedy. He assumes a distinction between the wide class of objects that are humanly made and those that are naturally produced—between, say, a table and a tree. In treating poetry as a craft, Aristotle differs from Plato, who discusses poetry in terms of inspiration and the emotive transport of the poet—a line of thought that continues in 19th century Romanticism, exemplified by William Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of emotion." He limits the study of poetry to its observable kinds and its formal construction, more or less ignoring questions about its origins. Drawing on a wide range of literary examples,

mainly from Sophocles' celebrated tragedy *Oedipus Rex,* Aristotle in *Poetics* presents six salient parts of tragedy, in order of their importance—plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* suggests a different avenue for the study of literature. If you remember from your reading of Unit 1, Rhetoric as the study of figures of speech, but Aristotle defined it more broadly as the ability to see the available means of persuasion. Rather than seeing literary works in terms of their distinctive features and internal construction, it opens for consideration their affective and political dimensions as forms of public speech. Because of its focus on types of public speaking, the impact of the *Rhetoric* on literary study has been less direct than that of *Poetics.* However, its emphasis on audience response foreshadows subsequent theoretical approaches concerned with the reader, interpretation, and the political effects of literature. His distinction between poetics and Rhetoric reflects a perennial division in literary theory: the split between theories concerned with the internal properties of literature and those concerned with literature's external effects, especially on readers and society. Although Aristotle alludes to audience response in his discussion of catharsis in *Poetics,* he is most concerned with the material and formal causes of poetry. Such a focus has strongly marked modern Literary Criticism notably that of the New Critics like Wimsatt and Beardsley who explicitly disallow considerations of the audience as "the affective fallacy".

Other surviving works of Aristotle include the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 10 books, the *Eudemian Ethics* in 7 books, and the *Magna Moralia* (or "Great Ethics" in Latin). The *Nicomachean Ethics* is generally regarded as the most important of the three. It consists of a series of short treatises. In the 19th century, the *Eudemian Ethics* was often suspected of being the work of Aristotle's pupil Eudemus of Rhodes, but there is no good reason to doubt its authenticity. The concerns of Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* are explicit in this line: "It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: "Aristotle's intellectual ideas are stupendous." Do you agree?

Q 2: Mention some of the great works of Aristotle. What ideas can we have of them?

Q 3: What do you get in Aristotle's *Poetics*?

Q 4: Discuss the significance of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*?

3.4 ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*

Aristotle's main concern in *Poetics* is tragedy, which was considered the most developed form of poetry in his days. In this section, we shall try to have a detailed discussion on *Poetics.* Although many translations of the text of *Poetics* are available, the quotations in this unit, are mainly from Richard Janko's translation.

Poetics is a treatise of about not more than 50 pages, containing 26 small chapters. We can assume that it is a collection of the lectures that Aristotle delivered to his pupils. It is also believed that there is a second part, which is lost. If we have a look at the division of the chapters the first 4 chapters are devoted to poetry, the 5th chapter to comedy, epic and tragedy, the next 14 chapters exclusively to tragedy, the next 3 to poetic diction, the last 4 chapters to epic poetry and its comparison to tragedy. For the convenience of our discussion, let us discuss Poetics in terms of its chronological presentations of the different issues and ideas.

A. Aristotle's Observations on Poetry :

The text of *Poetics* begins with a declaration:

"Our topic is poetry in itself and its kinds, and what potential each has; how plots should be constructed if the composition is to turn out well; also, from how many parts it is [constituted], and of what sort they are; and likewise all other aspects of the same enquiry…Epic and tragic composition, and indeed comedy, dithyrambic composition, and most sorts of music for wind and stringed instruments are all,[considered] as a whole, representations. They differ from one another in three ways, by

using for the representation (i) different media, (ii) different objects, or, (iii) a manner that is different and not the same…Some people use colours and forms for representations, making images of many objects (some by art, and some by practice), and others do so with sound; so too all the arts we mentioned produce a representation using rhythm, speech and melody, but use these either separately or mixed."

After going through such a declaration, it should be clear to you that Aristotle's first consideration is the nature of the poetic art in general and representation or imitation in particular. While mentioning representation, Aristotle refers to three points of difference—its media, its objects and its manner. Like Plato, he too calls the poet an imitator, who like a painter or any other artist, imitates one of the three objects—'things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be'. Like Plato, he too believes in the natural pleasures of imitation. Look at these lines:

"Two causes seem to have generated the art of poetry as a whole, and these are natural ones. (i) Representation is natural to human beings from childhood. They differ from the other animals in this: man tends most towards representation and learns his first lessons through representation. (ii) Everyone delights in representations."

So, it is the pleasure of imitation that enables a child to learn his earliest lessons in speech and behaviour. It is quite natural for a poet or an artist to imitate. However, there is also another natural instinct helping the poet—the instinct for harmony and rhythm manifesting itself in metrical composition. Hence, Aristotle states:

"Those by nature most disposed towards these generated poetry from their improvisations, developing it little by little. Poetry was split up according to their particular characters; the grander people represented fine actions, i.e; those of fine persons, the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones, at first composing invectives, just as the others composed hymns and praise-poems. We donor know of any composition of this sort by anyone before Homer, but there were probably many [who composed invectives]."

This is how, as Aristotle describes, comedy, tragedy and epic poetry were born. Comedy became the representation of people who are rather inferior, tragedy of serious people, and epic poetry following tragedy in so far as it is a representation of serious people, which uses speech in verse. Again, with respect to length, tragedy attempts as far as possible to keep within one revolution of the sun or only to exceed this a little, but epic is unbounded in time; although the poets at first composed in the same way in tragedy as in epics.



LET US KNOW

You have noted that Aristotle laid more and more emphasis on tragedy as the best form of poetic art. You have also understood that tragedy is different from comedy and epics in many ways. It also seems that epics and tragedy, being the imitations of the noble actions of good men, are held to be superior to satire and comedy, which are often concerned with the mean actions of low men. However, between tragedy and epic, Aristotle holds tragedy to be more superior a form, because it is compact and often embellished through music and spectacular effects.

Then Aristotle makes a comparative analysis between poetry and history. The difference between the poet and the historian is that the later relates to what has happened and the former to what may happen. Since history deals with the particulars, poetry expresses the universal. Thus, **poetry is more philosophical than history**. Poetry therefore is not the reproductions of facts, but truths embedded in those facts that apply to all places and times. This is perhaps the meaning imitation for Aristotle, as well as a severe objection to Plato's idea of imitation. Taking tragedy as the highest form of poetry, he states that it arouses the emotions of pity and fear—pity at the suffering of the hero who does not deserve that suffering and fear of the worst that may befall him. Thus, the emotional appeal of poetry is not harmful, as Plato once believed, but health giving and artistically satisfying.

B. Aristotle's Observations on Tragedy :

Aristotle deals broadly with the characteristics of tragedy. He defines tragedy "as a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements used separately in the various parts of the play; represented by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions."This has so far been one of the best definitions of tragedy. By "embellished speech," he means which has rhythm and melody. Since the actors of a tragedy produce the representation, the ornament of spectacle will necessarily be a part of tragedy. And then, 'song' and 'diction' become the media in which they produce the representation. By "diction", Aristotle means the construction of the [spoken] verses itself; and by "song", he means that of which the meaning is entirely obvious. Since tragedy is a representation of an action, and is enacted by actual people, these people are necessarily of a certain sort according to their character and their reasoning. It is because of these that we say that actions are of a certain sort, and it is according to people's actions that they all succeed or fail. Action thus comprises all human activities, deeds, thoughts and feelings. It should be complete or self-contained with a beginning, middle and ending. If this order is somehow gets dismantled, the action is never complete or whole, and becomes haphazard or loose.

Then Aristotle moves on to discuss the constituent parts of tragedy. As he states: "So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six parts...These are plot (mythos), characters (ethos), diction (lexis), reasoning (dianoia), spectacle (opsis),and song (melos)." The media in which the poets make the representation comprise two parts – diction and song, the manner in which they make the representation, plot, character and reasoning, spectacle and the objects which they represent. Then, he proceeds to describe each constituent part one by one. Plot is described as the soul of tragedy. Plot is primary while characters are secondary. However, a character in a tragedy should be good, appropriate, life like and consistent. Since tragedy is a

representation of an action, for the sake of the action, people who act are necessary. By diction, he means language which has the same potential in the case of both verse and prose speeches. By Reasoning he means what is possible and appropriate in case of the speeches of civic life. It is that element with which people demonstrate that something is or is not, or make some universal statement. Of the remaining constituents—song is the most important of the embellishments, while spectacle is something enthralling, but is very artless and least particular to the art of poetic composition.

After Aristotle provides the definitions, he starts discussing the sort of structure of the incidents, since this is the first and most important part of tragedy. If tragedy is the representation of a complete action, the whole action should have some magnitude. A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and an ending. A beginning is that which itself does not follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. An ending or conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements. Completeness thus implies organic unity or natural sequence of events that is not to be disturbed. This is how he brings in the idea of a plot, which is the representation of the action through the construction of the incidents. The plot should have certain magnitude or a reasonable length, such as the mind may comprehend fully within a stipulated time. In his own words, the plot should be of a length, which can be easily embraced by the memory. Thus, as Lodovico Castelvetro observed, Aristotle brings in the ideas of the three unities – Unity of Action, Unity of Time, and Unity of Place, to discuss the structure of the plot. Aristotle also brings in the idea of simple and complex plot. In a simple plot, there is no puzzling situation, which often enters into a complex plot in terms of what Aristotle calls Peripeteia and Anagnorisis.

The Three Unities :

Lodovico Castelvetro (1505-1571) was an important figure in the development of Neo-classicism. It was his reading of Aristotle that led to a widespread adoption of a tight version of the Three Unities, as a dramatic standard. Subsequently, his "The Poetics of Aristotle in the Vulgar Language" came to be considered as one of the most famous Italian Renaissance commentaries on Aristotle's *Poetics.* In *Poetics,* while discussing action in a play, Aristotle states that the fable should be the imitation of one action, and of the whole of this and the parts of the transactions should be so arranged, that any one of them being transposed, or taken away the whole would become different and changed. Of time he states that Tragedy endeavours to confine itself to one revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit. Of space, he is less explicit, merely saying (when contrasting epic and tragedy), that tragedy should be confined to a narrow compass. In the 16th and 17th century Neo-classical critics of the drama in Italy and France strongly adhered to the unities.

C. Aristotle's Observations on Comedy :

In the text of *Poetics*, we find very little about comedy. However, as Aristotle discusses, the roots of comedy perhaps lie deep in satirical verses, which owes its origin to the earlier phallic songs in honour of the fertility God Dionysus. Comedy represents men as worse than they are. Satire ridicules personalities, while comedy ridicules general vices. While referring to men as worse than the average, he does not actually mean men who are wicked or vicious but men who have some defect or ugliness, which is not painful or destructive. They simply provoke laughter but cause no harm or pain either to themselves or to others. They are simply ludicrous which is a subdivision of the ugly.

D. Aristotle's Observations on the Epics :

The epic is earlier in origin than either tragedy or comedy. In its nature, it resembles tragedy closely, but differs from it in terms of form. As Aristotle states: "As for the art of exposition and representation in verse, it is clear that, just as in tragedies, the epic poet should also

construct plot that is dramatic, that it should be a single whole action that is complete, with a beginning, middle and end, so that it will produce the pleasure particular to it. The constructions of the incidents should not be like histories. Just as the sea battle at Salamis and the battle against the Carthaginians in Sicily happened at the same time, but did not contribute to the same end, so in addition, in sequential periods, one thing sometimes comes about after another, but from these there comes about no single end. This is what the majority of the epic poets do.

Referring to Homer, he states: “For this reason, as we said already, Homer appears marvellous compared to the others, in that he did not undertake to put into his composition even the Trojan War as a whole, although it has a beginning and an end. For the plot would probably have been too big and not easily seen as a whole; or, if it were moderate in magnitude, it would have been too complex in its variety of incidents. As it is, selecting a single part of it, Homer has used many of them as episodes.” Again, epic must have, the same kinds as tragedy, for it must be either (i) simple or (if) complex, (iii) an epic of character or (iv) one of suffering. Its parts, except for song and spectacle, are the same. In fact, it also needs reversals, recognitions and sufferings. Homer is the first epic poet to use all of these. In addition, he has surpassed all others in diction and reasoning. Epic differs from tragedy in terms of the length of its plot-structure, and its verse. Epics imitate life by narration and not by dramatic action and speech. It has no use for song and spectacle, which are integral part of acting. Meaning is communicated through mere reading or recitation. Homer deserves acclaim mainly because he alone among epic poets is so well aware of what he was doing.

Poetics ends with a citation of the relative importance of tragedy over other genres of poetry mainly the epic. As he states “So if tragedy is superior in all these ways, and also in achieving the function of the art (for tragedy and epic should produce not a random pleasure, but the one we have mentioned), it is obvious that it will be superior to epic as it achieves its end more than epic does. So, regarding tragedy and epic, in themselves, their kinds and their parts, as to how many there are and

how they differ, and what are the causes of doing well or not in them, and regarding questions raised and their solutions, let this account suffice."

Russell and Winterbottom write, *Poetics* is a work that does not so much describe the genres of tragedy and epic as analyse them to see what makes them what they are, how they have developed with some admixture of historical information. From *Poetics*, we somehow come to learn about the kinds of plays that Aristotle likes or dislikes. *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method. We find Aristotle turning to the various categories of human artefacts, differentiating those made in language and eventually focusing on poetry, especially on epic and tragedy. He assumes a distinction between the wide class of objects that are humanly made and those that are naturally produced-between, say, a chair and a tree. Aristotle limits his study of poetry to its observable kinds and its formal construction, more or less ignoring questions about its affective origins, which he regards as falling under the auspices of other pursuits, such as psychology or Rhetoric.



LET US KNOW

Plato and Aristotle:

Arguing against Plato, Aristotle defined and defended tragedy as a worthy form. Plato had condemned poetry in his *Republic* on several grounds like—poets don't know what they are doing, but merely reproduce the surface of things, theirs is expressions of emotion, rather than illustration of the dangers of giving way to emotion and exalting the greater privilege of thinking, as philosophers do. In his defence of tragedy in *Poetics,* Aristotle gives poetry the knowledge and moral weight that Plato had denied. Aristotle undertakes to examine the nature and differentiating qualities of imaginative literature with a view to demonstrating that it is true, serious and useful, unlike Plato who had shown it to be false, trivial and harmful. Aristotle's Catharsis is in fact an answer to Plato's notion that art corrupts by nourishing the passions. Instead, Aristotle implies that art gives them real and useful purgation. For example, by exciting pity and fear in us, tragedy enables us to leave the theatre 'in calm of mind, all passion spent.'



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What are the main issues dealt by Aristotle in his *Poetics*?

Q 6: Mention the three points of difference in Aristotle's ideas of imitation.

Q 7: What is Aristotle's definition of tragedy? How is it related to imitation or representation?

Q 8: What are the constituent parts of a tragedy? State their role in a tragedy.

Q 9: What, according to Castelvetro, are the three unities in *Poetics*?

Q 10: How does Aristotle view comedy and epic?

Q 11: How do Russell and Winterbottom assess the importance of Aristotle's *Poetics*?

3.5 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF THE TEXT

Central to Aristotle's discussions in *Poetics* is representation *(Mimesis),* and he opines that the best plots should have verisimilitude, which means, they must be plausible. He also stresses a logically connected order— an appropriate starting point, elaboration, and a dramatic end or resolution. The best resolution is one that shows a reversal *(Peripeteia)* of position for the main character, as well as the character's recognition *(Anagnorisis)* of his or her fate. Aristotle feels that the characters in tragedy should come from high positions; otherwise, their tragic circumstances would not be remarkable. He also prescribes that their fates be linked to their own error *(hamartia,* literally "missing the mark," though frequently translated as "flaw"), rather than from some accident or wickedness. He concludes *Poetics* somewhat technically by classifying parts of speech in his discussion of diction, sketching solutions to problems of interpretation, and comparing the genres of tragedy and epic. Though rooted in the literature of his own time and focused especially on a form of drama quite different from ours, *Poetics*

has continued to powerfully influence criticism. Let us now briefly discuss the important concepts of *Poetics* in some detail.

Mimesis or "imitation", "representation":

In literary criticism, mimesis or imitation has two applications— (1) to define the nature of literature and the other arts, and (2) to indicate the relation of one literary work to another which served as its model. In *Poetics* however, Aristotle defines poetry as an imitation of human actions. By imitation, he probably means something like 'representation' in its root sense. The poem imitates by taking an instance of human action and re-presenting it in a new medium or material—that of words. By distinguishing differences in the artistic media, in the kind of actions imitated, and in the manner of imitation (for example, dramatic or narrative), Aristotle first distinguishes poetry from other arts, and then makes distinctions between the various poetic kinds, such as drama and epic, tragedy, and comedy. You should note that from the 16th through the 18th century, the term imitation was central in discussing the nature of poetry. Critics differed radically, however, in their concept of the nature of the mimetic relationship and the kinds of things in the external world that works of literature imitate. With the emergence *Expressive Criticism* (the view that poetry is essentially an expression of the poet's feelings or imaginative process) in the early 19th century, imitation seems to have been displaced from its central position in criticism and literary theory.

Catharsis or "purgation", "purification", "clarification":

Aristotle uses the word Catharsis in his definition of tragedy in *Poetics*, but there has been much inconclusive debate on exactly what he meant. The key sentence is: "Tragedy through pity and fear effects catharsis of such emotions." Therefore, in a sense, tragedy having aroused powerful feelings in the spectator has also a therapeutic effect. After the conflict-ridden climax, there comes a sense of release from tension. Traditionally, Catharsis is rendered as 'purgation' and refers to the psychological effect of tragedy on the audience. Against Plato's condemnation of art for unhealthily stimulating emotions, which should be suppressed, Aristotle argues that audiences are not inflamed or

depressed by the spectacle of suffering in tragedy, but in some way released. Our subjective, potentially morbid emotions are extended outward, through pity for the tragic hero, in an enlargement, a leading out, of the soul. Therefore, tragedy moves us towards psychic harmony. A related, but less psychological, interpretation puts Catharsis into the context of Aristotle's argument that the pleasure peculiar to tragedy arises from the fact that our emotion is authorised and released by an intellectually conditioned structure of action. Alternatively, Catharsis may also be seen not as the result but as a process operating through the 'structure of events' which purifies, not the audience, but the events themselves. Therefore, Catharsis is the purification of the hero, which enables us to overcome horror.

Anagnorisis or "recognition", "identification" & Peripeteia or "reversal":

According to Aristotle, Anagnorisis and Peripeteia are the two key moments of tragic plot. Aristotle uses these terms in his *Poetics* to describe the moment of recognition (of truth) that gives way to knowledge. For Aristotle, the best kind of recognition is accompanied by a Peripeteia, a reversal of situation (from happy to miserable, for example). The classic example is Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in which Oedipus discovers that he himself killed Laiusm, his father, and married his mother. While, Peripeteia is the reversal of fortune to misfortune that guides most tragic narratives, including that of Oedipus. Aristotle defines recognition as "A change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune." In Aristotle's favourite example, Oedipus finally knows that he has killed his father and married his mother, and this recognition brings on the terrible conclusion of *Oedipus Rex*.

Hamartia or "miscalculation", "tragic flaw":

Hamartia primarily means an error of judgment, which may arise from ignorance or some moral shortcoming. Discussing tragedy and the tragic hero in *Poetics*, Aristotle points out that the tragic hero ought to be a man whose misfortune comes to him, not through vice or depravity, but

through some error. For example, in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex,* Oedipus impulsively kills his father and marries his mother out of ignorance. To understand Hamartia, we may look at the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as 'the imitation of an action that is serious . . . with incidents arousing pity and fear'. Although in *Poetics* Aristotle attempts a classification of the elements proper to tragedy, but very few Greek tragedies conform to his model. However, his concept of Hamartia, the act of the hero, which initiates the fatal process, suggests a basis for a more developed theory of tragedy. This Hamartia may be anything—a mistake over identity or deliberate crime or sin. This is always horrifying as it leads to the consequences of pain and destruction. Tragedy is a dramatisation of an individual's sense of life and society as constantly under threat from the arbitrary chances of fate and humanity's own innate savagery.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: Discuss the main concepts that Aristotle raises in his discussion of tragedy in *Poetics*.

Q 13: How would you like to discuss the idea of Catharsis?

Q 14: What do you mean by Anagnorisis and Peripeteia? How are they connected?

Q 15: How is Hamartia connected with a more mature sense of tragedy?

3.6 RECEPTION OF ARISTOTLE AS A CRITIC

In the century immediately after his death, Aristotle's works seem to have fallen out of circulation. However, eventually they came to form the backbone of some seven centuries of philosophy in the form of the commentary tradition. From the 6th through the 12th centuries, although the bulk of Aristotle's writings were lost to the West, they received extensive consideration in Byzantine and Arabic Philosophy, where Aristotle was so prominent that he became known simply as "The First Teacher". In this tradition, the notably rigorous and illuminating

commentaries of Avicenna and Averroes interpreted and developed Aristotle's views in striking ways. These commentaries in turn proved exceedingly influential in the earliest reception of the Aristotelian corpus into the Latin West in the 12th century. Interest in Aristotle continued throughout the Renaissance in the form of Renaissance Aristotelianism. The dominant figures of this period borrow much from Medieval Aristotelian Scholasticism, which reached a rich and highly influential end in the figure of Suárez, whose life in turn overlaps with Descartes.

However, the study of Aristotle has undergone several periods of relative neglect and interest. Today, philosophers of various schools continue to look to Aristotle for guidance and inspiration in many different areas, ranging from the philosophy of mind to theories of the infinite, though perhaps Aristotle's influence is seen most overtly and avowedly in the resurgence of virtue and ethics that began in the last half of the 20th century. Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* although its influence has not been as sustained or decisive as that of *Poetics,* proposes what the twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger called the first work of hermeneutics; that is, it considers how response too is a factor in interpretation.

Aristotle's seminal distinction between Poetics and Rhetoric has been crucial in contemporary debates over the proper object of literary criticism. Against the tendency fostered by the New Critics, and later by the deconstructive critics who advocated a close linguistic study of literature, we have witnessed a "Rhetorical turn" toward methods favouring attention to the personal, historical, and social effects of literary texts. Some object that such approaches address topics outside the purview of literary study. That is, they urge, a strict poetic view, arguing that literary criticism should focus on the distinctive attributes of literary works.

You should however remember that the modern speculation on *Poetics* began during the Renaissance, when it was rediscovered from fragmentary manuscripts and was taken as a rulebook for literary composition. The descriptions of formal unity influenced 17th century

European writers such as the French dramatist Pierre Corneille. While the 18th century writers sought to revive its precepts as "neoclassicism". In 20th century literary theory, *Poetics* was often considered foundational for formalist methods, which apply objective modes of analysis to linguistic artefacts. Subsequently, it influenced a wide array of critics, ranging from the Russian formalists like Boris Eichenbaum and the American New Critics like William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe c. Beardsley to the archetypal critics like Northrop Frye and the French Structuralists like Tzvetan Todorov.

Aristotle's systematic categorisation of genus and species and his comparison of tragedy and epic underlie all genre theory. Perhaps, most decisively, in Aristotle's systematic description of plot and its component parts, is grounded contemporary narrative theory. His scientific examination of poetry has been championed by the New Critics– W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks as "Aristotle's answer" to Plato, responding both to Plato's view of poetry as a degraded imitation twice removed from the reality of eternal Ideas or Forms, and to his suspicion of poetry as stirring emotions in a way that is dangerous for society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 16: In what ways, as the New Critics would like to suggest, is Aristotle's *Poetics* an answer to Plato's idea of poetry?



3.7 LET US SUM UP

Poetics, as you must have realised by now, deals mainly with poetry. Among other things, it aims to answer Plato's criticisms of representative art. According to Plato's theory of Forms, material objects are only imitations of original or 'real' Forms. Artistic representations of material objects are therefore only copies of copies, and so removed from reality. Moreover, drama has a specially corrupting effect, because

it stimulates unworthy emotions in its audience. In response to such Platonic ideas, Aristotle insists that imitation is natural to humans. Subsequently, in order to answer Plato's complaint that playwrights are only imitators of everyday life, Aristotle draws a contrast between poetry and history. The poet's job is to describe not something that has actually happened but something that might well happen. Thus, poetry is viewed by Aristotle to be more philosophical and more important than history, for poetry speaks of the universal, history only the particular. Another point Aristotle raises regarding drama, is that far from debasing the emotions, as Plato used to think, drama has a beneficial and purgatory effect on the audience. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, must contain episodes that arouse pity and fear to achieve a "purification" of emotions.



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Web Resources :

plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle/http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/34560/Aristotle/254726/Rhetoric-and-poetics



3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Yes,he is the first genuine scientist in history… …He is the first to observe natural phenomena purposefully… …he is the first philosopher to achieve a comprehensive grasp of the relationship between observation and theory… …he is the first to identity the various scientific disciplines and explored their relationships… …he is the first great teacher to organise his lectures into courses.

Ans to Q No 2: It is believed that Aristotle wrote nearly 150 books… …some of his great contributions are – *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, *Magna Moralia… …*one important aspect of his works is that they are study guides rather than polished works… …most of them are particularly difficult to date, since they were probably composed and revised over a period of time.

Ans to Q No 3: *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method… …here he turns to poetry and especially to the species-specific traits of epic and tragedy… …in treating poetry as a craft, Aristotle differs from Plato, who discusses poetry in terms of inspiration and the emotive transport of the poet… …here he draws mainly from Sophocles' celebrated tragedy *Oedipus Rex* to present the six salient parts of tragedy—plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle.

Ans to Q No 4: Aristotle *Rhetoric* deals with the ability of a work of art to persuade… …rather than seeing literary works in terms of their distinctive features and internal construction, it is concerned with

an external effect of literature… …its emphasis on audience response foreshadows twentieth century theoretical approaches concerned with the reader, interpretation, and the political effects of literature.

Ans to Q No 5: Aristotle's observation on Poetry which is divided into tragedy, comedy and epic… …the notion of Imitation which is different from that of Plato… …detailed observation on tragedy… …the distinction between poetry and history and so on.

Ans to Q No 6: While mentioning mimesis, Aristotle refers to three points of difference—its media, its objects and its manner… …as Aristotle writes: "Some people use colours and forms for representations, making images of many objects (some by art, and some by practice), and others do so with sound; so too all the arts we mentioned produce a representation using rhythm, speech and melody, but use these either separately or mixed."

Ans to Q No 7: Aristotle defines tragedy as **"**a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements used separately in the various parts of the play; represented by people acting and not by narration; accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions."… …tragedy is enacted by actual people who are necessarily of certain sort according to their character and their reasoning, while action comprises all human activities, deeds, thoughts and feelings.

Ans to Q No 8: The main constituent parts are: plot (mythos), characters (ethos), diction (lexis), reasoning (dianoia), spectacle (opsis), and song (melos)… …plot is the soul of tragedy… …characters in a tragedy should be good, appropriate, life like and consistent… … diction is the language which should have potential… …reasoning demonstrates people's ability to make some universal statement… …song is used mainly for embellishments… …spectacle is something enthralling, but least particular to the art of poetic composition.

Ans to Q No 9: The idea of three unities are related to Aristotle's idea of a plot… …the plot should be of a length which can be easily embraced by the memory… …thus, he brings in the ideas of the three unities – Unity of Action, Unity of Time, and Unity of Place to discuss the structure of the plot.

Ans to Q No 10: In the text of *Poetics* very little is available on Comedy… …comedy represents men as worse than they are to arouse laughter… …while epic in its nature resembles tragedy closely, the only difference being its form.

Ans to Q No 11: *Poetics* demonstrates Aristotle's analytical method… …we find Aristotle turning to the various categories of human artifacts, differentiating those made in language and eventually focusing on poetry and especially on the specific traits of epic and tragedy… …but he limits his study of poetry to its observable kinds more or less ignoring questions about its affective origins… …finally, we end up knowing about the kinds of play that Aristotle likes or dislikes.

Ans to Q No 12 to 15: For the answers, you are advised to go through the section 3.5 carefully.

Ans to Q No 16: Instead of directly disagreeing with Plato, Aristotle implicitly validates poetry by examining it as a legitimate branch of study… …countering Plato's notion of poetry as degraded imitation, Aristotle sees poetry as a source of universal knowledge of human behaviour… …he also felt that unlike history, which produces knowledge only of specific situations, poetry describes the actions of characters who might be any humans… …moreover, he claims that good poetry has a positive emotional effect on its audience, which he calls Catharsis-perhaps the most important and variously interpreted word in *Poetics.*



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What do you mean by the idea of imitation or poetic representation in the context of Greek classical criticism? Discuss with reference to Plato and Aristotle.

Q 2: How does Aristotle view Poetry in his *Poetics*? Discuss in detail.

Q 3: Aristotle differentiates poetry from history. Discuss this point with reference to tragedy as the greatest form of poetry.

Q 4: Why does the idea of 'representation of an action' become so important in Aristotle's definition of tragedy?

Q 5: What according to you is the significance of what critics call the 'Platonic Dilemma'? Do, you feel that Aristotle's 'Catharsis' is an answer to the charges brought against poetry by Plato?

Q 6: In what ways, both Plato and Aristotle seek to provide clues to the 'ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry'? Substantiate your answer with reference to classical Greek criticism represented by Plato and Aristotle.

Q 7: Discuss the important concepts related to tragedy that Aristotle develops in his *Poetics.*

Q 8: Assess the importance of Aristotle as one of the most important critics of classical Greek tradition.

Q 9: How is Aristotle received as a critic since the Renaissance until the 20th century? Provide a detailed answer.

Q 10: Comment on the nature of Aristotle's works? How does Aristotle differ from his master Plato in terms of his works?

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