Thus, Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear [what we call] the catharsis of such emotions. By "embellished language" I mean precisely the composition of the verses, by "melody" only that which is perfectly obvious. And since tragedy is the imitation of an action that is enacted by men in action, these persons must necessarily possess certain qualities of Character and Thought, since these are the basis for our ascribing qualities to the actions themselves—character and thought are two natural causes of actions—and it is in actions that men universally meet with success or failure. The imitation of the action is the Plot. By plot I here mean the combination of the events; character is that in which we say that the persons are of such a quality; and Thought is present in everything in their utterances that aims to prove a point or that expresses an opinion. Necessarily, there are in tragedy as a whole, considered as a special form, six constituent elements, viz., Plot, Character, Language, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody. Of these elements, two [Language and Melody] are the media in which they effect the imitation; one [Spectacle] is the manner, and three [Plot, Character, Thought] are the objects they imitate; and besides these there are no other parts. So then they employ these six forms, not just some of them to speak; for every drama has spectacle, character, plot, language, melody, and thought in the same sense, but the most important of them is the organization of the events [the plot].

Purpose and character. For tragedy is not an imitation of men but of actions and life: it is in action that happiness and unhappiness are found, and the end we aim at is a kind of activity, not a quality; in accordance with their characters men are of such and such a quality, in accordance with their actions they are fortunate or the reverse. Consequently, it is not for the purpose of presenting their characters that the agents engage in action, but...
Some plots are simple, others complex; indeed, the actions of which the plots are imitation are at once so differentiated to begin with. Assuming the action to be continuous and unified, as already defined, I call that action simple in which the change of fortune takes place without a reversal or recognition, and that action complex in which the change of fortune involves a recognition or a reversal or both. These events [recognitions and reversals] ought to be rooted in the very structure of the plot that they follow from the preceding events at their inevitable or probable outcome; for there is a vast difference between following from and merely following after. **

Reversal (Peripety) is, as aforesaid, a change from one state of affairs to its exact opposite, and this, too, as I say, should be in conformance with probability or necessity. For example, Oedipus, the messenger, comes to relieve Oedipus by relieving him of the fear which leads to his destruction, revealing his true identity, does just the opposite of this. **

Recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading either to friendship or to hostility on the part of those persons who are marked for good fortune or bad. The best form of recognition is that which is accompanied by a reversal, as in the example from Oedipus.

Contrary to what some people think, a plot is not ipso facto a unity. It revolves about one man. Many things, indeed, an endless number of things, happen to any one man, some of which do not go together to form a unity, and similarly among the actions one man performs there are many that do not go together to form a single unified action. Those plots seem all to have erred, therefore, who have composed a Heracleid, a Tragedy, and other such poetics, being their idea evidently that since Heracles was one man, their plot was bound to be unified.

From what has already been said, it will be evident that the poet's function is not to report things that have happened, but rather to tell of such things as might happen, things that are possibilities by virtue of being in themselves vivable or probable. Thus the difference between the historian and the poet is not that the historian employs prose and the poet verse—work of Herodes Agathon could be put into verse, and it would be no less a history with verse than without them; rather the difference is that the one tells of things that have been and the other of such things as might be. Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical and a higher thing than history, in that poetry tends rather to express the universal, history rather the particular.

A universal is: The sort of thing that (in the circumstances) a certain kind of person will say or do either probably or necessarily, which in fact is the universal that poetry aims for (with the addition of names for the persons); a particular on the other hand is: What Alcibiades did or had to do. **

Among plots and actions of the simple type, the episodic form is the worst. I call episodic: a plot in which the episodes follow one another in no probable or inevitable sequence. Plots of this kind are constructed by bad poets on their own account, and by good poets on account of the actors; since they are composing entries for a competitive exhibition, they stretch the plot beyond what it can bear and are often compelled, therefore, to dislocate the natural order. **

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Chapter 11 145a 6 Peripetés 146a 6

Chapter 13 145a 6

Chapter 8 145a 1 2 Clem 13 145a 2

**The term "mythic hero" is not Aristotelian.

Jones: "There is no evidence that Aristotelian entertained the concept of the tragic hero."

W. D. Moebius (1781 - 1839) was a German poet and essayist.

εἴσαχθαι = great fear in judgment

Jewett: "The steersman efforts which were made during the nineteen century and occasionally since to lead men towards humanitarianism must be reduced accordingly. Although it is important to keep in mind that the Greeks did not distinguish wickedness and stupidity with empathy in Christianity, definitively.

But the motive behind those efforts is easy to discern. If we let Oedipus command: I need to know remote, but not absurdly, the man, if our Clytemnestra is a real person, mankind-minded (like the lady several times...)

we resist the conclusion that Aeneas downed to result from these mischances."

1. The members of the Persia Wars, a contemporary of Sophocles.
3. The Greek word is haimartos. It has sometimes been translated "bad", "wicked", "lame", and "deformed". But we resist the conclusion that Aeneas downed to result from these mischances. "
at first the poets accepted whatever myths came to hand, today the finest tragedies are founded upon the stories of only a few houses, being concerned, for example, with Alceon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephos, and such others as have chanced to suffer terrible things or to do them.) So, then, tragedy having this construction is the finest kind of tragedy from an artistic point of view. And consequently, those persons fall into the same error who bring it as a charge against Euripides that this is what he does in his tragedies and that most of his plays have unhappy endings. For this is in fact the right procedure, as I have said; and the best proof is that on the stage and in the dramatic contests, plays of this kind seem the most tragic, provided they are successfully worked out, and Euripides, even if in everything else his management is faulty, seems at any rate the most tragic of the poets.

In the characters and the plot construction alike, one must strive for that which is either necessary or probable, so that whatever a character of any kind says or does may be the sort of thing such a character will inevitably or probably say or do and the events of the plot may follow one after another either inevitably or with probability. (Obviously, then, the denouement of the plot should arise from the plot itself and not be brought about "from the machine," as it is in Medea and in the embarkation scene in the Iliad.* The machine is to be used for matters lying outside the drama, either antecedents of the action which a human being cannot know, or things subsequent to the action that have to be prophesied and announced; for we accept it that the gods see everything. Within the events of the plot itself, however, there should be nothing unreasonable, or if there is, it should be kept outside the play proper, as is done in the Oedipus of Sophocles.)

The chorus in tragedy. The chorus ought to be regarded as one of the actors, and as being part of the whole and integrated into performance, not in Euripides' way but in that of Sophocles. In the other poets, the choral songs have no more relevance to the plot than if they belonged to some other play. And so nowadays, following the practice introduced by Agathon, the chorus merely sings interludes. But what difference is there between the singing of interludes and taking a speech or even an entire episode from one play and inserting it into another?

8. The reference is to an incident in the second book of the Iliad: an attempt of the Greek rank and file to return home and abandon the siege is arrested by the intervention of Athena. If it were a dream, she would appear on the machine, literally the machine that was employed in the theater to show the gods flying in space. It has come to mean any implausible way of solving complications of the plot. Medea escapes from Corinth "on the machine" in her magic chariot. 9. A younger contemporary of Euripides, most of his plays were produced in the fourth century B.C.