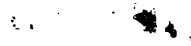

ARISTOTLE

POETICS



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ARISTOTLE

POETICS

INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY AND
APPENDIXES BY

D. W. LUCAS

PERCEVAL MAITLAND LAURENCE READER
IN CLASSICS IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE



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PREFACE

THE great edition of Bywater, on whose labours, together with those of Vahlen, nearly all subsequent work on the *Poetics* has depended, remains after half a century far from obsolete. But the text of many important passages has been improved in the light of new evidence, and knowledge of tragedy has advanced appreciably since Bywater wrote; further, those who use his work today may feel that his main interest was in Aristotle rather than in the theory and history of poetry. Since Bywater's several major editions have appeared, each more voluminous than the last. Accordingly it seemed that the ordinary student with limited time at his disposal might find useful a briefer Commentary, with literary emphasis, containing the new knowledge and what seem to me the more important of the new ideas which have emerged in recent years. Since the majority of those who take a serious interest in the *Poetics* in this country today are teachers or students of English Literature, I have tried to make the Introduction and Appendixes available to them by practically eliminating Greek type except from the footnotes.

It has been my good fortune to be able to use Professor R. Kassel's Oxford Text. To use another's text as a basis for a commentary is often embarrassing, but, as the pages which follow show, the number of places where I should have been inclined to prefer a different reading is negligible.

I have a number of debts which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. Mr. D. A. Russell read a draft of the whole at a time when he was under great pressure, and made many valuable corrections and suggestions. I have had useful discussions

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on parts of the work and received advice from Mr. G. H. W. Rylands, Mr. L. P. Wilkinson, Professor M. I. Finley, Professor Winnington-Ingram, Dr. G. E. R. Lloyd, and my daughter, and also from Mr. J. M. Bremer of the University of Amsterdam when he was working in Cambridge on the subject of 'hamartia'. I have received help with the proofs from my wife and from Mr. Wilkinson, who subjected them all to a careful scrutiny and saved me from myself on many occasions.

D. W. L.

Cambridge, 1967

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INTRODUCTION

I. ARISTOTLE'S WORKS

CICERO was acquainted with two types of Aristotelian writing: 'De summo autem bono quia duo genera librorum sunt, unum populariter scriptum quod ἐξωτερικόν appellabant, alterum limatius quod in commentariis reliquerunt . . . ' (*De Finibus* 5. 12). 'Commentarii', which translates ὑπομνήματα, can stand for anything from rough notes to such sophisticated works as Caesar's records of his campaigns. The exoteric works, presumably the same as those referred to as ἐκδεδομένοι λόγοι in the *Poetics* 54^b18, must be the class whose fluent style is elsewhere praised by Cicero.¹ These 'published' works are all lost, unless the *Ἀθηναίων Πολιτεία* recovered from a papyrus is to be reckoned among them. Probably they were for the most part early works, many of them dialogues, though less dramatic than those of Plato.² Our *Corpus Aristotelicum* consists of works of the type called by the early commentators, though not by Aristotle himself,³ ἀκροαματικά 'works for listening to'. It is not known for certain how these often jerky and discontinuous discourses were actually used. They have been thought of as lecture notes, either used by the lecturer or taken down by the pupil, as sketches for proposed works, or as summaries of works already completed, but it is pretty generally agreed that they formed part of a course of oral instruction and were not intended for wide circulation outside the school.⁴

¹ 'Flumen orationis aureum fundens' (*Acad.* 2. 119); 'dicendi incredibili quadam cum copia tum etiam suavitate' (*Top.* 1. 3).

² *Ad Att.* 13. 19.

³ The Letter to Alexander in which the word occurs (fr. 662) is not authentic.

⁴ See de Montmollin, p. 343; W. D. Ross, *Aristotle*⁵ (London, 1949), pp. 16 and 316; H. Jackson, *JPhil.* 35 (1920), 191-200; Bonitz 104^b44.

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They vary much in degree of finish, and the *Poetics* is among the least finished, being in parts little more than a series of jottings.

It is something of a mystery why the more elaborate works were driven out of circulation by the less finished during the early centuries of the Roman Empire, and thereafter lost. A story is told in Strabo (608-9) and in Plutarch (*Sulla* 26) that the works used in Aristotle's school passed through Theophrastus into the possession of Neleus, who hid them in a cave to keep them out of the hands of the book-collecting kings of Pergamum. They were recovered early in the first century B.C. and taken to Rome by Sulla, where they eventually received scholarly publication from Andronicus of Rhodes; it is suggested that the effect of this was to turn attention away from the philosophically inferior exoteric works. This would imply that these were the only copies of the esoteric works and that the essential Aristotle was lost to the world for two centuries. Scholars vary in their ability to believe this.¹

The characteristics of the surviving works have an important consequence. The *Poetics*, more than most, is disjointed, full of interruptions, of digressions, and of failures in connexion. It is in the nature of notes to be disjointed. It is also in their nature that they should be revised, supplemented, and supplied with alternatives, and if they are the property of a school, they may be worked over by different hands.² Accordingly the interpreter of the *Poetics*

¹ There is no agreement whether or not the influence of the supposedly lost works is to be found in the scanty philosophic remains of the period. Zeller, *Phil. der Griech.*³ (1879), ii. 2, ch. 3, maintained that the *Physics* was known to Poseidonius and that traces of most of the major works can be found. K. von Fritz in *Entretiens Fond. Hardt*, iv, p. 86, asserts that Polybius did not know the *Politics* nor Euclid the *Analytics*, which implies that they were not available. For the history of the Peripatetics between Theophrastus and Andronicus see C. O. Brink in *RE* Suppl. B. vii, especially 923 ff.

² The extreme position is taken by F. Grayeff (*Phronesis* i. 105 ff.),

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is perpetually confronted with an awkward choice. He can explain an apparent failure of cohesion by saying that the writer put down enough to indicate for his own use a certain sequence of ideas, and that the connexion would be made clear in a spoken version embodying the necessary transitional passages. On the other hand, by removing a phrase or a sentence it is often possible to make a confused passage logical and coherent, and the assumption that a marginal addition has got into the text, or that alternative versions have been combined is not, given the apparent nature of the work, implausible. Again, Aristotle appears at times blatantly to contradict what he has said elsewhere. Should we go to all lengths to resolve such inconsistencies, or allow that two views may appear in notes which, not being intended for posterity, were never finally adjusted? There is no lack of sentences which can be made to appear intrusive, and editors have made the discovery that, if much of the book is left out, the rest becomes easier to explain. But attempts to recover an original *Poetics* by stripping off later additions rest on the assumption, which may not be true, that the original *Poetics* is still there. If what we have was assembled from a larger collection of notes, parts of the original can have been lost when alternative drafts were combined.

The right course would seem to be to warn the reader of the suspicions which may reasonably be entertained as to the continuity of the existing text, and then to make every endeavour to find a meaning for it, resorting only as a final expedient to excisions or to the assumption that there is a lacuna.

who says that all we have is ἡ βιβλιοθήκη Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Θεοφράστου καὶ τῶν μετ' αὐτούς 'in which as it stands there may not be a single chapter of purely Aristotelian origin'.

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II. THE LITERARY WORKS AND THE SECOND BOOK OF THE *POETICS*

Aristotle, unlike his master Plato, did not regard the material world and ordinary, unphilosophic activities as trivial. He tried to give a rational account not only of rhetoric, but of poetry and music; quotations in ancient writers and other testimony show that he wrote a number of works on these subjects, though he mentioned painting and sculpture only incidentally, while architecture was not counted among the fine arts in the ancient world. Among the exoteric works was the dialogue named *Gryllus* after Xenophon's son who fell at the battle of Mantinea in 362 B.C. In this Aristotle raised the question, in opposition to Isocrates, whether rhetoric was an art at all.¹ Here the influence of Plato was still strong. More important was the dialogue in three books *On Poets*.² It is impossible to reconstruct the work, but fragments show that it touched on some of the same topics as the *Poetics*, no doubt in a more leisurely manner, and it is likely that it is one of the sources from which Aristotelian ideas on literature passed to a wider audience.

The remaining literary works seem to have been intended for use within the school. In addition to the *Rhetoric* in three books, which is extant, there was a *Τεχνῶν Συναγωγή*, a summary of rhetorical theories in two books, and a summary of the *Techne*, the Handbook, of Theodectes. Nothing is known of the *Περὶ Μουσικῆς*, *On Music*, which may have

¹ Quint. 2. 17. 14. 'The young A. scorned judicial oratory, the old A. analyzed it'; see G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (London, 1963), pp. 83-87.

² See Rostagni, 'Il dialogo a. *Περὶ Ποιητῶν*', *Riv. Fil.* N.S. iv. 433 and v. 145 (1926, 7), = *Scritti Minori* I. 263. He assumes a closer resemblance to the *Poetics* than there is warrant for.

It is noteworthy that the dialogue form was used also by the Peripatetic Satyrus for his work on the lives of the tragic poets, *POxy.* ix. 1176, ed. G. Arrighetti (Pisa, 1964).

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dealt with the mathematical aspects of the subject. There were six books of *Ἀπορήματα Ὀμηρικά*, *Homeric Problems*, of which the *Poetics* provides a sample in Ch. 25; it may have developed from the edition of the *Iliad* which Aristotle is said to have made for the young Alexander. The single book of *Ποιητικά* appears from its position in the list¹ of Aristotle's works to have been concerned with similar 'problems' in other poets. Finally there is a group of works based on researches in records and archives. A few years before 331 B.C. Aristotle compiled, with the help of his nephew Callisthenes, a list of victors at the Pythian festivals which is the subject of an existing inscription (Dittenberger, *Sylloge*, i. 275). He compiled similar lists of the victors at the Dionysiac festivals at Athens and of the plays which were produced on each occasion (*Didascaliae*). It is usually supposed that they were earlier than the *Poetics*, and that the knowledge of tragedy there displayed was based in part on researches carried out in connexion with these lists (see Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, pp. 103-26).

Our *Poetics* is almost certainly the work listed as *Πραγματεία Τέχνης Ποιητικῆς*, *Treatment of the Art of Poetry*, 2 books.² It follows directly after works on rhetoric in the

¹ The lists of A.'s works, of which the most important is that given by Diogenes Laertius (5. 22-27), are printed at the beginning of Rose's ed. of the *Fragments*, and they are discussed by P. Moraux, *Les Listes anciennes des ouvrages d'A.* (Louvain, 1951): see the same author's *A. et son école* (Paris, 1962), pp. 279-80. The source of Diogenes' list, which begins with the exoteric works and groups the rest by subjects, is generally believed to be the Peripatetic Hermippus of Smyrna, who was associated with the Alexandrian Library, and presumably composed his list before the disappearance, if they did disappear, of Aristotle's esoteric works. Moraux himself attributes it to a later Peripatetic, Ariston of Chios.

² This is the only work in the list described as a *πραγματεία*, a word which A. often used with reference to his inquiries, e.g. *Soph. El.* 183^b4.

Gudeman and de Montmollin consider our *Poetics* too unfinished for even such limited circulation as was intended for the esoteric works. The existence of a second book was denied by A. P. McMahon, *HSCP* 28 (1917), 1-46.

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ancient lists. Even without this external evidence there would be reason to believe that the *Poetics* consisted of two books or, since the division into books need not be Aristotle's, that a substantial portion of the work is missing. The scheme clearly implies a section on comedy to balance that on tragedy, and it is specifically promised at 49^b21. Further, it is promised at *Politics* 1341^b38 that a full account of *katharsis* will be given ἐν τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς 'in the work on poetry', and this could appropriately be part of the comedy section.¹

The existence of a second book is supported also by the *subscriptio* of William of Moerbeke's Latin version completed in 1278 'Primus Aristotelis de arte poetica liber explicit'.² Similarly the reference to the *Margites* at 48^b30 is cited by Eustratius (c. A.D. 1100) on *Ethics* 1141^a14 as occurring in τῷ πρώτῳ περὶ ποιητικῆς, the first book. Even if those are right who think our *Poetics* too rough and incoherent to be the finished version of Aristotle's work, what we have must still be the draft of a part only of the original (see p. xiii, n. 2).

III. ARISTOTLE AND HIS PREDECESSORS

When Aristotle wrote the *Rhetoric* he was only doing more comprehensively and scientifically what others had done before him, but in writing the *Poetics* it can be said with fair

¹ Vahlen argued that the words of Proclus on *Pl. Rep.* (1, p. 49 Kroll, see p. 52) refer to a discussion of *katharsis* applying both to tragedy and comedy, and that it is to be assumed that this was part of the missing book, *Gesammelte philolog. Schriften*, i. 233.

Other refs. to the *Poetics*, τοῖς περὶ ποιητικῆς, in A. are all from the *Rhetoric*, 1372^a1, 1404^a38, 1404^b7, 1405^a5, 1419^b5; the first and last of these refer to a definition of the laughable and its various kinds (εἶδη), which must have been more extensive than our 49^a32-37, and some of the other passages referred to are suspiciously brief. *Rhet.* 1404^b28 cites τοῖς περὶ ποιήσεως. The tenses used imply an order *Politics*, *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, but such evidence is not conclusive.

² *Aristoteles Latinus* xxxiii (Bruges/Paris, 1953).

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confidence that he broke new ground even though there was some overlap with his more popular dialogue *On Poets*.¹ There is no trace of any previous attempt to lay down the principles and to guide the practice of poetic composition in the way that rhetorical handbooks indicated the principles of that art.² Yet given the immense importance of poetry in Greek life, both in education and in public festivals, it must inevitably have been the subject of frequent discussion. This the *Poetics* would show even if there were not other evidence.³ References to arguments about the place where tragedy and comedy originated (48^a30), to conflicting views on the primacy of plot or character (50^a15-38), on the merits of single and double plots (53^a13), on the proper way of ending a tragedy (53^a24), and the mention of the severity shown by contemporary critics (56^a5) suggest a plentiful expression of opinion on literary subjects, though we have no means of telling how much was spoken and how

¹ *Soph. El.* 184^a9: *περὶ μὲν τῶν ῥητορικῶν ὑπῆρχε πολλὰ καὶ παλαιὰ τὰ λεγόμενα*, 'On rhetoric (as opposed to logic) much had been said, some of it long ago'.

On the *Περὶ Ποιητῶν* see p. xii.

² Poetry had long been recognized as a *techne*; cf. Aristoph., *Ran.* 939 (of tragedy): *ἀλλ' ὡς παρέλαβον τὴν τέχνην παρὰ σοῦ*. But as with *ὑπόκρισις*, the art of delivery, though it was recognized, *οὕτω δὲ σύγκειται τέχνη περὶ αὐτῶν* (*R.* 1403^b35).

³ Gudeman, in an attempt to correct what he conceives to be the over-emphasis on Plato as a source for the *Poetics*, gives on p. 10 of his Introduction (and in English in *Class. Studies in Honour of J. C. Rolfe*, pp. 75-100) a long list of works with literary titles, not all of which need have existed when A. wrote. W. Kranz, *Stasimon* (Berlin, 1933), pp. 4-7, lays emphasis on Hellanicus among his predecessors, but there is nothing to suggest that there was a serious critical literature before A. Cf. L. G. Breitholtz, *Die dorische Farce* (Göteborg, 1960), pp. 35-40.

On the critical notions that can be extracted from earlier Greek literature see E. E. Sikes, *The Greek View of Poetry* (London, 1931), chs. 1 and 2; J. W. H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1934), ch. 2; G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (London, 1965), chs. 1-3. The chief texts are collected in G. Lanata, *Poetica Preplatonica* (Florence, 1963).

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much written. The sections on style and grammar (Chs. 19–22) must owe something to the handbooks on rhetoric and to the linguistic speculations of the sophists, among whom Protagoras is mentioned by name at 56^b15. Chapter 25, on the solution of the problems presented by poetry, clearly has a long ancestry in the difficulties, both literary and ethical, presented above all by Homer's works. And in the discussion whether epic or tragedy is superior Aristotle obviously has in mind the expression of a view the opposite of his own, perhaps Plato's. Plato indeed may have provided him with the starting point for his treatment of several important topics.

In any society where poetry and the arts are important some ideas about their nature and function begin sooner or later to circulate. In the world which Homer describes the subject-matter of the poet is heroic deeds and tales of the gods; by telling them he casts upon his listeners a spell of delight.¹ His poetic gift is divine and comes to him from the Muses, but it is a craft that he possesses, not a fitful inspiration.² Hesiod too received his powers from the Muses, the daughters of Memory;³ and he was the first to raise the question of the truth and falsehood in the poet's message.⁴ Archilochus knew of the fierce inspiration of those in the grip of a power outside themselves, and Pindar proclaimed the inferiority of acquired skill to native genius.⁵ The spread of education and the ability to read, which is presupposed by the demand for written laws, caused men to reflect on the educational value of what they read—mainly Homer. Though his tone was pure, and the aristocratic ideal continued to be based on the heroic standards which he enshrined, there was room for much offence in his gods.

¹ κληθμός, *Od.* II. 334; θέλξίς, *Od.* 17. 518–21.

² δίδου δ' ἠδείαν ἀοιδήν, *Od.* 8. 64; θεὸς δέ μοι ἐν φρεσὶν οἶμας παντοίας ἐνέφυσεν, *Od.* 22. 347.

³ *Theog.* 29–32.

⁴ *Theog.* 27.

⁵ Archil. fr. 77, see p. 80; Pindar, *Ol.* 2. 86, 9. 100. See Sir Maurice Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford, 1964), ch. 1.

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Some—Xenophanes, Pythagoras, Heracleitus—denounced the poet who so portrayed the divine, others took refuge in explanations which assumed a hidden and deeper meaning. The first was probably Theagenes of Rhegium about the end of the sixth century.¹

A no less lively stimulus to discussion must have come from the institution of literary contests at Greek festivals, especially the tragic contests at Athens. Contests are decided by comparison of one work with another, and such comparisons lead naturally to the development of a critical vocabulary and to the establishment, even if unconscious, of critical standards. As the verdicts of the judges were of interest to all, the growth of a critical attitude was rapid, as is clearly shown by the frequency and quality of literary allusions in comedy.² The contest of Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes is a remarkable piece of impressionistic criticism which achieves all that is possible in a medium which forbids sustained seriousness. But in treating a question of principle, the poet's purpose in writing, Aristophanes is less happy. In a sense it is true that any poet who takes his own work seriously hopes that he will 'make men better citizens'.³ If he believes that he has something to say, he believes that men will be the better for hearing it, even if he does not aim at inculcating specific virtues. Probably Sophocles, for instance, was conscious of working within a framework of values which many, to the

¹ In Pl. *Ion* 530 C, D Metrodorus of Lampsacus and Stesimbrotus of Thasos are mentioned as the leading expounders of Homer. Gods might be identified with the elements or with human faculties, the method by which Theagenes explained away the battle of the gods in *Il.* 20, or a hidden meaning might be found in a frivolous story, as Socrates jestingly interprets the story of Circe (Xenophon, *Memorab.* 1: 3. 7). Plato did not approve of such interpretation by *ὑπόνοια* (*Rep.* 378 D).

² In addition to *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Frogs* there were many comedies, now lost, in which literary themes were prominent.

³ *Ran.* 1009.

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detriment of the city, did not, accept. But when Aristophanes makes Aeschylus justify the poets on the ground that they convey useful information on curing diseases or drawing up an army, he puts him in the same ridiculous position as the Ion of Plato's dialogue who claimed to have acquired from his familiarity with Homer a knowledge of generalship.¹ Whether or not Aristophanes is wholly serious here, Plato's *reductio ad absurdum* would lack point unless such claims were actually made on behalf of poets. Those who use poets for education may easily come to assume that poets write to educate, and centuries later Plutarch, in his *De Audiendis Poetis* (M. 14 E ff.), often argues as though this were the case.

Some have believed that the literary contest in the *Frogs* presupposes a society in which literary criticism was widely practised. It is clear that there was lively interest and debate, but there is no evidence that it did more than touch the fringe of the subject.² The growth of rhetoric as a conscious art in the second half of the fifth century directed attention to words and to the formal structure of sentences. The sophists Prodicus, Protagoras, and Hippias, and, among philosophers, Democritus are known to have been interested in this kind of investigation. An awareness of the importance in rhetoric of arrangement and transitions might well awaken interest in the way poets handled similar problems.³ Above all Gorgias, who defined rhetoric as 'the art of

¹ *Ran.* 1030-6, *Ion* 541 A.

² M. Pohlenz in an influential article on 'The Beginnings of Greek Poetic', *Nach. Gött. G.* (1920), 142 ff. asserted the need to assume the existence of a body of critical theory behind the *Frogs*. The founder of this he discovered, following Süss, *Ethos* (Leipzig, 1910), pp. 49 ff., in Gorgias. His reconstruction is of what could have happened rather than of what there is reason to suppose did happen; cf. O. Immisch ed. of Gorgias' *Helen* (Kleine Texte, Berlin, 1927), pp. 28-30. Refs. to further criticisms of the article in Radermacher, *Aristoph. Frösche*² (Vienna, 1954), p. 368.

³ Protagoras seems to have suggested that the battle between Achilles and the river Xanthus, *Il.* 21. 211-384, provided a transition

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persuasion', asserted the power of words, with or without metre, to stir the emotions and control the mind, producing *apate*, deceit. It could be that Paris' eloquence deceived Helen, in which case she deserves no blame for not resisting him. Tragedy too is a source of *apate*, but this is a justifiable deceit and those who succumb to it are wiser than those who do not, meaning, perhaps, that the audience must co-operate by accepting the conventions of drama if it is to enjoy it.¹ There is no necessity to link this *apate* through word and persuasion with the *apate* in the sense of 'illusion' produced by the artist with his pigments, which amounts to deceit only in quite exceptional cases when a viewer is tempted to take a picture for the reality. But *apate* was used in connexion with the visual arts as early as Empedocles, fr. 23. 9, and the two were brought together round about 400 B.C. in the sophistic treatise on *The Two Arguments*² where it is said that the best poet and the best artist is the one who most deceives by producing things like the truth. Here, as in the epigram of Gorgias, the word is used with a conscious aim at paradox. The idea that poet and artist or sculptor are doing essentially the same thing was perhaps first expressed by Simonides in his celebrated comparison (see p. 269). The idea could be developed with reference to the process in terms of *mimesis*, or with reference to the effects in terms of *apate*,³ but it is impossible to trace this development, as the few relevant statements cannot be dated with any precision.

between the battle of mortals, Greeks and Trojans, and the battle of gods, 385-513, see fr. of schol. on 21. 240, *POxy.* ii. 68 = Protag. fr. A 30.

¹ Gorgias, *Hel.* 8: εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας. . . . Fr. B. 23 (Plut. *M.* 348 C): ἀπάτην, ὡς Γ. φησὶν, ἣν ὁ τε ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος.

² *Δισσοὶ Λόγοι* I. 3. 10: ἐν γὰρ τραγωδοποιίᾳ καὶ ζωγραφίᾳ ὅστις <καὶ> πλείστα ἐξαπατᾷ ὁμοίᾳ τοῖς ἀληθινοῖς ποιῶν, οὗτος ἄριστος.

³ This term, common in Plato, is conspicuously absent from the *Poetics*. There is some approach to it at 60^a13, 61^b11.

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It would be more possible to decide whether Gorgias was productive only of epigrams or of a serious theory if we knew more of two works, both probably of the late fifth century, the 'On Poetry' of Hippias and of Democritus. We know from Plato (*Hippias Ma.* 285 B-E, *Hippias Mi.* 368 B-D) that Hippias concerned himself with words and rhythms, but we are told nothing more. Titles of works by Democritus preserved in Diogenes Laertius (9. 48) show similar interests, but he is famous principally for his insistence that poetry is the result of inspiration, 'excludit sanos Helicone poetas' (Hor. *Ars Poet.* 295), a surprising belief to be held by a materialist (but see commentary on 55^a32). This, however, tells us nothing about Democritus' view on the nature of poetry as *mimesis* or *apate*, though one would suppose that a work of this period on poetry would deal with the problem.

Finally there was one author of the late fifth century who seems to have been an historian of literature in something like the modern sense of the term, Glaucus of Rhegium, whom Aristotle may well have used. Fragments of his work *On the Ancient Poets*—the title need not be his own—deal with the early development of Greek lyric and include a valuable scrap of information about Aeschylus' *Persae*.¹

Whatever Aristotle may have owed to fifth-century speculations, there can be no doubt about the influence exercised on him by Plato, whose pupil and follower he was from the time when he came to Athens at the age of seventeen until Plato's death twenty years later. Plato has much to say about poetry. In the *Ion* and, more eloquently, in the *Phaedrus*² he describes poetry as divinely inspired, 'the madness of the Muses'; but the compliment is two-edged,

¹ *Περὶ τῶν Ἀρχαίων Ποιητῶν καὶ Μουσικῶν*. Fragments in *F.Hist.G.* ii. 23. Damastes of Sigeum, pupil of Hellanicus, wrote *Περὶ Ποιητῶν καὶ Σοφιστῶν*.

² *Ion* 534 B; *Phaedr.* 245 A.

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since the theory of inspiration is used to explain the inability of poets to give a rational account of what they have said. Only in the *Symposium* (209 A-D) is there a faint hint that poets may have a glimpse of ideal truth. In the early part of the *Republic* (376 C-402 A) he examines the value of the poets, especially Homer, for primary education, and finds the moral standards expressed and implied generally unacceptable. He had already in the *Protagoras* (347 C) rejected the use, popular with the sophists, of poems as the starting-point for discussions on moral questions among adults. It is in the last book of the *Republic* that Plato delivers his main attack on the arts,¹ using his Theory of Ideas to show that artists and poets are guilty of the most dangerous of all deceptions, representing appearance as reality. For if ideas alone are real and the world known to the senses is only a shadow of the ideas, then the arts yield the shadow of a shadow at the third remove from truth. A subsidiary argument (605 B-607 A) shows that the emotions aroused by poetry are as deleterious as its moral standards, and encourage weakness rather than self-control. Accordingly poetry is rejected as neither revealing truth nor helping the temperance of the emotions. To the second-best state described in the *Laws*, the work of Plato's old age, poets are indeed admitted, though only under the supervision of those who have knowledge of good and evil (658 E-661 D). Almost all existing poetry is condemned, and it is unlikely that any of the poets banished from the Republic would have cared to accept the terms offered for admission to the city of the *Laws*.

In private life Plato's attitude to literature seems to have been more genial; he knew the poems of Homer practically by heart, and in his works never tired of quoting them; he admired Sophron to whose art he probably owed much,² and if it is true that he sent a disciple to Colophon to

¹ 595 A-601 B. See Appendix I.

² Diog. Laert. 3. 18. See commentary on 47^b10.

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collect the poems of Antimachus,¹ his interest in poetry was not unduly narrow.

Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, has little to say of genius or inspiration,² nor is he concerned about the religious or moral implications of the myths,³ since he clearly does not expect them much to affect educated adults. As he did not accept the Theory of Ideas and the status attributed in it to the material world, he was under no necessity to controvert Plato's account of the artist as a mere imitator; but in showing how the poet can reveal significance by generalizing and universalizing he may have meant to show up the inadequacy of Plato's view. It is more certain that the theory of emotional purgation is an answer to Plato's complaint that drama encouraged the dominance of the emotions.⁴ Finally, though Aristotle was not interested in the educational effects of drama, he may have been influenced by Plato's strictures on myths which show virtue defeated and vice triumphant when he laid down his requirement that the tragic sufferer should not be a character of unblemished excellence.

IV. THE TEXT AND ITS TRANSMISSION⁵

Neither before nor after the alleged loss of Aristotle's esoteric writings does the *Poetics* seem to have been widely read. Throughout the last three centuries B.C. there was a considerable output of critical literature from the Peripatetic

¹ Proclus, *In Timaeum* i. 90.

² Mentioned only in Ch. 17, where it is probably to be understood in terms of the physiology of the four humours. See commentary and Appendix II.

³ Cf. 60^b36 where Xenophanes' objections are dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders.

⁴ See the passage of Proclus' Commentary on the *Republic* printed on p. 52.

⁵ For a fuller account of the sources of the text see the Latin Introduction to R. Kassel's Oxford Classical Text.

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school based on the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus. Quotations which we meet as examples first in *Poetics* or *Rhetoric* frequently recur in later literature,¹ but there is no passage earlier than the fourth century A.D. of which it can be asserted with confidence that it is derived directly from the *Poetics*.²

The *Poetics* seems never to have been the subject of a Commentary. But it was certainly known in Byzantium, and it was translated into Syriac probably at the end of the ninth century A.D. The Syriac version is lost except for part of Ch. 6, but a few years later the Syriac was done into Arabic by Abu Bišr (d. 940), and this translation, which has survived almost entire, is the earliest witness to the Greek text, though a halting one. For not only is it at two removes from the Greek, but it is accessible to most of us only in a Latin translation. Further, both Syriac and Arabic translators were at the disadvantage of scarcely knowing what a tragedy was.³ The first complete Latin rendering of the Arabic was given by D. S. Margoliouth, Professor of Arabic at Oxford, in his edition of the *Poetics* (Oxford, 1911); but this has been superseded by the version of J. Tkatsch published posthumously at Vienna, vol. i, 1928, vol. ii, 1932; the translation is accompanied by a rambling commentary usable only with the aid of the index.

Probably within a generation or two of the translation

¹ See G. Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Gk. Trag.* (Harvard and London, 1966), p. 113, n. 52; F. Solmsen in *Hermes*, 66 (1931), 241-67. A striking example is the passage from the Rainer Papyrus given on p. 159.

² The earliest are: Themistius *Or.* 27, 337 B from 49^b6, which is in part a later insertion; the story of Mityls (52^a8) appears in *De Mirab. Auscultat.* 846^a; sentences from ch. 20 on grammar are quoted in the Commentaries of Ammonius and of Boethius on the *De Interpretatione* (see Bywater on 56^b20).

³ Else gives as an example of the errors to which such a work is prone the Latin version of 51^b21 *qui ponit*, where the Syriac translator read *Ἀγάθωνος Ἀνθεῖ* as *Ἀγάθων ὁς ἀν θῆ*, which the Arabic necessarily followed.

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into Arabic was copied the best and oldest surviving Greek manuscript, Parisinus 1741, called A or A^c by editors. This manuscript was still in Constantinople in 1427, but reached Florence before the end of the century and found a final home in Paris. Its outstanding value was not recognized till the nineteenth century. J. Vahlen, who gave a full account of its readings in his editions of 1874 and 1885, regarded it as the sole authority from which the text of the *Poetics* is derived.

It was from a closely related manuscript that William de Moerbeke, who translated much of Aristotle, made his Latin version in 1278; this survives in two manuscripts, but they lay unrecognized until 1930. The Latin is occasionally of service in establishing the reading of A.¹

Since Vahlen's day it has been recognized that there is one manuscript which preserves a tradition independent of A; this is Riccardianus 46 (B or R to editors), which, though of the fourteenth century, is the second oldest manuscript. Attention was first called to it by F. Susemihl in 1878, and some of its readings were published by G. Vitelli in *Stud. ital. di fil.* in 1894 and by C. Landi in the following year. They were given more fully in the apparatus to the edition of Margoliouth, who used the evidence of Ch. 16, where Riccardianus alone has the words that fill a previously unrecognized lacuna, to prove that it is independent of A, (see commentary on 55^a14). Though Riccardianus has no descendants, a few of its readings found their way into Renaissance manuscripts (see apparatus, p. 3).

The numerous manuscripts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are all dependent on A, and their readings, though occasionally of interest, have the authority only of anonymous emendations. See E. Lobel, 'The Greek Manuscripts of Aristotle's *Poetics*', *Supplement to the Bibliographical Society Transactions*, no. 9, 1933.

¹ See *Aristoteles Latinus* xxxiii, ed. Minio-Paluello (Bruges/Paris, 1953).

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