

NOTES ON ARISTOTLE, *POETICS* 13 AND 14¹

In an important recent article² T. C. W. Stinton reaffirmed the case that *ἁμαρτία* in Aristotle's *Poetics*, ch. 13, has a wide range of application. I do not wish to dispute the general conclusion of what seems to me a masterly analysis of the question but simply to discuss two areas where Stinton's argument may be thought defective—the interpretation of the examples given by Aristotle in *Poetics* 13, 53^a 11 and 53^a 20–1 and the problem of the contradiction between 13, 53^a 13–15 and 14, 54^a 4–9.

I. THE EXAMPLES OF *POETICS* 13

The critical passage runs as follows (I print Kassel's Oxford Text):

- ὁ μεταξὺ ἄρα τούτων λοιπός. ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτος
ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη μήτε διὰ κακίαν
καὶ μοχθηρίαν μεταβάλλων εἰς τὴν δυστυχίαν ἀλλὰ δι'
10 ἁμαρτίαν τινά, τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία,
οἷον Οἰδίπους καὶ Θυέστης καὶ οἱ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων γενῶν
ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες. ἀνάγκη ἄρα τὸν καλῶς ἔχοντα μῦθον
ἀπλοῦν εἶναι μᾶλλον ἢ διπλοῦν, ὥσπερ τινὲς φασι, καὶ μετα-
βάλλειν οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον
15 ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι'
ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλῃν ἢ οἷον εἴρηται ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ
χειρόνος. σημείον δὲ καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον· πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ
οἱ ποιηταὶ τοὺς τυχόντας μύθους ἀπηρίθμουν, νῦν δὲ περὶ
ὀλίγας οἰκίας αἱ κάλλισται τραγωδίαί συντίθενται, οἷον
20 περὶ Ἀλκμέονα καὶ Οἰδίπουν καὶ Ὀρέστην καὶ Μελέαγρον
καὶ Θυέστην καὶ Τηλέφον καὶ ὅσοις ἄλλοις συμβέβηκεν
ἡ παθεῖν δευῶ ἢ ποιῆσαι. ἡ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὴν τέχνην
καλλίστη τραγωδία ἐκ ταύτης τῆς συστάσεως ἔστι.

Stinton (pp.226 f.) argued (a) that the examples do not support the view that *ἁμαρτία* should be restricted to the sense of 'mistake of fact' and (b) that in any case the second set of examples is not necessarily meant to illustrate *ἁμαρτία* at all. Both arguments represent a major attack upon the prevailing modern orthodoxy³ and in particular the second, if correct, would completely demolish most recent discussion of the problem.

Stinton's second argument seems to have been anticipated by G. M. A. Grube,⁴

¹ I thank Professors D. W. Gooding and M. J. McGann for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper. I am extremely grateful to Mr. T. C. W. Stinton for detailed discussion by letter of many of the problems. I need hardly stress that he does not agree with all my arguments though he has persuaded me to modify many of them.

² *Hamartia* in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy', *CQ* N.S. 25 (1975), 221–54.

³ e.g. G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: the Argument* (Harvard, 1957), pp.391–8, J. M. Bremer, *Hamartia* (1968), D. W. Lucas, ed. 1968, pp.144–6 and 304. Full references in Stinton's article.

⁴ *The Greek and Roman Critics* (London, 1965), p.80 n.3. So far as I know, this is an original suggestion, though Grube makes it with absolute confidence.

who maintains that the *first* set of examples (Oedipus and Thyestes) is intended as a comment *only* upon the phrase τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία. (Grube does not say what he thinks is the application of the second set of examples, but we are presumably meant to infer that, if the first set of examples is irrelevant to the question, then *a fortiori* the second is too.) Grube's argument has a certain prima-facie plausibility, because καὶ ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων ἐπιφανείς ἄνδρες (13, 53^a 11–12) clearly picks up τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ δόξῃ ὄντων καὶ εὐτυχία (13, 53^a 10). But it does not follow from this that the whole phrase οἷον Οἰδίπους . . . ἄνδρες exemplifies τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ . . . εὐτυχία *only*. τῶν ἐν μεγάλῃ . . . εὐτυχία is not a separate category of hero—it is only one element in the composite prescription ἔστι δὲ . . . εὐτυχία, and it would be surprising if Aristotle felt it necessary to give examples of a category that is so completely the norm in Greek tragedy. The flow of the sentence suggests that these examples are meant to apply to the entire prescription ἔστι δὲ . . . καὶ εὐτυχία. Of course, on the usual assumption that the *second* set of examples embodies ἀμαρτία, another argument against Grube's view would be the fact that Oedipus and Thyestes reappear in the second set, since the sentence ἀνάγκη ἄρα . . . χείρονος looks to be simply a recapitulation of ἔστι δὲ . . . ἄνδρες, with only slight qualifications. This makes it *doubly* necessary to scrutinize Stinton's contention that the second set of examples is not necessarily intended to illustrate ἀμαρτία.

Although Stinton, unlike Grube, accepts the relevance of the first set of examples to the problem, he asserts that in the second set 'these heroes are chosen as especially suitable for tragedy simply because of the dreadful things they do and suffer, so that the poets gradually narrowed down their choice to such stories . . . there is no reason to suppose . . . that the stories connected with these names are meant to illustrate all the features of the ideal prescription.' In other words, these examples are meant *primarily* to illustrate stories of dreadful things done or suffered, and not *necessarily* to satisfy the whole prescription, so that they cannot safely be used as evidence for the application of ἀμαρτία. Yet it seems clear from the flow of the argument from 13, 53^a 12 ff. that the second set of examples is intended *both* to illustrate stories of dreadful deeds or sufferings *and* to satisfy the composite prescription as a whole. They do not *merely* exemplify 'those to whom it has befallen to suffer or inflict terrible experiences': they *also* back up the assertion 'this is borne out by existing practice' (σημεῖον δὲ καὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον), and that assertion in turn is made to back up the particular formulation of the plot approved by Aristotle (μετάβαλλειν . . . δι' ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην—a restatement of 13, 53^a 8–12), which *includes* ἀμαρτία. Experience has taught the poets that 'those to whom it has befallen to suffer or inflict terrible experiences' provide the best material for tragedy, because the stories of such heroes will naturally illustrate a change from good to ill fortune δι' ἀμαρτίαν μεγάλην. The point is driven home by the sequel (13, 53^a 22–5) ἡ μὲν οὖν . . . δρᾷ, where μὲν οὖν fulfils its usual function of summing up the preceding discussion before the introduction of a new theme, and ταύτης . . . συστάσεως must refer back to 13, 53^a 12 ff. and cover the intervening material as well.¹ This provides a further argument for rejecting Grube's interpretation of the first set of examples: the two sets of examples are mutually corroborative, and both can be used as evidence for the application of ἀμαρτία.

¹ Cf. also Else, p. 391, for similar arguments. Stinton has now kindly agreed that

it is wrong to detach the second set of examples from the prescription as a whole.

Stinton lays some stress on Aristotle's known laxity in the use of examples.¹ This is an important point, because, even if it could be shown that all the examples referred to mistakes of fact, this would not of itself *prove* that *ἁμαρτία* was restricted to that application; if Aristotle intended *ἁμαρτία* to have a wide range of application and only gave examples of 'mistakes of fact', he would still be giving examples of a particular aspect of that range, and though such a procedure might be misleading, it would not necessarily be un-Aristotelian. A more positive general consideration in favour of the argument for giving *ἁμαρτία* a wide range of application is simply the vague phraseology at the end of both sets of examples, especially the second. This wording does not necessarily mean that Aristotle does not have in mind some specific type or types of *ἁμαρτία* in the named examples, but it surely does raise the possibility that he could have envisaged other types of *ἁμαρτίαι* from those suggested by the stories of the heroes explicitly mentioned. On two counts, then, even if all the named examples yielded the result *ἁμαρτία* = 'mistake of fact', this would not prove the case that this was the *only* meaning Aristotle wished to attribute to the term. Nevertheless, it is still worth while to attempt an analysis of the named examples to see if any consistent picture emerges.

Stinton accepts the usual view that Oedipus' *ἁμαρτία* is a mistake of fact, but correctly implies that it would be circular to assume that this means that Thyestes' must be of the same type. Of the various possibilities for Thyestes' *ἁμαρτία*, the banquet and unwitting² seduction of his daughter would give 'mistake of fact', but the seduction of Aerope and the theft of the golden lamb would both be examples of *ἁμαρτία* brought about by *ἁκρασία*. Stinton rightly insists that there are no *a priori* grounds for giving preference to one or other of these interpretations. There remain four names in the second set of examples. The case of Orestes is critical. Stinton is of course right to dismiss as quite unconvincing the argument advanced by Else: namely that the Orestes story Aristotle has in mind is likely to be the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, because he admired the plot of this play.³ This argument is not only weak in itself: it is also vulnerable to several objections, cumulatively decisive: (i) as Stinton points out, 'Alcmeon and Orestes are standard examples of a particular kind of horrific episode, viz. matricide, the essentials of which are given in the tradition.'⁴ This naturally suggests that the reference is the obvious one—to Orestes' killing of Clytemnestra; (ii) in the general context of ch. 13, where it is required that the tragic figure should be to some extent responsible for his fate, it is extremely

¹ Stinton, p.227 n.1, cl. *Met.* 948^a14. Possible instances in the *Poetics* are e.g. 1, 47^b17–23 (perhaps rather a case of sophistic argument), 8, 51^a25–6, 11, 52^b12–13 (see Lucas ad loc.; contra B. R. Rees, G & R 19 (1972), 7 f.), 11, 52^a24–6 (if *περιπέτεια* = 'reversal of character expectation'. Cf. p.89 n.3 below).

² See Lucas on 13, 53^a11. But even in this example Sophocles' *Thyestes in Sicyon* apparently had Thyestes commit incest with his daughter *deliberately* (references in Else, pp.395–6).

³ Stinton's somewhat unkind paraphrase of Else, p.394 and n.97. But it is what Else's argument amounts to.

⁴ Stinton, p.227 cl. *Poetics* 13, *E.N.* 3.1, 1110^a28, the sophistic *Dialexeis*, *DK* ii.410. Cf. Antiphanes, fr. 191K. *E.N.* 3.1, 1110^a28 does not exclude Orestes' matricide from consideration in *Poetics* 13: for the arguments see Stinton, pp.229–35. One may wonder, in any case, whether too much stress has not been laid upon *E.N.* 3.1, 1110^a28. Is it not possible that Aristotle is intemperately rejecting the possibility of justifiable deliberate matricide simply because he finds the arguments used by the Euripidean Alcmeon so offensive? Moralists often condemn the general principle because they are outraged by the particular indefensible instance.

improbable that Aristotle should have in mind a story where Orestes is not the agent; (iii) the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* does not fit the composite prescription of ch. 13 at all in an important respect, since it is a case of τὸ μέλλοντα ποιεῖν τι τῶν ἀνηκέστων δι' ἄγνοιαν ἀναγνωρίσαι πρὶν ποιῆσαι (14, 53^b 34–5), where the μετάβασις is εἰς εὐτυχίαν; (iv) the general parallelism of thought between 13, 53^a 17–22 and 14, 53^b 22–6¹ implies that Aristotle has Clytemnestra's murder in mind in ch. 13 as in ch. 14. If, then, the reference is to Orestes' killing of his mother, it is hard to see how it can be interpreted as anything other than ἀμαρτία of compulsion.²

The Stories of Meleager and Telephus³ offer plenty of scope for ἀμαρτία other than mistakes of fact which would still satisfy the requirements for the best type of tragic hero. More difficult is the case of Alcmeon. Stinton's analysis here seems less persuasive. If 'Aristotle himself cites Alcmeon's matricide as an example of a deed too horrible for the agent to plead that he acted under compulsion' (*E.N.* 3.1, 1110^a 28), as Stinton points out, then perhaps versions where Alcmeon's matricide was a mistake of fact, whether through madness (Antiphanes, fr. 191K), or ignorance (as in Astydamos, ? the Younger) are what is required.⁴ In any case Astydamos' version must come into consideration, simply because it is cited in ch. 14. Stinton objects that the reference in ch. 14 is part of a different argument, and maintains that 'it is improbable that we should be meant to think here of Astydamos' idiosyncratic version.' There seem to be several suspect elements in this argument: (i) though the mention of Astydamos' version in ch. 14 is indeed part of a different argument, the common use of examples in similar contexts in chs. 13 and 14 (Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Orestes' matricide, Alcmeon's matricide) may suggest that the reference in ch. 14 to Alcmeon's matricide as treated by Astydamos can be back-referenced to ch. 13; (ii) it is tendentious to speak of 'Astydamos' idiosyncratic version'. Astydamos, though little more than a name to us, was clearly a prolific and famous tragedian in his own times, and one, moreover, apparently

¹ πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οἱ ποιηταὶ τοὺς τυχόντας μύθους ἀπηρίθμουν, νῦν δὲ περὶ ὀλίγας οἰκίας αἱ κάλλιστα τραγωδίααι συντίθενται, οἷον περὶ Ἀλκμέωνα καὶ Οἰδίπουν καὶ Ὀρέστην. . . τοὺς μὲν οὖν παρειλημμένους μύθους λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν, λέγω δὲ οἷον τὴν Κλυταμνήστραν ἀποθανοῦσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ὀρέστου καὶ τὴν Ἐριφύλην ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀλκμέωνος.

² Lucas on 13, 53^a 20, following Else, p.394 n.97, remarks: 'Since he returned unrecognized to his own country, he was certainly a cause of ἀμαρτία in others.' But it is hard to believe that Aristotle could have meant that Orestes fell into misfortune because of other people's failure to recognize him. The fact that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus do not recognize Orestes until too late certainly facilitates Orestes' killing of them, but it is not the cause of his misfortune. Stinton agrees with me that 'Orestes is certainly there as an example of deliberate matricide.'

³ Meleager: Else, pp.394–5, Lucas,

pp.146 and 304. Telephus' murder of his uncles (treated in Sophocles' *Aleadae* and probably also Aeschylus' *Mysians*), among other possibilities, could not have been a 'mistake of fact'.

⁴ In itself a reference to *conscious* matricide is not precluded by *E.N.* 3.1, 1110^a 28 (cf. p.79 n.4 above) but Aristotle seems to have been particularly struck by the inadequacy of Alcmeon's plea of compulsion. Of course I do not put much weight on this argument *in isolation*, since as Stinton points out to me 'Aristotle might say that it was ridiculous for Alcmeon to claim that his act was compulsory, and therefore worthy of (full) pardon, but might still allow that the command of Ampharaus, which presumably carried with it a curse and the threat of his Erinyes if it was disobeyed, would be a mitigating circumstance', which on Stinton's analysis (with which I am in general agreement) is a sufficient condition for *hamartia*.

respected by Aristotle. The madness version of Alcmeon's matricide was *well known* (to judge from Antiphanes), and it is quite possible that in Astydamos' treatment of the story Alcmeon's ignorance was the result of madness;¹ (iii) the phraseology 'it is improbable that *we should be meant here to think of Astydamos' idiosyncratic version*' (my italics) introduces a false note. This is hardly the right way to approach the examples. The *Poetics* belongs to the class of ἀκροαματικά, and it is in any case unfinished and incomplete. Consequently we should not be thinking in terms of *reader-reaction* (as Stinton seems to imply) but in terms of what Aristotle, writing almost in note form, himself appears to have in mind. It is misleading to argue from the fact that a reader would probably not think of Astydamos when he came to 13, 53^a20–1. If we try instead to penetrate Aristotle's admittedly elusive thought processes, then the explicit reference to Astydamos' treatment of Alcmeon's matricide in ch. 14, the fact that Aristotle was apparently rather shocked by versions of the story where Alcmeon pleaded compulsion, the fact that the same examples seem to be used in similar contexts in ch. 13 and ch. 14, and the obvious fact that throughout the *Poetics* Aristotle relies on a relatively small sample of tragedies for purposes of illustration—all these considerations combine to make quite a good case for supposing that Aristotle is thinking of Alcmeon's matricide as a 'mistake of fact'.²

To sum up. Of the six names Aristotle gives, only one (Oedipus) can confidently be interpreted as illustrating a 'mistake of fact', though Alcmeon *may* also be intended to do so. Three (Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus) are simply unclear. One (Orestes) seems a clear case of compulsion. Consequently, there is

¹ T. B. L. Webster, *Hermes* 82 (1954), 305, Else, p.391 n.86. See further my text note.

² I hope this is not 'implausible special pleading' (Stinton on the Else/Bremer approach to the examples). After all, Stinton himself takes it for granted that the reference to Oedipus in ch. 13 is to the Sophoclean Oedipus, not merely the Oedipus of Greek tragedy in general. In his letter to me Stinton agrees that Aristotle must have been thinking of particular *versions* of the stories, but argues that this does not necessarily mean that he was referring to particular plays, despite the reference to Sophocles' *Oedipus*, since it was famous in a way that Astydamos' Alcmeon could not have been. He also points out that if the version in which Alcmeon killed his mother when he was mad was Astydamos' version, then Aristotle in ch. 14 of the *Poetics* would be regarding Alcmeon as acting δι' ἄγνοιαν, whereas by the terminology of *E.N.* 3.1. he ought to be acting ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος. He further argues that, although Aristotle is lax about examples and it might be thought that the precise distinctions of *E.N.* 3.1 are irrelevant to *Po.* 14, there is no hint in *Po.* 14 that Aristotle is thinking of acts done in a fit of madness rather than just ignorance,

hence *prima facie* Astydamos' version was peculiar to himself, whereas the standard version, despite Antiphanes, was presumably that of Sophocles' *Epigoni*, and therefore the most likely reference in ch. 13 is to the version where Alcmeon killed his mother deliberately, under compulsion. Against this I would argue that *if* the distinction between δι' ἄγνοιαν and ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος means anything in the context of *Po.* 14, then it only knocks out the equation of Astydamos' version with that mentioned by Antiphanes. But I do not in any case accept that the distinction could be important, since in ch. 14 Aristotle is only operating within the frame of εἰδότες ἢ μὴ εἰδότες. And given Antiphanes' evidence, I do not see that for Aristotle, writing towards the end of the fourth century, from an emphatically fourth-century standpoint, the 'standard version' could not have been one where Alcmeon killed his mother ἀγνοῶν διὰ πάθος. Of course after a certain point such detailed arguments as these cease to have much contact with the reality of Aristotle's rather sparse text. None the less, I believe that the cumulative case for taking the example of Alcmeon as a reference to Astydamos' version is quite good.

no need to invoke Aristotle's carelessness in use of examples to avoid the interpretation advocated by Else and his followers—that *ἁμαρτία* is restricted to the sense of mistake of fact. At the same time, the vague, open-ended, phraseology in the two sets of examples at 53^a 11 and 53^a 21 is itself a strong indication that it would be rash to try to circumscribe the application of *ἁμαρτία*. Thus Stinton's approach to the interpretation of the examples is broadly persuasive, even if some of the detail is unconvincing.

II. THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN 13, 53^a 13–15 and 14, 54^a 4–9

14, 54^a 4–9 runs as follows in Kassel's Oxford Text:

κράτιστον δὲ

τὸ τελευταῖον, λέγω δὲ οἷον ἐν τῷ Κρεσφόντῃ ἢ Μερόπῃ 5
μέλλει τὸν υἱὸν ἀποκτείνειν, ἀποκτείνει δὲ οὐ, ἀλλ' ἀν-
εγνώρισε, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἰφιγενείᾳ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τὸν ἀδελφόν, καὶ
ἐν τῇ Ἑλλῇ ὁ υἱὸς τὴν μητέρα ἐκιδόναι μέλλων ἀνεγνώ-
ρισεν.

In the same article¹ Stinton offered some fresh observations on the apparent contradiction between 13, 53^a 13–15 and 14, 54^a 4–9. He implicitly rejects the usual attempt² to save Aristotle from the charge of inconsistency: namely that in ch. 13 Aristotle is concerned with the whole plot, but in ch. 14 only the critical scene, so that there is no necessary contradiction between his preference for a *μετάβασις* from good to bad fortune and his approval of a critical scene in which the deed of violence is averted at the last possible moment. The implications of such a rationalization are awkward. As Lucas (on 14, 54^a 8) points out, though the scene of realization before action might be combined with ultimate misfortune *in theory*, this is extremely unlikely (there are no known examples of such a plot), and we would be left to conclude that the best scene could not be got into the best plot. It is in any case quite artificial to try to make such a distinction between the best scene and the best plot: although Aristotle does indeed spend most of ch. 14 considering the critical scene, he is in effect considering it in relation to the *whole* plot³ (14, 53^b 3 ff. makes this clear. And the formula τὸ ἀγνοοῦντα μὲν πράξαι, πράξαντα δὲ ἀναγνώρισαι (14, 54^a 2–3) practically covers the whole plot of the *Oedipus*—not just *Oedipus'* confrontation with Laius). So we must conclude that Aristotle changed his mind between writing 13, 53^a 13–15 and 14, 54^a 4–9.⁴ Why?

⁴ The fact that the mode recommended as best in ch. 14 is not mentioned at all in ch. 13 might seem to suggest that the final preference of ch. 14 is an afterthought, rather than a properly considered change of mind. But it is hardly likely that when writing ch. 13 Aristotle should have forgotten of the existence of plays like the *Ion*, *Cresphontes*, and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and the emphatic phraseology of 13, 53^a 14–15 οὐκ εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἐκ δυστυχίας ἀλλὰ τοῦναντίον ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν and 21–30 must be intended to reject more than the mode τοὺς μοχθηροὺς ἐξ ἀτυχίας εἰς εὐτυχίαν (13, 52^b 36–7), and must in fact also contain an implicit polemic

against the *Cresphontes* schema.

¹ Art. cit. 252–4.

² Originally suggested by Lessing and accepted by e.g. J. Vahlen, *Beiträge zu Aristoteles Poetik*, ed. H. Schöne (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 53–4, D. de Montmollin, *La Poétique d'Aristote: texte primitif et additions ultérieures* (Neuchâtel, 1951), pp. 338–9, Else, pp. 450–1, Lucas, p. 155 (tentatively).

³ This is not to exclude the possibility that some of the discrepancies between chs. 13 and 14 can be explained by distortion due to difference of emphases: cf. p. 83 n. 2 below.

The most popular explanation has been Bywater's. He suggested that the explanation lay in Aristotle's 'somewhat tardy recognition of the necessity of avoiding the morally outraging' at all costs, on the ground that there must be an element of *τὸ μαιρόν* even in a play like the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. This is crisply refuted by Miss Hubbard:¹ 'the recognition is so far from tardy that it has dominated the discussion from the beginning of ch. 13, and in any case the tragic situation where the deed is done in ignorance is expressly said to involve no feeling of outrage.'² Thus the only way to salvage Bywater's theory is to suppose a further change of mind between 14, 54^a 2–3 and 14, 54^a 4–5, a more than dubious procedure! Miss Hubbard herself makes a characteristically cool suggestion: 'There seems nothing to be done with the change of mind but to accept it. However surprising it may seem to people in full strength, Aristotle is not after all the only great man to pass in later years from a preference for tragedy to a preference for tragicomedy; Shakespeare and Sophocles [*sic*: ? Euripides] are notable examples.' This presupposes a considerable interval between the writing of ch. 13 and at least part of ch. 14, which is of course not impossible. More important, while it provides a very general explanation for Aristotle's change of mind, it does nothing to explain on what precise grounds Aristotle finally preferred realization *before* action to realization *after* action. Though realization before action naturally implies a 'happy ending', it is not on that account, in the first instance at any rate, that it is preferred. The question why Aristotle changed his mind can only be answered (if at all) by first establishing the detailed reasons for his preference in ch. 14 for realization before action.

In ch. 14 Aristotle is weighing up the various ways of handling the *πάθος*,³

¹ M. E. Hubbard, *Ancient Literary Criticism* (ed. D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, Oxford, 1972), p.109 n.5. Cf. I. M. Glanville, 'Tragic Error', *CQ* 43 (1949), 47.

² 14, 54^a 3–4; it is quite clear in ch. 14 that whether or not *τὸ μαιρόν* comes into play depends on the *motivation* of the agent, *not* on whether the deed is done or not. Cf. also 14, 53^b 38–9, where the situation where someone in possession of the facts is about to act, but fails to do so, is stigmatized for having *τὸ μαιρόν*. The same accusation is levelled *implicitly* against the situation where the agent acts knowingly (14, 54^a 2). It is misleading to say 'Aristotle passes no judgement on class (2), acts done knowingly' (Stinton, p.234), or 'The schema is not uncommon . . . it is not excluded as untragic by Aristotle, but simply not preferred, as belonging to the simple not the complex plot' (Stinton, p.252). Although the superiority of the complex plot is certainly of some relevance, *in the first instance* Aristotle is assessing the various possibilities according to the criteria of *τὸ μαιρόν* and arousal of the tragic emotions. The situation where the agent acts knowingly clearly involves *τὸ*

μαίρον and equally clearly the structure of Aristotle's argument implies that this is so, even though the text at this point is little more than a series of jottings. But, though Stinton overlooks this important fact, it does not necessarily go against his argument for a wide-ranging application for *ἁμαρτία* in ch. 13. See Stinton, pp.234–5. To the objection: 'Why does Aristotle here pointedly reject acts done knowingly as having *τὸ μαιρόν* if he is prepared to allow them as *ἁμαρτίαι* in ch. 13?' the answer might be that the distortion of emphasis occurs because Aristotle has effectively forgotten that he is supposed to be assessing the *πάθος* in the light of the whole *πρᾶξις* and has simply become interested in calculating the relative merits of the various *πάθη* for their own sake (this goes some way to explaining the preference for a 'happy ending' plot in ch. 14, as argued below). Stinton, however, is right that Aristotle does not exclude schema (2) (*Medea*) as 'untragic'.

³ The term *πάθος* is carefully analysed by B. R. Rees, 'Pathos in the *Poetics* of Aristotle', *G & R* 19 (1972), 1–11, though he does not deal directly with the problems of ch. 14.

the critical act of violence, in order to secure the most effective arousal of the tragic emotions, pity and fear. One important criterion for deciding the relative merits of the different possibilities is the avoidance of *τὸ μαιρόν*. It is easy to see that realization before action avoids *τὸ μαιρόν*: in this case, as in the case of realization after action, moral outrage is avoided because the agent is ignorant of the true identity of the victim. Thus, in the case of realization before action, the original intent to kill does not cause revulsion in the audience, and when the identity of the victim is revealed, the fact that the agent does not carry his purpose through ensures that the feeling of revulsion is finally avoided. In the case of realization after action, moral revulsion does not occur because, although the agent does commit the murder, he is ignorant of the identity of his victim and thus unaware of the full enormity of the deed. The real problem is why realization before action should be thought by Aristotle to produce more effective arousal of the tragic emotions than realization after action. For, on the fact of it, as Stinton emphasizes, it would seem that if the tragic act is left undone, the emotion aroused must be less great. Realization after action is a prescription that appears to have everything possible in its favour: pity and fear are aroused because the deed is actually done, *τὸ μαιρόν* is avoided because the agent does not appreciate the nature of his action, and *ἐκπληξίς* occurs when the realization comes after the deed (I defer for the moment discussion of *ἐκπληξίς*). Why should this formula be less good than realization before action?

Stinton is undoubtedly right to see part of the explanation in Aristotle's belief that as much emotion was generated by an event still in the future as by a past event, provided it was *πρὸ ὁμμάτων*.¹ But this can only be *part* of the explanation, since, though it gets around the apparent deficiency of non-action, it does not of itself explain why realization before action should be *more* efficient in arousing pity and fear.² One factor in favour of realization before action, pointed out by Miss Hubbard and accepted as valid by Stinton, is that 'It might even be argued that a fear which is to be averted by rescue could be worked up to a higher pitch, and still be tolerable, than a fear which is fulfilled.' By analogy, much the same argument could be applied to the arousal of pity. Stinton offers a rather different explanation of why Aristotle might have supposed that the non-occurrence of the disaster allows increased scope for the arousal of pity. He argues as follows:

"Ἐλεος, pity or sympathy (Mitleid), depends on undeserved misfortune; and the more *ἐπιεικής* the victim, the greater the sympathy—up to a point: beyond that point his downfall becomes *μαίρον*. So his *ἐπιεικεία* must have a limit . . . If there is no downfall, however, this limit is unnecessary: he can be as *ἐπιεικής* as we like, and our pity will still be heightened and not diminished. At the vital moment, then, before the actual disaster, we shall pity him more than we should pity the actual downfall of a less good (and less sympathetic) character.

¹ Stinton, pp.253–54, working from Glanville, p.55 nn.6, 7, cl. *Rbet.* 1385^b13, 1386^a34, 1382^a21 (below, p.86 n.2). The point was already made by Vahlen, pp.53 ff., and accepted by Else, p.451. That it is relevant to *Poetics* 14 is suggested by 14, 53^b18 οὔτε ποιῶν οὔτε μέλλων.

² Rees, art. cit. 5, does not come to grips

with this difficulty. Glanville, pp.52 ff., argues that realization before action 'rescues both man and God from a moral condemnation through which pity is roused for what is human only at the cost of misrepresenting what is divine.' On the unlikelihood of this explanation see Stinton, p.253.

This ingenious argument runs counter to what is normally considered to be the most basic requirement of all for the arousal of the tragic emotions. According to the usual view, Aristotle does indeed recognize that to a *certain extent* the downfall of a man is the more pitiable the more virtuous he is (13, 53^a ὁ μὲν [ἔλεος] περὶ τοῦ ἀνάξιον ἐστὶν δυστυχούντα. This is presumably also the point of the qualification at 13, 53^a 16 ἡ οἶον εἶρηται ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ χειρόνος). But an important control on the ἐπιείκεια of the tragic character is exerted by the basic requirement that, to allow the audience to identify with him at all, he must be ὁμοιος. His ἐπιείκεια must have a limit, even when disaster does not occur, because we feel fear περὶ τὸν ὁμοιον (13, 53^a 6), and, although Aristotle does not say so explicitly in the *Poetics*, the same is true of pity (*Rhet.* 2.8, 1385^b 13, 1386^a 24).¹ Thus on the usual interpretation of ὁμοιος, Stinton's argument here would fall foul of an essential condition for the operation of the tragic emotions. But Stinton believes that the usual interpretation of ὁμοιος is wrong and that the term does *not* imply an *upper* limit of goodness. This is too large a question to deal with properly here, so I merely emphasize that Stinton's argument does conflict with the usual interpretation of ὁμοιος, which I believe to be right, and suggest that in any case such an argument is too theoretical to do justice to the demands of the general context of ch. 14.²

Nevertheless, there *are* arguments which might plausibly be advanced in favour of the scheme of realization before action. Apart from the argument suggested by Miss Hubbard, there is another, fairly obvious, factor which might be urged in favour of this scheme: a matter of practical stage-craft. An important characteristic of plays like the *Cresphontes*, *Helle* (presumably),³ *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and *Ion* is that the critical confrontation scene, complete with near-murder, could be enacted in its entirety on stage, simply because the murder does not finally occur, whereas, owing to the conventions of Greek tragedy, representations of actual killings on stage were exceedingly rare.⁴ Hence the critical scene could be placed quite literally, and at extended length, πρὸ ὀμμάτων, and the dramatist could exploit the emotions of his audience in a more direct way than was possible by relating the details of the killing in a speech or choral ode, or even by putting the confrontation on stage and then making its murderous outcome take place just off stage. It is true that this rather conflicts with Aristotle's emphatic assertion at the start of ch. 14 that the mere reading of a plot should be sufficient to arouse pity and fear and to a certain extent with his generally cool attitude to ὄψις (14, 53^b 2–8),⁵ but *any* explanation is bound to conflict with something (since Aristotle changed his mind), and the harshness of the contradiction is alleviated if we accept Bywater's suggestion (made for other reasons) that 14, 53^b 22–54^a 9, and not the whole of ch. 14, is the later accretion.

It could also be argued that, from the point of view of Aristotle in his role of apologist for tragedy against the moralistic attacks of Plato, the scheme of

¹ As Bywater remarks on 13, 53^a 5–6, 'The antithesis in the text . . . is too strongly put', cf. also Else, p.373.

² See end-note, pp.92–4 below.

³ Nothing more is known of this play.

⁴ For deaths etc. on stage see Lucas on 11, 52^b 10. The nearest thing to the representation of an actual killing is Ajax' suicide,

which occurs (arguably) only just out of sight of the audience. Later such restraints were relaxed, as the fame of Timotheus of Zacynthus (*Schol. Ai.* 864) attests.

⁵ Note, however, that Aristotle does seem to accept as a useful criterion whether a thing comes off on stage: 13, 53^a 27–8, cf. 17, 55^a 22 ff.

realization before action would obviously be a highly efficient mechanism (arguably a more efficient mechanism than realization after action) for securing tragic *catharsis*. In a 'tragic' tragedy the emotions of pity and fear are purged away by their own excess, but in a 'happy ending' tragedy the dramatist himself brings about their purgation by working them up to an almost intolerable pitch, and then relieving them by averting the catastrophe at the last possible moment. The therapeutic value of a play like the *Cresphontes* is obvious. But whether this is a factor which would weigh with Aristotle the aesthetic theorist is a moot point. It presumably would not, if (as I should argue) '*Catharsis* is not something the tragic poet aims to produce . . . *Catharsis* is a therapeutic by-product, not something the poet either does or should intend.'¹

The weakness of all the arguments considered so far is that they make little attempt to see Aristotle's preference for realization before action in relation to the whole argument from 14, 53^b 37 ff. I suggest that it is possible to interpret the argument in such a way as to show that it is quite logical for Aristotle to describe realization before action as *κράτιστον*, even though *we* may think that he is mistaken to do so. This interpretation is hardly revolutionary and is to a certain extent implicit in some of the arguments already considered, especially the perception that a *πάθος* that has yet to occur can generate as much emotion as a *πάθος* that *has* occurred. Yet so far as I am aware, it has not been argued explicitly before.

One of the reasons why a future *πάθος* can generate as much emotion as an actual *πάθος* is that, from the point of view of the onlooker, the danger of its occurrence appears to be in some sense a real one.² In describing the formula of realization before action Aristotle seems to concentrate on the critical moment when it looks as if disaster is *just about to strike*: 14, 54^a 5–7 ἡ Μερόπη μέλλει τὸν υἱὸν ἀποκτείνειν, ἀποκτείνει δὲ οὐ, ἀλλ' ἀνεγνώρισε. Might it not be that Aristotle prefers realization before action simply because he thinks it affords greater opportunity for the creation of dramatic tension and suspense, which serve to heighten the tragic emotions? We know from Plutarch's description that the audience in his day found the suspense of the critical scene in the *Cresphontes* almost unbearable.³ Aristotle admittedly does not say much about dramatic tension, but it is clear that he was well aware of its effectiveness as a means of arousing audience emotion. Tales of narrow escapes are *θαυμαστά* (*Rhet.* 1.11,

¹ This is not the place to become embroiled in discussion of *catharsis*. The formula in the text is Hubbard, op. cit., pp.88–9. Else, pp.423–50, while denying that *catharsis* is the 'end' of tragedy (p.439), still manages to make it relevant to Aristotle's preference for realization before action. But his analysis depends not only on an idiosyncratic interpretation of *catharsis*, and an argument that is not easy to follow, but also upon an erroneous acceptance of Bywater's view that recognition after action still involves an element of *τὸ μισαρόν*.

² Cf. *Rhet.* 1385^b 13 ff. "Ἐστω δὲ ἕλεος λύπη τις ἐπὶ φαινόμενῳ κακῷ . . . ὃ κἂν αὐτὸς προσδοκῇσιεν ἂν παθεῖν . . . καὶ τοῦτο ὅταν πλησίον φαίνεται" δηλον γὰρ ὅτι

ἀνάγκη τὸν μέλλοντα ἐλέησεν ὑπάρχειν τοιοῦτον οἷον οἴεσθαι παθεῖν . . . 1386^a 34 ff. ἐγγὺς γὰρ ποιῶσι φαίνεσθαι [τὸ κακὸν] πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιῶντες, ἢ ὡς μέλλοντα ἢ ὡς γεγνηότα. Καὶ γεγνηότα ἄρτι ἢ μέλλοντα διὰ ταχέων ἐλεεωτέρα. 1382^a 21 f. "Ἐστω δὲ φόβος λύπη τις ἢ ταραχὴ ἐκ φαντασίας μέλλοντος κακοῦ . . . We should also bear in mind the simple fact that fear is *προσδοκία κακοῦ*.

³ *De Esu Carnium* 998E σκόπει δὲ καὶ τὴν ἐν τῇ τραγωδίᾳ Μερόπην ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτὸν ὡς φονέα τοῦ υἱοῦ πέλεκυν ἀραμένην καὶ λέγουσαν 'ὠνητέραν δὴ τὴνδ' ἐγὼ δίδωμι σοι πληγὴν', ὅσον ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ κίνημα ποιεῖ, συνεξεορθιάζουσα φόβῳ μὴ φθάσῃ τὸν ἐπιλαμβανόμενον γέροντα καὶ τρώσῃ τὸ μερῶκον.

1371^b 10–11). People add τὸ θαυμαστόν to their stories because τὸ θαυμαστόν ἡδύ (*Poet.* 24, 60^a 17). Περιπέτεια is a ‘change’ involving τὸ θαυμαστόν (*Rhet.* 1.11.1371^b 10–11). The best form of ἀναγνώρισις also necessarily involves τὸ θαυμαστόν (*Poet.* 11, 52^a 32–3). In all these cases the arousal of the audience’s emotions depends on either the gradual build-up of suspense of its resolution.¹ That Aristotle is thinking in terms of tension or suspense in ch. 14 is shown, I think, by his criticism of the scheme where the agent is about to act knowingly but refrains (14, 53^b 37–9). That this is censured for incurring τὸ μᾶρόν is simple to understand and has already been discussed. But there is a second ground for criticism: such a scheme is οὐ τραγικόν· ἀπαθὲς γάρ. The difficulty here lies in explaining why such a scheme should be ‘not tragic’ (i.e. incapable of arousing the tragic emotions of pity and fear): the explanation is ἀπαθὲς γάρ; but what exactly does ἀπαθὲς mean? Scholars have mainly divided into two camps, some taking it as = ‘without a πάθος’, others as = ‘lacking in (not productive of) emotion’ (i.e. the tragic emotions). If we were compelled to choose between these two alternatives, then we would have to prefer the former, simply because Aristotle’s usage in the *Poetics* at large, and certainly in ch. 14 (14, 53^b 18, 54^a 13), generally supports the interpretation of πάθος as = ‘a destructive or painful act’. But in context ἀπαθὲς cannot simply mean ‘without a πάθος’, since the mere fact that a πάθος does not occur is not in itself a deficiency (cf. above, p.84). Such a scheme also self-evidently does raise the ‘idea of a pathos, the intention of performing one’.² It seems to me that this riddling phrase in effect combines *both* senses of πάθος, and means ‘without a πάθος in the real sense’, or even, ‘without a πάθος that can arouse πάθη’ (i.e. in the present context, pity and fear).³ If we compare this scheme with that of realization before action, in both of which the idea of the pathos is canvassed, but the pathos itself does not materialize, it is surely clear that the superiority of the latter (avoidance of τὸ μᾶρόν aside) must lie in the fact that the πάθος at least seems to be a real possibility, whereas in the case of the former, though the idea of the πάθος is indeed broached, nothing is made of it—there is no tension, and the agent simply fails to carry his plan out. (This scheme is naturally inferior to the one where the agent acts knowingly, because there the fact that the πάθος does occur guarantees the arousal of at least some emotion.)

We may distinguish, generally speaking, several distinct conditions under which dramatic tension may operate. If the audience *do not* already know the story, there may be suspense of a very simple kind: what happened/whodunit? If the audience *do* know the story in advance (whether because the story itself is a very familiar one, or they have seen or read the play before, or the dramatist himself in effect tells them the story at the beginning, as in an explicit Euripidean prologue), tension may be generated in different ways. The dramatist can frustrate the audience’s expectations in *detail*, while at the same time keeping to the broad outlines of the story (this is a favourite technique of Euripides’).⁴ It can also happen that, although the audience know the story in

¹ τὸ θαυμάζειν is the desire to understand: *Rhet.* 1371^a 31–4 (cf. ^b 5–11), *Met.* 982^b 17–19.

² The formulation is Else, p.420.

³ See also Rees, art. cit., p.4, for a similar interpretation.

⁴ See Dodds on *Bacch.* 52, Barrett on

Hipp. 41–50, and Owen on *Ion* 70–1.

Broader studies of Euripides’ partiality for teasing the expectations of his audience are R. P. Winnington-Ingram, ‘Euripides: *Poietes Sophos*’, *Arethusa* 2 (1969), 127–42, and G. Arnott, ‘Euripides and the Unexpected’, *G & R* 20 (1973), 49–64.

advance, they yet identify so strongly with the characters of the play that to some extent they suspend their own superior knowledge, and enter into the emotions of the tragic characters who do not possess that knowledge. In addition, if the ending of the story is tragic, it is only human nature to wish that it might not be so, and tension will occur even with regard to the outcome because of the operation of the so-called 'principle of hope'. Conversely, if the ending of the story is 'happy', it is, equally, only human nature to be apprehensive about the outcome. This applies even when the audience has been told explicitly that there is no real cause for alarm (thus in the prologue to the *Ion* Euripides makes it clear that there will be a happy ending, yet clearly in the crucial scenes he plays with his audience's apprehensions that Creusa will in fact kill Ion and vice versa), or even when they know that the conventions of the particular genre presuppose a happy ending (most old-fashioned adventure stories and practically all 'telly-cop' plots depend on the exploitation of this kind of suspense, though of course suspense of the 'how-was-it-done?' kind may also be operative). It may be agreed without argument that all these types of tension except the first (tension arising from total, or almost total, ignorance of the outcome) were possible in the Greek theatre. Could tension of the first kind have been operative? Most scholars would deny this possibility on the ground that the degree of knowledge about the central stories of Greek myth possessed by the Athenian audience of certainly the fifth, and probably also most of the fourth, centuries would rule out tension of so basic a kind. But even if they are right about the degree of knowledge in the Athenian audience,¹ this in itself does not rule out the possibility that Aristotle could have entertained such a view of dramatic tension: the only relevant evidence here is Aristotle's own opinion about the knowledgeability of the audience. Throughout the *Poetics* he is writing from a fourth-century perspective: he frequently cites the work of fourth-century tragedians, the fifth-century tragedians in whom he is chiefly interested, Sophocles and Euripides, retained great popularity in the fourth century, and his relative neglect of Aeschylus must be attributed to the sharp decline of interest in Aeschylus in the fourth century. He attacks the decadent taste of the contemporary audience, the artistic compromises of contemporary tragedians, and the modern tendency towards irrelevance in the choral odes.² Most important for our purposes, he asserts that 'even the familiar stories are familiar only to a few' (9, 51^b 26). How is this statement to be assessed? The problem, for the purposes of this argument, is not so much whether Aristotle is right or not (though if the statement could be shown to be flagrantly at odds with the external evidence, then there would be the beginnings of a case for dismissing it as rhetorical bravura, not seriously meant), but whether he himself believed it. And the answer must be that he did: the context shows that this is not rhetorical exaggeration, but a serious statement, meant to carry conviction, to prove a serious point. Aristotle is appealing to what he takes to be a self-evident fact.³ (We should also remember that Aristotle praises Agathon's

¹ Eur. *Hipp.* 451–6 must give pause—see Barrett ad loc. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, 1971), p.198 n.124, is not (in my opinion) an adequate reply. One of the most commonly used arguments—that use of ironic effects necessarily presupposes audience foreknowledge—is also unconvincing. See p.90 n.2 below.

² 13, 53^a 34; 9, 51^b 36–9, 13, 53^a 34–5; 18, 56^a 27–32.

³ 9, 51^b 23–6 ὥστ' οὐ πάντως εἶναι ζητητέον τῶν παραδεδομένων μύθων, περὶ οὓς αἱ τραγωδίαι εἰσὶν, ἀντέχεσθαι. καὶ γὰρ γελοῖον τοῦτο ζητεῖν, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ γινώρμα δλίγοις γινώρμα ἐστὶν, ἀλλ' ὅμως εὐφραίνει πάντας.

Antheus, which was completely made up, and points out that there is no need for dramatists to keep to the traditional stories (9, 51^b 21–5).) Consequently, we may conclude that Aristotle could have conceived of dramatic tension of the most basic kind. All types of dramatic tension, then, may be of relevance to Aristotle's discussion in ch. 14.

In assessing the fourth possible way of handling the critical confrontation Aristotle merely says that it is *κράτιστον*. The fact that he does not specify the exact grounds of his approval suggests that they must be clearly implicit in the immediate context. The third possibility, realization after action, has an *ἀναγνώρισις* that is *ἐκπληκτικόν*. The two possibilities are equal as regards the avoidance of *τὸ μαιρόν*. Both possibilities have an *ἀναγνώρισις*. It is therefore only reasonable to infer that the superior *πάθος* of the fourth possibility must have something to do with the manner in which the *ἀναγνώρισις* is achieved. To resolve this problem we must first of all decide the rationale of Aristotle's judgement on the third possibility.

What are the implications of *ἐκπληξις*? The word can be used of the onset of any strong emotion. But Aristotle defines it as *ὑπερβολὴ θαυμασιότητος* (*Top.* 126^b 14) and a connection with *τὸ θαυμαστόν* in the *Poetics* seems assured by the fact that Aristotle describes Achilles' pursuit of Hector as *ἐκπληκτικόν* in 25, 60^b 25 and *θαυμαστόν* in 24, 60^a 14. And *περιπέτειαί* are *θαυμαστά* at *Rhet.* 1371^b 11, as they also are in the *Poetics*,¹ while *ἀναγνώρισεις* are *ἐκπληκτικά* (*vid.* the present passage and 16, 55^a 17), so that the link between *ἐκπληξις* and *τὸ θαυμαστόν* is again confirmed, in the light of the close connection between *ἀναγνώρισις* and *περιπέτεια*.²

It is clear from the general context of ch. 14, where Aristotle is concentrating on the means a dramatist may employ for arousing pity and fear while avoiding moral revulsion, that he has in mind the *ἐκπληξις* felt by the audience. Although it is practically impossible to find an adequate English equivalent for *ἐκπληξις*, it seems clear (or at any rate as clear as anything in the *Poetics* can be) that Aristotle intends the term to *include* a feeling of 'wonder' or 'surprise', whether or not this can be said to be its 'meaning'. It is also clear from the immediate context that 'wonder' or 'surprise' is thought to be particularly conducive to the arousal of pity and fear (this idea is explicit at 9, 52^a 3–4). Why should the audience feel 'wonder' or 'surprise' in Greek tragedy? Wonder or surprise is felt when things turn out logically but *unexpectedly*, as Aristotle makes clear in his discussion of *τὸ θαυμαστόν* at the end of ch. 9 (9, 52^a 3–4 *ταῦτα δὲ γίνεται . . . ὅταν γένηται παρὰ τὴν δόξαν*). In this passage also the surprise is naturally taken to be the surprise of the audience, when things turn out contrary to their expectations.³

The external evidence is inconclusive. The best discussion is Else, pp. 318 ff., though his interpretation of *καὶ τὰ γνῶριμα* as 'even the familiar names' is strained (but does not affect the argument).

¹ In the first sentence of ch. 11 *κάθ' ἅπερ εἴρηται* refers back to 9, 52^a 4: so A. Rostagni, *Aristotele Poetica* (2nd edn. Turin, 1945), p. 60, Glanville, 'Note on *Peripeteia*', *CQ* 41 (1947), 73–8 (on the basis of an unpublished paper by F. M. Cornford) Else, p. 344, Lucas, p. 129. *Rhet.* 1371^b 11 helps the case.

² This analysis is essentially Bywater's.

³ So, emphatically, Else, p. 330 n. 103; the immediate context and the *θαυμαστόν* and *ἐκπληξις* contexts discussed above combine to make this interpretation practically certain. But this interpretation, because of the link between 11, 52^a 23 and 9, 52^a 4 (n. 1 above), implies that *περιπέτεια* in ch. 11 should be taken as 'reversal of audience expectation'. Although I agree with this view (see e.g. Else, p. 345, P. Turner, 'The Reverse of Vahlen', *CQ* N.S. 9 (1959),

But Aristotle, in common with most Greeks of his time, assumes a very high degree of identification between audience and tragic characters.¹ Consequently an audience may feel wonder or surprise in two main ways. In cases where they *do not* know the story in advance, and it is not revealed to them in an explicit prologue, they may feel surprise on their own account, independently of the tragic characters (though their surprise will be enhanced by the consternation of the tragic characters). In cases where they *do* know the story in advance or it is revealed to them in an explicit prologue, they may still feel surprise because they identify so strongly with the shocked tragic characters, and/or because the plot is given a particular twist, surprising in itself, even when the outcome is known.

It is now time to apply this general theorizing to the *ἀναγνώρισις* of the *Oedipus*, the third category of play considered in ch. 14. Because the full identity of the principal parties is not revealed to the audience before the *ἀναγνώρισις* the *ἀναγνώρισις* itself will come as a 'surprise' in something the same way as the solution of a detective story,² though the surprise of the audience

207–15, Hubbard, p.104 n.5), which is consistent with Aristotle's belief in the ignorance of the contemporary audience (p.88 above), it hardly affects the argument which view of *περιπέτεια* is preferred. Even if *περιπέτεια* means 'reversal of character expectation', the significance of this reversal lies in the transference of the emotions of the characters to the audience. Cf. next note.

¹ D. W. Lucas, 'Pity, Terror, and *Peripeteia*', *CQ* N.S. 12 (1962), 52–60, esp. 54 ff.

² Lucas appears to concede this possibility in 'Pity' 53 (following Else, p.346), but rejects it in his edition (p.133) on the ground that 'Even with regard to *Oedipus* the audience is clearly assumed to know from the start all that in the course of the play *Oedipus* discovers about himself' (cf. Glanville, 'Note on *Peripeteia*', p.77). But this argument simply ignores the possibility that *as far as Aristotle was concerned* the audience could feel surprise of a detective-story type. Not only, as Else points out, can it be argued that 'Our knowledge that *Oedipus*' situation is going to be reversed is "accidental" in Aristotle's sense. It is not an expectation based on the facts as they are given in the course of the play', but also Aristotle's belief that 'even the familiar stories are familiar only to a few' means that from his point of view the whole question of advance knowledge of a given plot is simply irrelevant (cf. Else, p.346 n.10). I may add that the natural interpretation of 11, 52^a24–6 is that the audience is assumed not to know the *Oedipus* story (cf. Hubbard ad loc.). None of this *necessarily* means that Aristotle is insensitive to ironic effects in tragedy, as both Else and Lucas imply, though admittedly he says nothing

about them. It is often argued that the mere presence of ironic effects of the kind used so extensively throughout the *Oedipus* necessarily presupposes audience foreknowledge of the story, but although I do not doubt that some of Sophocles' audience had that foreknowledge, or that he exploited it to the full by the use of ironic effects, their mere presence does not *prove* audience foreknowledge. Irony of course can work retrospectively. This is a familiar enough technique in Greek and Latin poetry (e.g. Anacreon 358 *PMG*, as interpreted by A. E. Harvey, 'Homeric epithets in Greek lyric poetry', *CQ* N.S. 7 (1957), 213). It should also be familiar enough to any follower of modern theatre or cinema or indeed to anyone who reads a detective story. One does not deny the existence of the clues Hitchcock gives his viewers in the first part of *Psycho* simply because their significance is not appreciated when they actually appear on screen, or the ironic light thrown on everything that precedes the solution by the solution itself in Agatha Christie's classic detective story, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The criterion: would the audience appreciate it at the time?—is altogether too crude a critical tool. Thus Aristotle's emphasis on the techniques of suspense is in theory by no means incompatible with an awareness of the significance of ironic effects. In fact, if the *ἐκπληξις* felt by the audience at the *ἀναγνώρισις* of the *Oedipus* is of a detective-story kind, it is actually enhanced by the previous ironic effects, whose true meaning is only made clear by the *ἀναγνώρισις* itself. Aristotle's way of looking at the *Oedipus*, which assumes an audience without advance knowledge of the story, therefore gives the ironic effects a somewhat different

will certainly be augmented by their identification with the shocked Oedipus. In the case of plays where (given their general ignorance) the audience do not know what is going to happen, and are not told the outcome by the dramatist himself, but are given the full identity of the persons who are to come into conflict,¹ the ἐκπληξίς generated by the ἀναγνώρισις will derive largely from the audience's identification with the shocked tragic character. In the case of plays where the plot is set out in advance, the ἐκπληξίς felt by the audience will be of a similar kind. In all three cases the ἐκπληξίς results from the final and unexpected rupture of the dramatic tension and is the culminating emotion which stuns the audience and arouses pity and fear to a high degree.

In the fourth category, however, that of realization before action, the dramatic tension mainly springs from the fact that the dramatist could create tremendous suspense by posing the audience the question: will the πάθος take place or not—will the πάθος be averted by a life-saving ἀναγνώρισις?²—and dramatizing the critical moment on stage. In the case of plays where the audience is not told the outcome in advance, like the *Cresphontes*³ and *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, the dramatic tension would be particularly acute: Plutarch's testimony is sufficient proof of this. But even in a play like the *Ion*, with its explicit prologue,⁴ and audience will necessarily be gripped with suspense in the critical scenes. Aristotle could reasonably have supposed that the dramatic tension generated by realization before action was greater, and hence the arousal of emotion more intense, because, whereas the emotions aroused by realization after action depend on the unexpected rupture of a gradually established dramatic tension, those aroused by realization before action operate by putting an audience's fears and apprehensions on a knife-edge in a critical scene (or scenes) of tremendous suspense.

Ch. 14 of the *Poetics* undoubtedly contains a flat contradiction of the approved formula of ch. 13. Why Aristotle changed his mind must remain a matter for speculation. Perhaps it was simply that he saw a performance of the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* or *Cresphontes*, and like Plutarch, was tremendously impressed by the effect the climactic critical scene had upon the audience. Both plays were popular in Athens towards the end of the fourth century.⁵ A more likely explanation lies in the different emphases of chs. 13 and 14. Although ch. 14 is *theoretically* concerned with the handling of the πάθος *in relation to the whole plot* it is easy to suppose that once Aristotle had

value than they would have had for *some* of the fifth-century audience, but it need not be taken to devalue them completely.

¹ e.g. Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Heracles*; probably Astydamos' *Alcmeon* and Sophocles' *Odysseus Akantrophex*.

² This seems to have been appreciated by Glanville, 'Note on *Peripeteia*', p.77 n.1: 'In plays with a happy ending, the tragic emotion . . . depends on the outcome *not* being a foregone conclusion . . .', though her parallel argument (p.77) that 'the whole emotional effect of the play' (viz. the *Oedipus*) 'depends on their knowing the outcome from the first, since fear is *προσδοκία κακοῦ*' ignores Aristotle's belief in the ignorance of the audience and the

possible role of retrospective irony (p.90 n.2 above), and also seems to imply quite wrongly that *προσδοκία κακοῦ* is not a significant factor in 'happy ending' plays.

³ The *Cresphontes* did not have an explicit prologue. See O. Musso, *Euripide, Cresfonte* (Milan, 1974), p.XXIV.

⁴ It is not quite explicit—see p.87 n.4 above—but presumably the audience would feel fairly sure of a happy ending after it, though they would undoubtedly get some shocks along the way.

⁵ Documentation in A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre* (2nd edn. Oxford, 1898), pp.99–102, cf. *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (Oxford, 1896), p.448 n.4.

embarked upon his detailed comparison of the different ways of handling the *πάθος*, he was induced to change his preference because at that particular point in his work his more detailed approach necessarily involved taking a more restricted perspective. Whether he was right to do so is another question. Stinton's view that the formula of realization before action is 'the typical schema for melodrama' (Stinton, p.254) is perhaps a little harsh. Elsewhere in the *Poetics* it is not, after all, a necessary requirement, though it is a preferred element, in a tragedy that it should have an 'unhappy' ending, and it is arbitrary to deny the appellation 'tragedy' to plays which rely for their effect upon the creation of a more immediate form of excitement. But of course it is true that the fear and pity evoked by a 'tragic' tragedy are of a more profound and lasting kind, that the scheme of realization before action necessarily puts greater emphasis upon a single climactic scene (or scenes), however skilfully led up to, somewhat at the expense of the *πρᾶξις* as a whole, and that such a formula can hardly produce *great* tragedy. Stinton is therefore right to see a falling off from the profound insights of ch. 13 and we may speculate that Aristotle's final preference for that formula is the manifestation of a jaded critical palate, just as today the intellectually *blasé* may have recourse to the reading of detective stories, thrillers, and Science Fiction (*experto credite*). Nevertheless, the theory that Aristotle is thinking in terms of suspense and excitement in ch. 14 does at least provide a rational basis for his preference for the formula of realization before action. And his *general* emphasis upon suspense, excitement, surprise does show an acute awareness of one level at which even the greatest of tragedies work upon the emotions of the audience, a level increasingly recognized by modern scholarship.¹

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END-NOTE

I am grateful to Mr. Stinton for making his position on *ὁμοιος* clear to me (I had not realized that it is implicit on pp.239 and 253 of his article). He believes that the usual assumptions that (i) Aristotle means by *ὁμοιος* to imply an *upper* limit of goodness; that is, that a completely good person would be unlike ourselves, and so we could not identify with him, and (ii) that this is a correct account of how the tragic emotions work, are both wrong. Briefly, his arguments are as follows:

(i) The limitation *ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη* (13, 53^a 8) refers back to *οὔτε τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς* etc. (13, 52^b 34 ff.), not to *ὁμοιον* (13, 53^a 6). (Commentators since Twining have realized that it must be the antithesis of *ἐπιεικεῖς*, otherwise *ἐπιεικεῖς* cannot have the sense 'very good' required by the context. It follows that *ἐπιεικεῖς* is what it refers to.) That is: the central figure must not be *very* good, not because he would then be unlike ourselves, so that we could not identify/sympathize with him, but because his downfall would be *μαρὸν*. Stinton finds confirmation for this interpretation in the qualification *ἢ βελτίονος μᾶλλον ἢ χείρονος* (13, 53^a 16–17), which he takes to mean that the central figure should be as good as possible, provided he is not perfect, and

¹ e.g. the studies of Euripides' dramatic technique cited above, p.87 n.4, or O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977). Note, e.g., Taplin's con-

tention that the so-called 'carpet scene' in the *Agamemnon* 'is meant to be puzzling' (p.316).

in the observations ἤτοι βελτίονας ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς (2, 48^a 4) and ἡ μὲν [κωμωδία] . . . χείρους ἢ δὲ βελτίους . . . τῶν νῦν (2, 48^a 17 f.). He also maintains that in the initial prescription οὔτε τοὺς ἐπιεικεῖς ἄνδρας δεῖ μεταβάλλοντας φαίνεσθαι ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, οὐ γὰρ φοβερὸν οὐδὲ ἐλπεῖν τούτο ἀλλὰ μιᾶρον ἐστίν (13, 52^b 34–6) it is wrong to explain οὐ φοβερὸν by the theory that the agent is too good to be like ourselves (as is done e.g. by Lucas ad loc.) because οὐδὲ ἐλπεῖν cannot be explained in the same way, since the ἐπιεικής in this situation clearly is ἀνάξιος δυστυχῶν. οὐδὲ ἐλπεῖν has therefore to be explained by the fact that the sense of outrage annuls that of pity and the same applies, in his opinion, to οὐ φοβερὸν.

(ii) We do not in fact find the stage portrayal of very good people unsympathetic unless the dramatist takes care that we should by making their very virtues contribute to a defect such as priggishness or spiritual pride (as e.g. Hippolytus). Generosity or altruism or love or courage are not *per se* unsympathetic. We identify with people who have the qualities we admire, or think we should admire, whether or not we have them ourselves. Thus we can identify with Robert Powell's Jesus Christ or with Socrates in the *Phaedo*.

These are powerful arguments, which deserve the most careful consideration. I should tentatively reply: (i) Stinton's analysis of the critical passage in ch. 13 seems to me to do more justice to the strict letter of Aristotle's rather schematically organized argument than to its general spirit. It is true that at *no single point* does the argument *require* ὅμοιος to imply an upper limit of goodness. Yet surely that implication is built into the very word itself. The ὁμοιότης in question must, in context, be moral. We feel fear for someone 'like' (*ourselves*). 'Likeness' to ourselves would seem to imply more than just absence of moral depravity. Stinton's interpretation in effect gives little (or perhaps rather an extremely strained) meaning to ὅμοιος. Further, it must be true that we also feel *pity* for the ὅμοιος (see p.85 n.1 above), even though the form of Aristotle's argument at 13, 53^a 5–6 tends to obscure this. Now the scheme of a fall from good to bad fortune of a σφόδρα πονηρός, who is *not* ὅμοιος, is unsatisfactory, because, although it satisfies 'human feeling' (τὸ φιλόανθρωπον), it does not arouse pity or fear. Pity is not aroused by undeserved suffering *only*: it is an implicit requirement that the subject of the pity should also be ὅμοιος to some degree. Fear is also felt for the ὅμοιος. The best scheme involves the fall from good to bad fortune of ὁ μήτε ἀρετῇ διαφέρων καὶ δικαιοσύνη. Although Stinton is right to say that this phrase does not *refer* to ὁμοιον, it is clearly *implied* by the argument that such a man will be ὅμοιος, since the arousal of both pity and fear depends on ὁμοιότης. Ch. 13 is in effect concerned with three classes of persons: the very bad man, the very good man, and the man in between the two extremes. The best tragic character has to be 'like ourselves' in that he is neither very good nor very bad, so that we can identify with him. But he has to be 'better rather than worse' (13, 53^a 16–17 does not justify the inference that 'he should be as good as possible') because we feel pity for undeserved suffering. These two requirements pull in different directions, so that it comes as no surprise if Aristotle from time to time emphasizes the one at the expense of the other.

(iii) Stinton's observations here are a valuable corrective to the too easily made assumption that great virtue is unsympathetic, an assumption which, as he suggests to me, probably owes much to modern sensibilities alert to hypocrisy and pretension. It is true that we can identify with Christ as played by Robert

Powell and with Socrates in the *Phaedo*. But this, I would maintain, is because their great goodness is a dynamic quality, maintained by constant effort and struggle. It is not therefore 'inhuman'. By contrast, I would argue, the correct critical response to the typical Dickensian heroine is one of alienation (even though this was not the contemporary response, nor the one intended by the artist), and this is because their goodness is static, and so unadulterated as to be quite inhuman. Aristotle of course does not discuss such distinctions. But as a *general* statement, the requirement that a stage character should be 'like ourselves' in being neither very good, nor very bad, seems to me to have sufficient truth for Aristotle to have been satisfied with it in his analysis in *Poetics* 13.

It may be objected that this whole discussion is academic on the ground that the question is only important when the *πάθος* does not occur. (Where it does occur, the tragic hero certainly cannot be of consummate virtue because his fall would be morally revolting.) I have dwelt upon it because it raises very important general questions about the conditions necessary for audience identification and because it is also critical for Stinton's suggested explanation for the preference in ch. 14 for a 'happy ending' plot.

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