

ARISTOTLE'S HISTORY OF POETRY

CARNES LORD

Yale University

It has become necessary almost to apologize for writing on Aristotle's *Poetics*; to attempt to discuss Aristotle's account of the origins of poetry may seem altogether indefensible. But what is familiar has a way of being taken for granted, and it seems to me that scholars have been only too disposed, in the general haste to get on with the business of historical investigation, to take for granted and even to treat with some impatience the familiar but puzzling, problematic, and—many have felt—singularly unhelpful “history” which has been supplied them by Aristotle. What is true of literary historians is true in some degree even of commentators on the *Poetics*. Most commentators have tended to operate on the assumption that the *Poetics* as a whole is an assemblage of lecture notes or observations connected in loose and somewhat haphazard fashion; accordingly, they have had little objection to an approach which sees in the fourth chapter of the *Poetics* only a quarry from which to extract potentially useful historical information.¹

I think it is safer to assume, with several recent commentators, that the *Poetics* has a coherent plan and is composed with at least ordinary care.² I am less sure it is necessary to follow these commentators in

¹ The following works will be cited by author only: I. Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (Oxford 1909); G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963); A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles Poetik* (Berlin 1934); D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Oxford 1968); D. de Montmollin, *La Poétique d'Aristote: texte primitif et additions ultérieures* (Neuchâtel 1951); A. Rostagni, *Aristotele Poetica* (Turin 1945); J. Vahlen, *Aristotelis de Arte Poetica Liber* (Leipzig 1885³). The second edition of A. W. Pickard-Cambridge's indispensable *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, with revisions by T. B. L. Webster (Oxford 1962), will be cited as *DTC*². For the *Poetics* I have used the text of R. Kassel, *Aristotelis De Arte Poetica Liber* (Oxford 1965).

² The approach of Else and Montmollin. Consider in particular Else's remark concerning “the failure of all efforts to construct a plausible early history of tragedy” from Aristotle's account: “On the one hand the various parties to the controversy tend to

the complicated and frequently unconvincing assumptions regarding the state of the text which are characteristic of many of their analyses. At any rate, I am convinced that it is possible to trace, in the "history" of Chapter 4, an ordered, careful and even lucid argument, without significantly altering the text as it is presently constituted.³

The purpose of my analysis is to understand Aristotle rather than to attempt to reconstruct the early history of tragedy. Obviously, it is not possible to interpret what Aristotle says without at the same time considering what he could or should have said. But the historical questions have been treated very frequently and very fully, and it would serve no useful purpose to repeat information which is readily available elsewhere, and still less to attempt to discuss every theory, hypothesis or guess which has been advanced in the course of what is easily one of the largest scholarly controversies of this century. Generally speaking, I have pursued historical questions only to the extent required for the elucidation of Aristotle's argument. In the last section I attempt to account for several statements of Themistius on the origins of tragedy and comedy which are usually attributed to Aristotle, and I offer some suggestions regarding the pre-history of tragedy in the Peloponnese. Suffice it to say that I believe it can be shown not only that Aristotle's view as a whole does not conflict with what is known or thought to be known of the historical facts, but that it accounts for them at least as well as any other explanation. I shall also suggest that there is no basis to the very generally held view⁴ that Aristotle's account of poetry, and in particular his account of tragedy, is guided by considerations of a theoretical or *a priori* character.

differ *toto caelo* on the application of Aristotle's words to literary theory or history, while on the other hand they tend to agree implicitly on the interpretation of the words themselves. Yet in a disturbing number of cases this tacit agreement does not rest on a thorough scrutiny of Aristotle's argument but simply on mechanical acceptance of a *fable convenue*. . . . If we are to break out of the dead center in which the interpretation of the *Poetics* is becalmed at present, we must stop repeating what has been said before, simply because it has been said before, and concentrate again, soberly and without preconceptions, on what Aristotle himself says" (viii). Cf. O. Gigon, "Aristoteles-Studien I," *MH* 9 (1952) 113-14.

³ I have departed in two places from the reading of Kassel's text; one concerns a matter of punctuation. See notes 18 and 49.

⁴ Recently argued at some length by H. Patzer, *Die Anfänge der griechischen Tragödie* (Wiesbaden 1962) 70-88.

I

In the beginning, Aristotle says, those who were by nature particularly skilled at imitation, harmony and rhythm after a gradual development generated poetry out of improvisations. Then, or rather from the first, "poetry split up in accordance with their individual characters:⁵ the more dignified imitated noble actions and the kind of men who perform them, while the meaner imitated the actions of base men, at first composing invectives [*ψόγοι*], just as the others produced hymns and encomia" (48b24-27). The first difficulties appear in the immediate sequel. Kassel's text reads (48b28-32):

τῶν μὲν οὖν πρὸ Ὀμήρου οὐδενὸς ἔχομεν εἰπεῖν τοιοῦτον ποίημα, εἰκὸς δὲ εἶναι πολλούς, ἀπὸ δὲ Ὀμήρου ἀρξαμένοις ἔστιν, οἷον ἐκείνου ὁ Μαργίτης καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα. ἐν οἷς κατὰ τὸ ἀρμόττον καὶ τὸ ἱαμβεῖον ἦλθε μέτρον—διὸ καὶ ἱαμβεῖον καλεῖται νῦν, ὅτι ἐν τῷ μέτρῳ τούτῳ ἱάμβιζον ἀλλήλους.

We are unable to cite "a poem of this sort," says Aristotle, for any of the poets who preceded Homer. The possible ambiguity of *τοιοῦτον ποίημα* is removed by what follows: we are unable to cite a *ψόγος* for any pre-Homeric poet; the first known "invectives" are, it seems, "Homer's *Margites* and things of that sort." Now the obvious difficulty is that Aristotle proceeds, within a very few lines (b36-49a2), to treat the *Margites* as something more than an ordinary *ψόγος*, as a prototype or even a kind of comedy. And this entails a further difficulty. In the sentence following, the natural antecedent of ἐν οἷς (b30) is ὁ *Μαργίτης καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα*. But it is hard to believe that

⁵ Else (following G. Finsler, *Platon und die aristotelische Poetik* [Leipzig 1900] 198 n. 2) argues that τὰ οἰκεῖα ἦθη refers not to the poets themselves but to the kinds of character objectively inherent in poetry, i.e., σπουδαῖος and φαῦλος (cf. 48a2). But as Aristotle indicates at the outset (48b4-5; cf. b23), the chapter as a whole deals with the "causes" which "generated" not only poetry as such but the various kinds of poetry; it deals, in other words, with the efficient (not the formal or final) causes of poetry, and these are precisely its human causes—of poetry as such, human "nature" (cf. b5, 20. 22), and of the various kinds of poetry, human character. It is for this reason that Aristotle continues to speak of poets where one would expect him to speak of poetry or poems (e.g., b28-29). Else takes Aristotle too literally when he argues that the accepted view makes Homer's character or his achievement unintelligible. Homer's union of the serious and the playful is perhaps rare; it is not against nature (compare Plato, *Symp.* 223d3-6 with *Rep.* 396e2 and context).

Aristotle means to trace the origin of iambic meter, as this would have him do, to a poem which was not properly "iambic" in spirit—especially as Aristotle himself seems to insist on the connection between iambic meter and the satirical spirit of iambic poetry (b31–32).

As regards the second difficulty, Vahlen⁶ attempted to solve it by ignoring the *Margites* and the sentence of which it forms a part, referring ἐν οἷς back to ψόγους in b27, and making Aristotle argue that the development of iambic meter is coextensive with the development of the earliest, pre-Homeric ψόγοι. Vahlen's interpretation appears to satisfy the requirements of the argument and is plausible in itself, but his solution is awkward, and has led some commentators to raise questions as to the condition of the text.⁷ It has led one commentator to reconsider the interpretation itself. Rostagni defends the traditional reading on the grounds that Aristotle has just disclaimed any direct knowledge of pre-Homeric ψόγοι and is therefore in no position to trace the origin of iambic meter to a period earlier than that of the *Margites*. I believe one may go somewhat further. It is reasonably certain that the *Margites* did indeed contain iambic verses; these verses seem to have been interspersed irregularly among a larger number of hexameters.⁸ But this fact—and the absence of a tradition regarding iambic poetry prior to Homer—would seem to make possible and even plausible a Homeric origin for iambic meter: Homer's sparing and irregular use of iambs suggests that their introduction was a novelty, and the *Margites* altogether a metrical experiment.⁹ There is, indeed,

⁶ *Beiträge zu Aristoteles' Poetik* (Leipzig 1914²) 12. He is followed by Gudeman and Bywater.

⁷ Montmollin declares the intervening sentence (b28–30) a later addition, and Else thinks it has been dislocated.

⁸ Hephaestion, *Ench.* 17.63 Westphal. That these verses formed a part of the original poem seems to be no longer in dispute (see Rzach, "Homeridai," *RE* VIII 2155–57, Radermacher, "Margites," *RE* XXVIII 1706; cf. Bywater).

⁹ Gudeman fails to consider this possibility when he argues that ἐν οἷς cannot refer to the *Margites* "da die eingefügten jambische Trimeter nur einen ganz geringen Bruchteil der angewandten Verse bildeten." To argue, as Radermacher does (*RE* XXVIII 1707–8), that the *Margites* cannot have been written much before 600 because it depends on Archilochus and the development of iambic poetry—and perhaps even of tragedy—is merely to beg the question. According to an Aristotelian commentator (Eustratius ad *Eth. Nic.* 1141a14, 320 Heylbut = Archilochus, fr. 153 Bergk), Archilochus had mentioned the *Margites*. Since the Homeric authorship of the *Margites* was in fact widely acknowledged, and at a relatively early date—if Eustratius' information is correct, Archilochus

only one fundamental objection to a return to the traditional reading of this passage, and that is the objection regarding the character of the *Margites*. To repeat: iambic meter cannot have originated in a poem that was not properly "iambic" in spirit. In what sense, then, can the *Margites* be said to have been a *ψόγος*, a poem of "invective?"¹⁰

The precise difficulty is this. According to Aristotle, it was in the *Margites* that Homer "first adumbrated the form of comedy, dramatizing not invective but the laughable" (b36-38). He seems to argue that the *Margites* represents in dramatic form a certain subject matter—"the laughable" (τὸ γελοῖον). In a passage in Chapter 5, however, he indicates that τὸ γελοῖον is precisely the subject matter of comedy (49a32-37). It is hard to avoid concluding that in the decisive respect the *Margites* was for Aristotle a form of comedy. But the unavoidable conclusion is impossible, for Aristotle's argument also requires that it be in the decisive respect a form of invective.

Homer "adumbrated the form [τὸ σχῆμα] of comedy," as it seems, in two respects: the *Margites* is at once a representation of "the laughable" and a representation which is "dramatic." Homer seems to have adumbrated both the form and the content of comic poetry properly speaking. Accordingly, it would seem better to say that Homer adumbrated, not the form, but the "formative constituents" of comedy. The expression, "the σχῆμα of comedy," must be taken, it seems, as the equivalent of "the εἶδη of comedy" in the sense in which that term is used (for example) at 49a8, where Aristotle speaks of the εἶδη—the "formative constituents," the constitutive elements or

and Cratinus had spoken of it as a Homeric work—any attempt to correct (Bergk and others) or to interpret away (Radermacher) the evidence of Eustratius must seem arbitrary. The question is sensibly discussed by Rzach (*RE* VIII 2157-59), who cautions against the assumption that the presence of iambic verses in the *Margites*—or, for that matter, its satiric character—must betray the influence of Archilochus.

¹⁰ Else and Lucas reject Rostagni's view for the reason given, Montmollin on the grounds that it ignores "le caractère théorique et a priori de cette histoire" (281); but none of their interpretations comes any nearer to resolving the difficulty. Montmollin simply dismisses it (37). Else thinks he has "mitigated" it "to a considerable extent" by transposing b28-30 and thus permitting a distinction between (improvised) *ψόγοι* and (composed) *ἱαμβοί* (of which the *Margites* is an example); but such a distinction would seem impossible by itself (consider b27 *πρῶτον ψόγους ποιοῦντες*), and in any case does not resolve the question of whether or in what way the *Margites* can have been regarded as a *ψόγος*.

principles—of tragedy.¹¹ But this interpretation, which has generally been repeated rather than argued, is, I think, very doubtful.

Though the phrase τὸ τῆς κωμωδίας σχῆμα appears nowhere else in the *Poetics*, Aristotle does speak of the σχήματα of comedy in the account of comedy in Chapter 5. After a brief definition centering on the notion of τὸ γελοῖον (49a32–37), Aristotle goes on to speak of the development of comedy. That development is, it seems, particularly obscure. “It was only at a late date that the archon provided a chorus of comedians, while previously they were volunteers; and it was only when it already possessed some of its forms [σχήματά τινα αὐτῆς ἐχούσης] that the names of the comic poets came to be recorded; but as to who was responsible for masks or prologues or the number of actors, it is not known” (49b1–5). Is Aristotle speaking, then, of the “formative constituents” of comedy? In fact, the meaning of σχήματα is relatively clear from its context: Aristotle is thinking, not of τὸ γελοῖον, but of choruses, masks, prologues and actors. The σχήματα of comedy are precisely its theatrical externals, the outward “forms” of comedy understood as a theatrical poetry, as a kind of poetry which is acted or performed.¹² σχῆμα must be distinguished from εἶδος. Generally speaking, σχῆμα can signify the external form of a thing as distinguished from its inner or constitutive form, its essence or being. As Aristotle remarks elsewhere: “shape is the external form assumed by the constitutive principle” (τὴν δὲ μορφήν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ιδέας).¹³

Aristotle concludes his account of comedy as follows. “The

¹¹ εἶδη in 49a8 is “fast synonym mit σχήματα” (Gudeman). Bywater’s translation of σχῆμα in b36 by “outlines” in effect merges it with ὑπέδειξεν; at any rate, he also assumes that εἶδη in a8 (rendered as “formative constituents”) is synonymous with σχῆμα in b36 and σχήματα in 49b3 (and presumably also in 49a6); cf. Vahlen, *Beiträge* 2 22. σχῆμα or σχήματα have sometimes been identified with μέρη as used at 50a8 and elsewhere; but μέρη and εἶδη seem often used synonymously (cf. 50a13). If there is a difference, it is that the μέρη of (for example) tragedy include elements which are not essential to the effect of tragedy and hence cannot be said to belong to its constitutive forms (cf. 50b15–20, 52b14, 59b7–13, 62b17).

¹² In a later passage (62a2–3), Aristotle says that there are some who rank epic above tragedy on the grounds that epic is for high-class spectators who οὐδὲν δέονται τῶν σχημάτων. Here, σχήματα seems to mean primarily “the actors’ gesturings” (cf. a5–6), but “theatrical show” or “dramatic externals” would equally suit the sense of the passage.

¹³ *Metaph.* 1029a4–5; cf. 1032a32–b2.

practice of composing plots came originally from Sicily, but of the Athenian poets it was Crates who first abandoned the iambic spirit [ἡ ἱαμβικὴ ἰδέα] and composed generalized [καθόλου] arguments and plots" (49b5-9). Aristotle claims he does not know when most of the σχήματα of comedy were introduced, or who introduced them. He does know, however, which poet originated the comic "spirit," the εἶδος or ἰδέα of comedy. It seems that Crates was the first poet to abandon the older "iambic" or invective comedy in favor of the "generalized" plots of comedy properly speaking.¹⁴ In the decisive respect, then, the *Margites* was not a comedy. The *Margites* was not a comedy because Homer had not made the transition from the spirit or idea of iambic poetry to the spirit or idea of comedy. Homer only adumbrated the σχῆμα, the "dramatic form" of comedy; he did not give to comedy its proper content.

Still, does Aristotle not say that Homer dramatized, in the *Margites*, "not invective but the laughable?" I suggest the following explanation. To judge from the argument of Chapter 5, the spirit or idea of comedy is distinguished from the "iambic idea" in the first place by the fact that the plots of comedy are "generalized." Indeed, it would seem that the iambic poets did not use plots or stories (μῦθοι) at all. The iambic poets did not make use of fictions or of fictionalized characters: they attacked persons known to them; as Aristotle says, they "lampooned one another" (48b32). They composed their poetry precisely in a spirit of "blame" or with the intention, not of amusing, but of injuring. Now what most obviously distinguishes Homeric from pre-Homeric poetry altogether is its dramatic character. The *Margites* is distinguished from the ψόγοι of the iambic poets in the first

¹⁴ It has always been assumed that Aristotle assigns the origin of the comic "idea" either to Homer or to the Sicilian poets and in particular to Epicharmus. But Else (197-99) has shown, I think conclusively, that the reference to Epicharmus and Phormus at 49b6 is a gloss; and it is difficult to see why Aristotle would mention the name of Crates while omitting the names not only of the founders of the genre which Crates continued but even of the poets he appears to treat elsewhere (48a34) as the earliest representatives of Attic comedy, not to mention the fact that Aristotle's entire account is extremely sparing in its citation of proper names. I think it must be inferred that Aristotle regarded Crates as the founder of comedy in the strict sense: the composition of "generalized" plots and arguments constitutes a fundamental advance over the composition of "plots"—the sole innovation of the Sicilian poets (apart from whatever contributions they may have made to the development of comic σχήματα), who had remained within the pale of the ἱαμβικὴ ἰδέα. Cf. pp. 221-24 below.

place, then, by the fact that it “dramatizes” its subject matter. Let us say that the *Margites* “dramatizes” the “iambic idea,” the subject matter of iambic poetry. The *Margites* will then present a “dramatic imitation” of invective, of verbal assault on an individual.¹⁵ But this by itself could seem decisive. The very fact of imitating or dramatizing rather than engaging in invective marks an important change in the “spirit” if not in the actual “idea” of iambic poetry. The *Margites* may not have had a “generalized” plot—Aristotle suggests it had no plot at all—but it had “generalized” or fictional characters. Invective may have been the central concern of those characters; it was not the central concern of the poet. The poet himself did not write in anger or with the intention of injuring; he was concerned only or primarily to amuse. This, then, was Homer’s achievement in the *Margites*: Homer showed that those human faults which are worthy of “blame” become amusing—“laughable”—when viewed impersonally, at a distance, or through the medium of dramatic imitation. Homer anticipated or created the spirit if not the actual content of comedy when he ceased to “compose” (ποιεῖν) and began to “dramatize” (δραματοποιεῖν) invective, for in dramatizing invective he “dramatized,” in effect, “the laughable.”¹⁶

Aristotle seems to contradict himself when speaking of the *Margites* precisely because the *Margites* is anomalous or contradictory in character. The anomalous character of the *Margites* is indeed not immediately apparent, for Aristotle seems to place it in a category: he

¹⁵ What little is known of the *Margites* proves nothing one way or the other (fragments and testimonia in T. W. Allen, *Homeri Opera* 5 [Oxford 1912] 152–59). The *Margites* of the title (a redender Name—the character is fictional) was proverbially celebrated for his stupidity. One cannot infer from this, however, that he was treated only as a “laughable,” harmless or sympathetic figure; it is at least as likely that he was treated as Thersites is treated in the second book of the *Iliad*. When Plato cites the *Margites* (2 *Alc.* 147b2–3) he makes the prefatory remark: τὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ, ὃ λέγει κατηγορῶν πού τινος.

¹⁶ In other words, Aristotle’s phrase involves a zeugma: οὐ ψόγον (ποιήσας) ἀλλὰ τὸ γελοῖον δραματοποιήσας. It was understood in this way by Vahlen (cf. Bywater). The *Margites* will have provided, then, the direct model for Sicilian comedy, which was also both “iambic” and “dramatic” (cf. note 14 above). Comedy in the strict sense is distinguished from the *Margites* (and from Sicilian comedy) by its concern for more “general” subjects and perhaps also by its tendency to imitate human “faults” (ἀμαρτήματα) rather than human “vices” (cf. 49a32–35). It is not necessary to assume that invective can have no place at all in true comedy (cf. Else 184–85); Aristotle would perhaps allow, as in the case of Aristophanes, an invective which is in the service of more “general” purposes.

speaks of "the *Margites* and things of that sort [$\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$]." But it is also clear that $\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ cannot be understood if it is understood to refer to works completely analogous to the *Margites*.¹⁷ The only tolerable solution is the obvious one: $\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ must be taken with what immediately follows.¹⁸ It was the *Margites* and "things of that sort" "in which [$\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \omicron\iota\varsigma$] iambic meter first appeared, as was fitting; and because it was in this meter that they lampooned [$\acute{\iota}\alpha\mu\beta\iota\zeta\omicron\nu$] one another, it is called iambic today" (b30-32). However understood, the poems in question must share with the *Margites* the element of invective, for this is required by the argument as a whole. But Aristotle's immediate point is that they share with the *Margites* the distinction of being the first poems of any kind to employ iambic meter. $\tau\alpha\ \tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ are, I suggest, precisely the iambic poems of Archilochus.

It is generally recognized that Archilochus must be one of the "iambic poets" ($\acute{\iota}\alpha\mu\beta\omega\nu\ \pi\omicron\iota\eta\tau\alpha\acute{\iota}$) of whom Aristotle speaks in the sequel (b33-34). But Aristotle is there only summarizing the development he has just been describing.¹⁹ Aristotle accepts the tradition according to which Archilochus was the first poet to compose invectives²⁰ in iambic meter. He modifies that tradition to the extent of suggesting on the one hand that Archilochus was not the first to compose invectives, and on the other that he was not the first to employ iambic meter. As regards the *Margites*, Aristotle mentions it, I would suggest, precisely in order to account for the origin of iambic meter. *Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo*²¹ is not the view of Aristotle: there is no intrinsic connection between iambic meter and the anger of

¹⁷ There have been various suggestions: on the one hand, post-Homeric poems of epic parody, like the *Batrachomyomachia*; on the other, minor poems by Homer himself or by later poets. But there is no reason to suppose that the former had anything to do with invective (cf. Gudeman, Lucas), and the latter are completely unattested.

¹⁸ There is every reason to mark a comma rather than a period after $\tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$, as was customary in older texts. The change is due to Vahlen (*Beiträge* 2 12), and depends on his interpretation.

¹⁹ That Archilochus is necessary to the argument was felt by F. G. Welcker (*Kleine Schriften* 4 [Bonn 1861] 31), who assumed a lacuna after $\tau\omicron\iota\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha$ (cf. Vahlen, *Beiträge* 2 247-48). Else remarks the absence of an explicit reference to Archilochus, and takes it as a demonstration of the "arbitrary and abstract" character of Aristotle's account (148-49). Cf. note 9 above.

²⁰ Cf. *Rhet.* 1418b27 $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \text{Ἀρχιλόχους ψέγει}$.

²¹ Horace, *Ars Poetica* 79.

invective. There is, however, as Aristotle will argue (49a24–28), an intrinsic connection between iambic meter and “speech.” Iambic meter first came to be employed in the *Margites* because the *Margites* was the first “dramatic imitation” of ordinary speech. It was subsequently taken over and put to a more regular use by Archilochus and by other invective poets, and from this circumstance it received its name.²² “And so of the ancients some became poets of heroic verses and others of iambic verses.”

II

Aristotle now takes a further step (48b34–49a2):

ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ τὰ σπουδαῖα μάλιστα ποιητῆς Ὅμηρος ἦν (μόνος γὰρ οὐχ ὅτι εὖ ἀλλὰ καὶ μιμήσεις δραματικὰς ἐποίησεν), οὕτως καὶ τὸ τῆς κωμωδίας σχῆμα πρῶτος ὑπέδειξεν, οὐ ψόγον ἀλλὰ τὸ γελοῖον δραματοποιήσας· ὁ γὰρ Μαργίτης ἀνάλογον ἔχει, ὥσπερ Ἰλιάς καὶ ἡ Ὀδύσσεια πρὸς τὰς τραγωδίας, οὕτω καὶ οὗτος πρὸς τὰς κωμωδίας.

What is clearest from this passage is that Homer effected a fundamental change in the form of poetry. Homer was preeminently a poet of “the serious things” because he alone composed finely and at the same time composed “dramatic imitations,” just as he first adumbrated the form of comedy by “dramatizing the laughable.” Homer was the first poet to compose “dramatic imitations.” More precisely—for Homeric poetry is of course “narrative” as well as imitative²³—Homer was the first poet to “adumbrate” the form of dramatic poetry. And yet it is also clear that Homer’s achievement amounts to something more. By the fact that he dramatized “the laughable,” Homer adumbrated not only the form of comedy but its spirit. Moreover,

²² “[The *Margites*] entstand zu der Zeit, da man daran ging, das dem Tonfall der gewöhnlichen menschlichen Rede sich nähernde iambische Mass neben dem althergebrachten heroischen Hexameter in die Literatur einzuführen . . .” (Rzach, *RE* VIII 2159). Else has seen that the present passage must be understood in the light of Aristotle’s later remark concerning the relation between iambic meter and speech, and he rightly points out that διὸ καὶ ἱαμβεῖον καλεῖται νῦν (b31–32) means “that is why it is called iambic now” (not “still called”): Aristotle is attempting to account for an accidental fact. Compare b30–31 κατὰ τὸ ἀρμόττον with 49a27–28 τῆς λεκτικῆς ἀρμονίας.

²³ 49b9–12, 26–27. Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 392d5 ff.

Aristotle appears to suggest that the *Margites* bears the same relation to "the comedies" that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* bear to "the tragedies." It would seem that Homer adumbrated not only the form of tragedy but its spirit as well.

And yet it is undeniable that in other respects "there does not appear to be a corresponding advance on the serious side."²⁴ Aristotle says nothing to suggest that Homer in any way anticipated the tragic equivalent of τὸ γελοῖον: he does not speak of pity, fear or catharsis. In fact, as it seems, he says nothing at all regarding the spirit, the "idea" or the content of tragedy.²⁵ It is difficult to escape the impression that Homer's innovation in regard to tragedy was a merely formal one.

Now it is certainly odd, considering the prominence of tragedy both in Chapter 4 itself and in the *Poetics* as a whole, that Aristotle does not have more to say here concerning its relation to "serious" poetry and in particular to Homer. Actually, he seems more interested in the *Margites* and its relation to comedy than in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and their relation to tragedy. At first sight, this interest seems merely perverse. Properly understood, it provides, I think, the key to the interpretation of Aristotle's argument as a whole.

Aristotle's argument focuses on the *Margites* in the first place because the *Margites* is an anomaly, and because its anomalous character is not sufficiently recognized. Aristotle had seemed to treat the *Margites* initially as a poem of invective, as a ψόγος pure and simple. He is now anxious to correct that impression. "But²⁶ as Homer was pre-eminently a poet also of the serious things," so "even [καί] the form of comedy" was "adumbrated" by him; "for just as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are related to the tragedies, so too does [the *Margites*] bear a relation to the comedies."²⁷ Aristotle focuses his argument on the *Margites* because he is anxious to show that the *Margites* has a claim to

²⁴ Else 144.

²⁵ Else attempts to rectify the apparent omission by reading <τὸ> εἶδ, which he explains as the equivalent of τὰς καλὰς πράξεις in b25. It must be admitted that εἶδ is difficult.

²⁶ δέ responds to μέν in b28, and indicates the dependence of the argument on what has preceded: in spite of the reference to the *Margites* in b30, Homer has to be distinguished from τῶν . . . πρὸ Ὁμήρου. Cf. Else.

²⁷ Aristotle does not say, as he is usually made to say, that the *Margites* bears the same relation to comedy as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to tragedy; his point is only that the *Margites* bears some relation to comedy.

being considered a kind of comedy. But how does he attempt to show this? He argues entirely by analogy; and the analogy on which he rests his case is precisely that of the "serious" Homeric poems. He argues—just as he had argued in connection with pre-Homeric poetry²⁸—from the more evident or more certain to the less evident or less certain. Aristotle's argument focuses on the *Margites* in the second place, then, because the case for a Homeric origin of comedy is precisely *weaker* than the case for a Homeric origin of tragedy. Aristotle does not stress the "tragic" character of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* precisely because he takes it for granted. So far as we know, Aristotle was the first to connect Homer or the *Margites* with comedy. But the connection between Homer and tragedy was a familiar one; at any rate, Plato's Socrates could appeal or allude to it without encountering bewildered incomprehension or, indeed, any reaction at all. According to Plato, Homer is the "first" tragedian, the leader and the teacher of the tragic poets.²⁹

What exactly was Homer's achievement in tragedy? If the case of comedy and the case of tragedy were truly parallel, Homer would have "adumbrated" the dramatic form of tragedy while at the same time "adumbrating" its "idea." But the two cases are not truly parallel. When Aristotle asserts that Homer was preeminently a poet of "the serious things" (τὰ σπουδαῖα), he is not speaking of a subject matter common to the poetry of Homer and the older poetry of "hymns and encomia." Plato or his Socrates was prepared to admit into the best city of the *Republic* "hymns to the gods and encomia to the good," and yet was absolutely unwilling to admit the poetry of Homer.³⁰ When Plato's Athenian Stranger speaks of "those they call the serious poets—

²⁸ Compare ὥσπερ in b34 and 38 with ὥσπερ in b27. Aristotle infers the existence of pre-Homeric ψόγοι from the existence of pre-Homeric hymns and encomia, which were well-attested in the tradition (cf. Rostagni); he would probably argue that the former had been forgotten διὰ τὸ μὴ σπουδάζεσθαι (49a38–b1).

²⁹ *Rep.* 595b10–c2, 607a2–3. From *Theaet.* 152e4–5 it appears that Plato regarded Epicharmus as Homer's counterpart in comedy (he speaks of οἱ ἄκροι τῆς ποιήσεως ἐκατέρως) if not as the actual founder of comedy. The one Platonic discussion involving the *Margites* (2 *Alc.* 147b1–d8) has nothing to do with comedy; consider in addition the implication of *Symp.* 223d3–6.

³⁰ *Rep.* 607a2–5 (cf. *Laws* 801e1–4, *Prot.* 325e5–26a3). That the exclusion of Homer has nothing to do with "imitation" appears from the fact that in the relevant section of *Republic* 10 all poetry is assumed to be imitative (603b4–7, c1).

those poets of ours concerned with tragedy,"³¹ he is explaining to a Cretan and a Spartan a usage that was evidently current at Athens. "The serious things" are precisely "the tragic things." Of the "dignified" poets—of those poets who composed in epic, "heroic" or hexameter verse—Homer was the *only* poet of "the serious things." "For he was the only one who composed finely, and he composed dramatic imitations" (b35–36).³² Homer may only have "adumbrated" the dramatic form of tragedy; he created—definitively and completely—the content, the spirit or the "idea" of tragedy. As Aristotle says at a later point in the *Poetics* (59b8, 12–13): "epic poetry ought to have the same formative constituents [εἶδη] as tragedy"—and, he adds, "all of these were used, first and adequately, by Homer."

If Homer was a tragedian in any sense, he was, it will be argued, a very imperfect tragedian. For, so to speak, every schoolboy knows that Aristotle's account of the development of tragedy is dominated by an "entelethic idea," and that the idea in question is Sophoclean tragedy. Homer may have "used" the εἶδη of tragedy "adequately;" he cannot have used them well. After Homer, the poets deserted epic poetry of the Homeric type and turned their attention to a kind of poetry that is "greater and more estimable" (49a6); after Homer, tragedy had to "undergo many changes" before it "attained its own nature" (49a14–15). Tragedy had to move very far from Homer before attaining its definitive excellence in the tragedy of Sophocles and in particular in Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

Aristotle begins his account of the post-Homeric development with this statement (49a2–6):

παραφανείσης δὲ τῆς τραγωδίας καὶ κωμωδίας οἱ ἐφ' ἑκατέραν τὴν ποίησιν ὀρμῶντες κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν οἱ μὲν ἀντὶ τῶν ἰάμβων κωμωδοποιοὶ ἐγένοντο, οἱ δὲ ἀντὶ τῶν ἐπῶν τραγωδοδιδάσκαλοι, διὰ τὸ μείζω καὶ ἐντιμότερα τὰ σχήματα εἶναι ταῦτα ἐκείνων.

When tragedy and comedy first made their appearance, those who pursued each kind of poetry in accordance with their individual natures

³¹ *Laws* 817a2–3, τῶν δὲ σπουδαίων, ὡς φασι, τῶν περὶ τραγωδίαν ἡμῖν ποιητῶν. Cf. 810e6–9 as well as *Rep.* 604c1 and 605d4.

³² Gudeman saw very clearly the difficulties with the usual interpretation of this remark: (1) γάρ does not follow; (2) μόνος does not correspond with πρῶτος (b37); (3) why does Aristotle ignore post-Homeric epic, which was also a major source for the tragedians?

became comic poets and producers of tragedy rather than poets of iambic and epic verses. Now according to the conventional interpretation, Aristotle here anticipates the argument that is developed in the sequel (49a9 ff.): tragedy originated with those who led off the dithyramb, as comedy with those who led off the phallic songs; as each came to light or made its appearance, the poets deserted epic and iambic poetry for the newer genres by reason of their manifest superiority. Tragedy in particular was, however, subsequently "influenced" by Homeric epic through the medium of those poets who did not entirely forget the lessons they had learned from Homer.

And yet why is it necessary to assume that Aristotle anticipates an argument that is developed later when his reference to the "appearance" of tragedy and comedy is perfectly intelligible in the light of what has already been said? Tragedy and comedy made their appearance precisely in the poetry of Homer. The poets abandoned epic and iambic poetry not in spite of Homer but because of him: Homer himself had shown the way toward the new dramatic poetry.³³ Still, one is compelled to wonder why epic poetry should have been abandoned in the first place. If the "greater and more estimable genres" of which Aristotle speaks were already substantially present in Homer, how did it happen that poetry of the Homeric type came to be superseded by tragedy and comedy?

In fact, however, Aristotle does not say that Homeric poetry came to be superseded by tragedy and comedy because "these genres were greater and worthy of more esteem" (Else). In the first place, he does not say that they were "worthy of more esteem," "more honorable" or better than Homeric poetry. What he says is that they were "held in more esteem," "more honored" (*ἐντιμότερα*) than Homeric poetry. There is a difference between what is conventionally or customarily "held in honor" (*ἐντιμον*) and what is honorable or valuable by nature or in truth (*τιμητόν*).³⁴ And, in the second place, he does not speak of "genres." He does not speak of the *εἶδη*, the formative constituents of a given kind of poetry; he speaks only of *σχήματα*—of external, dramatic or theatrical "forms."

³³ Else (146–47) has seen this.

³⁴ *Eth. Nic.* 1124a20–25 (cf. 1116b18–21); compare 1094b2 and context with 1141b3 and context (cf. *Pol.* 1340a1).

Aristotle's argument would appear to be this. Tragedy and comedy made their first appearance in the poetry of Homer; and it was with Homer that tragedy acquired its definitive character, its *εἶδη*.³⁵ But Homer only "adumbrated" the external, dramatic or theatrical forms of tragedy and comedy. Homer composed tragic poetry, but he did so in "epic verses;"³⁶ and in other respects—for example by its very length—Homeric poetry was formally or externally ill-suited for dramatic performance. The poets abandoned epic poetry, then, not because of the essential superiority of dramatic poetry but rather precisely because the external forms of dramatic poetry—indeed, the very fact of dramatic performance—promised to win them "more honor" in the cities. The poets pursued, elaborated and developed the narrowly dramatic elements of tragedy and comedy because those elements promised to appeal to the widest possible audience. Aristotle does not attempt to deny that tragedy appeals to a wider audience than epic, even—and particularly—an audience of "the vulgar" (62a2 ff.). As Plato had said: tragedy is preferred by "perhaps, indeed, the majority altogether."³⁷

Aristotle continues as follows (49a7–9):

τὸ μὲν οὖν ἐπισκοπεῖν εἰ ἄρα ἔχει ἥδη ἡ τραγωδία τοῖς εἶδεσιν ἰκανῶς ἢ οὐ, αὐτό τε καθ' αὐτὸ κρῖναι καὶ πρὸς τὰ θέατρα, ἄλλος λόγος.

This remark is explained by and at the same time serves to confirm the interpretation of what has preceded. "To investigate, then, whether tragedy is on this account [*ἄρα*] indeed [*ἥδη*]"³⁸ adequate to its constitutive elements—judged both in itself and with a view to the audience—is a matter for another argument." Aristotle corrects the impression which the reader may have gained from the previous sentence. The fact that the *σχήματα* of dramatic poetry altogether are "greater" than

³⁵ This explains, I think, the apparently pointless variation (cf. Lucas) in 49a4–5. Only after Homer were there "comic poets" properly speaking, but Homer himself was a "tragic poet;" by calling the later tragic poets *τραγωδοδιδάσκαλοι*, Aristotle emphasizes the merely technical character of their innovations.

³⁶ Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 602b8–10, *τούς τε τῆς τραγικῆς ποιήσεως ἀπτομένους ἐν ἰαμβείοις καὶ ἐν ἔπεσι*.

³⁷ *Laws* 658d4; cf. 817c4–5.

³⁸ Else argues persuasively for this interpretation of *ἥδη*: the question is not, as is generally supposed, whether tragedy in Aristotle's time (*ἥδη* "now") is adequate to the *εἶδη* of (fifth century) tragedy.

those of epic does not mean that tragedy—that is to say, tragic drama—surpasses or even equals Homeric epic in employing “adequately” (*ικανῶς*) the *εἶδη* of tragedy. For, to repeat: the *εἶδη* of tragedy were employed “first and adequately [*ικανῶς*]” by Homer himself (59b8–13). The question Aristotle does not here attempt to resolve is the question whether the *εἶδη* of tragedy were also employed “adequately” by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.³⁹ Aristotle’s remark looks back to Homer as much as it looks ahead to Sophocles.⁴⁰

III

Aristotle seems to interrupt his account of the origins of dramatic poetry in order to make a remark about tragedy. When the argument resumes, however, we appear to be confronted with a new account of the origins of dramatic poetry (49a9–15):

γενομένη δ' οὖν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτοσχεδιαστικῆς—καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ ἡ κωμωδία, καὶ ἡ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐξαρχόντων τὸν διθύραμβον, ἡ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν τὰ φαλλικά ᾄῃ καὶ νῦν ἐν πολλαῖς τῶν πόλεων διαμένει νομιζόμενα—κατὰ μικρὸν ἡϋξήθη προαγόντων ὅσον ἐγίγνετο φανερόν αὐτῆς· καὶ πολλὰς μεταβολὰς μεταβαλοῦσα ἡ τραγωδία ἐπαύσατο, ἐπεὶ ἔσχε τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν.

Aristotle now seems to argue that tragedy owes its origin to “those who led off the dithyramb,” just as comedy derives from “those who led off the phallic songs.” But Aristotle’s new account, if it does not grossly contradict his original account, at any rate constitutes a very great problem. Regardless of how one wants to understand the earlier account, it is difficult to explain why, in the present passage, Aristotle seems to forget Homer altogether. But perhaps Aristotle’s silence regarding Homer admits of another explanation.

I shall suggest that the argument which begins at 49a9 and occupies

³⁹ It would seem that the superiority of Sophocles is, then, not even a question for Aristotle (cf. S. L. Radt, “Aristoteles und die Tragödie,” *Mnem.* 24 [1971] 201–03). One could also argue that Sophoclean tragedy, while not superior to Homeric epic “in itself”—Euripidean tragedy would seem scarcely to equal it (cf. 53a28–30)—has nevertheless a certain advantage over it “with a view to the audience.” One could argue in this way if it could be assumed that Aristotle is thinking of catharsis, and that catharsis (as distinguished from pity and fear) does not belong to tragedy “in itself” or to the *εἶδη* of tragedy as established by Homer.

⁴⁰ The connection with what follows is commonly stressed (cf. Vahlen, *Beiträge*² 15, 250–51): *γενομένη δ' οὖν* (a9) responds to *τὸ μέν* (a7).

the remainder of Chapter 4 is in fact merely a continuation of the argument which begins at 48b22. Before the interruption at 49a7, Aristotle had brought the argument to the point where something called "tragedy" had already made its appearance and had stimulated the poets to pursue and develop its *σχήματα*, its "external forms;" and tragedy had made its appearance precisely in the "form" of Homeric epic. Aristotle then interrupts the argument by cautioning against the assumption that "tragedy"—that is, tragic drama as it was to emerge in the fifth century—is adequate to the *εἶδη* of tragedy as articulated, definitively and completely, by Homer. But Aristotle's interruption also serves to anticipate what follows. When the argument resumes, Aristotle continues to speak, not of tragedy as it had come to light in Homer, but rather of tragedy in its familiar sense—that is, "tragic drama." What he proceeds to describe are the vicissitudes of the "form" of what was to become tragic drama, from its origin in choral performances of a certain kind through its subsequent impregnation with the "idea" of Homeric tragedy to its full and final development in the tragedy of Aeschylus and his successors.

This interpretation is the only one that can make sense of Aristotle's argument up to and including the beginning of his "history" of tragic drama. That it is not an impossible interpretation of the history of tragedy itself is sufficiently guaranteed by the fact that a historical argument to the same or very similar effect has been advanced in recent years by Gerald Else.⁴¹ But I believe it is also the only interpretation that is capable of making sense of Aristotle's own "history." Else's thesis regarding the Homeric origin of tragedy, though indeed suggested by his reading of the *Poetics*, was developed independently of—and even in opposition to—his own analysis of the argument which occupies the last section of Chapter 4.⁴² It is, however, precisely that argument which supplies the strongest confirmation of his thesis as a whole.

⁴¹ "The Origin of *ΤΡΑΓΩΔΙΑ*," *Hermes* 85 (1957) 17-46; *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy*, Martin Classical Lectures 20 (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). Else's book is usefully reviewed by W. M. Calder, *Gnomon* 41 (1969) 229-33.

⁴² Else 146-48, 162-63. Else makes the crucial observation that *παραφανείσης* at 49a2 must refer to the appearance of tragedy in Homer, but he fails to draw the (in my opinion) necessary conclusions because he misses the equally crucial distinction between the *εἶδη* and the *σχήματα* of tragedy.

Aristotle begins by arguing that tragedy came into being "from an improvisational beginning—both it and comedy, the one from those who led off the dithyramb, the other from those who led off the phallic songs which even now continue to be performed in many cities as a publicly established custom" (29–13). Aristotle is always understood to argue that tragedy developed or grew out of improvised performances of dithyrambic hymns. But it is also generally recognized that a development of this sort is, in itself, highly problematic. The chief difficulties are these: (1) Aristotle seems to indicate at a later point in the argument (20) that tragedy also developed out of "(something) satyric" (ἐκ σατυρικοῦ); but there is practically no other evidence to suggest that anything like a "satyric dithyramb" ever existed.⁴³ (2) The dithyramb was originally a hymn in honor of Dionysus, and dithyrambic performances are said to have been characteristically "ecstatic" or "enthusiastic;" but tragedy as we know it seems to have remarkably little to do with "Dionysus" either in substance or in spirit.⁴⁴ (3) Dithyrambs and dithyrambic performances seem to have been from first to last almost entirely non-dramatic; accordingly, it is difficult to imagine how the dithyramb can have undergone an internal change in the direction of tragic drama, or how the ἐξάρχων of the dithyrambic chorus can have evolved into an "actor" who forms no part of the chorus.⁴⁵ (4) The dithyrambic chorus was circular and consisted of fifty choreuts; the tragic chorus was rectangular and consisted of twelve or fifteen.⁴⁶ (5) The choral odes of tragedy show affinities with practically every kind of choral lyric *except* the dithyramb.

All of these difficulties may be avoided if one is willing to assume that Aristotle is here thinking less of "tragedy" simply than of the

⁴³ Satyrs appear to be connected with the dithyramb in a notice in the *Suda* (s.v. Ἀρίων); but it is far from clear that the same performance is being referred to (cf. *DTC*² 98–99, Patzer, *Anfänge* 54–55). There is some slight corroborating evidence from vase-paintings (Webster in *DTC*² 34; cf. D. W. Lucas, *CR* 77 [1963] 148) which, however, do not antedate the fifth century.

⁴⁴ Cf. Else, "Origin" 45–46, *Origin and Early Form* 30–31. Aristotle himself seems to distinguish dithyrambic ἐνθουσιασμός from the "pity and fear" inspired by tragedy (*Pol.* 1342a4–15, 33–b12).

⁴⁵ The non-dramatic character of the dithyramb is stressed by Plato (*Rep.* 394c1–3); cf. *DTC*² 28–29, 32. On the improbability of an evolution from ἐξάρχων to actor see Patzer, *Anfänge* 81–82.

⁴⁶ Athenaeus 5.181c; cf. *DTC*² 32.

"form" of "tragic drama." Indeed, it would seem that he must be thinking of the form of tragic drama, for Aristotle does not, after all, derive tragedy from "the dithyramb;" he derives it very precisely from "those who led off the dithyramb." It is not the substance or the "idea" of the dithyramb which interests Aristotle but rather the mode of its performance. "Those who led off the dithyramb" supplied, it would seem, the model for that responsive collaboration between individual and chorus which was to become an important feature and indeed the fundamental "form" of tragic drama. But the dithyrambic performance, though eminently adaptable to the requirements of a dramatic poetry, was not in itself "dramatic," nor did it contain within itself the potentiality for becoming dramatic. Aristotle has indicated as clearly as possible that what is properly dramatic in tragedy derives from Homer and only from Homer.

Once a tragic drama had actually come into being (*γενομένη δ' οὖν*), it grew little by little "as they developed that part of it which was coming to light" (*προαγόντων ὅσον ἐγίγνετο φανερόν αὐτῆς*); and after undergoing many changes, tragedy ceased when it reached its own nature (*ἢ τραγωδία ἐπαύσατο, ἐπεὶ ἔσχε τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν*) (a13-15). This passage is usually taken as the most blatant expression of the teleological bias of Aristotle's account as a whole. It is, I will suggest, nothing of the sort. Tragedy did not "grow" by itself, like a natural thing; it was "developed."⁴⁷ Tragedy did not grow to maturity by itself any more than it had grown by itself from an improvised dithyrambic performance. Tragic drama was brought into being, and it was "developed," precisely by those poets who had taken over from Homer the "idea" of tragedy and had set out in pursuit of a more appropriate "form."

But what does Aristotle mean when he says that they developed "that part of it which was coming to light?" If he means that they developed only the "form" of tragic drama, he must be understood to mean that they developed only what they developed. On the other hand, it would seem that the tragic "idea" had already been "developed" to its fullest extent by Homer himself. And yet that the

⁴⁷ It should not be necessary to insist that tragic poetry, as a *ποιούμενον*, does not exist "by nature" or possess in itself a principle of motion (cf. *Phys.* 192b8-32). Consider *Soph. El.* 183b22-34 and note 5 above.

tragic idea is in fact meant appears clearly enough from the sequel: to speak of the "nature" of a thing is to speak of its "idea," its constituent or essential form.⁴⁸ Evidently, the development of tragic drama involved at the same time a development of the tragic idea itself. But must the development in question then represent a fundamental or substantive advance over Homeric tragedy? In fact, there is another alternative. The attempt to accommodate Homeric tragedy to new and alien forms could have required in its earliest stages the sacrifice of certain essential features of the tragic idea itself. The necessity of a compromise with existing and conventional modes of public performance could have temporarily distorted or obscured the very "nature" of tragedy. But as the new tragic drama became known and accepted—as the tragic "idea" began to emerge—the poets could have taken liberties with the original forms; they could have "developed" the "idea" of tragedy in proportion as the possibilities inherent in that idea became "manifest" to their audiences, and as innovations in form became, as a result, less objectionable. The development in question would have ceased when tragic drama "reached its own nature"—that is, when the form of the tragic performance became finally adequate to the idea of tragedy as that idea had been articulated by Homer.

That this indeed represents Aristotle's argument becomes clear, I think, in the sequel. Kassel's text reads as follows (a15–25):

καὶ τό τε τῶν ὑποκριτῶν πλῆθος ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς δύο πρῶτος Αἰσχύλος ἤγαγε καὶ τὰ τοῦ χοροῦ ἡλάττωσε καὶ τὸν λόγον πρωταγωνιστεῖν παρεσκεύασεν· τρεῖς δὲ καὶ σκηνογραφίαν Σοφοκλῆς. ἔτι δὲ τὸ μέγεθος· ἐκ μικρῶν μύθων καὶ λέξεως γελοίας διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ μεταβαλεῖν ὁπὲ ἀπεσεμνύνθη, τό τε μέτρον ἐκ τετραμέτρου ἱαμβεῖον ἐγένετο. τὸ μὲν γὰρ πρῶτον τετραμέτρῳ ἐχρῶντο διὰ τὸ σατυρικὴν καὶ ὀρχηστικωτέραν εἶναι τὴν ποίησιν, λέξεως δὲ γενομένης αὐτῇ ἡ φύσις τὸ οἰκεῖον μέτρον εὔρε· μάλιστα γὰρ λεκτικὸν τῶν μέτρων τὸ ἱαμβεῖον ἐστίν.

Since Aristotle indicates somewhat later that he knows more of the history of tragedy than he has seen fit to include in his account, it is important to raise the question of his principle of selection. What he says is this: "as for the other things, and what is said of their manner of adornment [καὶ τὰ ἄλλ' ὡς ἕκαστα κοσμηθῆναι λέγεται], let my

⁴⁸ Vahlen (*Beiträge*² 15) aptly cites *Phys.* 193a36.

account suffice, for it would perhaps require too much effort to go through them individually" (a28-31). Aristotle does not speak, then, of purely external developments, of the mere "adornments" of tragic drama. When he speaks of the second actor and the movement away from a "satyric" form, he speaks of changes which reflect a fundamental development in the tragic idea itself.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, the changes in question can hardly be said to constitute a fundamental advance over Homeric tragedy. In Homer as in Aeschylus, "speech" (λόγος) was the "protagonist." And Homeric tragedy did not need to be "solemnized:" Homer had never employed "small plots" (μικροὶ μῦθοι) or "ludicrous speech" (λέξις γελοία).⁵⁰ It would rather seem that Aeschylus and his successors only regained for tragedy the ground that had been temporarily lost by reason of the circumstances in which tragedy had first come to be performed.

In the passage under consideration, then, Aristotle is concerned to explain those developments—and only those developments—which recovered for tragedy its proper character or its "nature."⁵¹ The developments in question, though closely related, are discussed separately, and fall under two headings: (1) the relative prominence of actors and chorus (τὸ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν πλῆθος a15 ff.); (2) amplitude or dignity (τὸ μέγεθος a19 ff.).⁵² As regards the first, Aristotle's

⁴⁹ The fact that the introduction of the third actor and scene-painting does not reflect such a development is the strongest argument in favor of Else's athetesis (165-66, 182) of *τρεις δὲ καὶ σκηνογραφίαν Σοφοκλῆς* (a18-19). As Else points out, the introduction of scene-painting is attributed elsewhere (Vitruvius 7 pr. 11; cf. *Vita Aeschyli* 14), apparently on good authority, to Aeschylus. But I do not think it is necessary to follow Else (167-68; "The Case of the Third Actor," *TAPA* 76 [1945] 1-10) in assuming that Aristotle means to distinguish *ὑποκριτής* from *τραγωδός* (the first or original actor), and therefore attributes to Aeschylus the introduction of the second *ὑποκριτής*—but the third actor. For the purposes of Aristotle's argument the important innovation is the second actor, for it establishes the primacy of λόγος; and it is precisely for this reason that the remark concerning Sophocles fits the context so badly. Cf. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford 1968²) 130-32; Calder, *Gnomon* 41 (1969) 233.

⁵⁰ Consider 59b12, 16, 60a5-11, 62b3-11.

⁵¹ As Else points out (165 and n. 143), *καί* in a15 is epexegetic and should be taken with *ἔσχε τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν* (not with *πολλὰς μεταβολὰς μεταβαλοῦσα*).

⁵² That the order of the argument is chronological has sometimes been asserted, but it is hardly conceivable that *μικροὶ μῦθοι* and *λέξις γελοία* can have been intended to characterize Aeschylean as distinguished from Sophoclean tragedy (cf. Else 176 n. 179), and *ἔτι* (a19) suggests a logical rather than a chronological arrangement.

argument is clear. Aeschylus was the first to increase the number of actors from one to two; at the same time, he decreased the part of the chorus and made "speech" the center of interest. Aeschylus' achievements are obviously of a piece. By introducing a second actor, Aeschylus reduced the dependence of the actor on the chorus and was able, accordingly, to reduce the part of the chorus;⁵³ henceforth, the interest of tragedy would center on "speech" or the conversation of the actors rather than on the songs or other activities of the chorus. As regards *μέγεθος*, however, Aristotle's meaning is less clear. In fact, his argument appears to become involved in so many difficulties that nothing short of a radical reconstitution of the text could seem required in order to make sense of it.⁵⁴

Aristotle speaks of the development of tragedy *ἐκ σατυρικοῦ. σατυρικόν* is to be understood as modifying—what? The obvious answer is *δρᾶμα*. But the obvious interpretation—that Aristotle is thinking of that "satyr-play" (*σάτυρος*) which would form a part of the tragic competitions in the fifth century—encounters the immediate difficulty that the satyr-play appears to have originated with Pratinas of Phleius, a contemporary or near-contemporary of Aeschylus.⁵⁵ Accordingly, it is now generally assumed that something more primitive must be meant. It is also assumed, however, that the *σατυρικόν* must have been a dramatic performance of some kind.⁵⁶ To support this view, scholars have called attention to the proverb *οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον*, and the explanations offered for it in late antiquity. Pratinas, it is argued, was moved to restore the older satyr-play or a modified form of it out of piety toward Dionysus, who had suffered progressive neglect at the hands of the tragic poets. Pratinas reintroduced the

⁵³ Cf. Else 168 n. 150.

⁵⁴ There is some evidence of textual disturbance, and several scholars have assumed a lacuna in the vicinity of *μύθων* (cf. Patzer, *Anfänge* 67–68). Else's solution is to excise α19–21 (ἔτι . . . ἀπείσεμνύνθη) altogether, though he also suggests various emendations.

⁵⁵ *Suda* s.v. *Πρατίνας*; see F. Brommer, *Satyrroi* (Würzburg 1937) 36, *DTC*² 65–67.

⁵⁶ The current position is well defined by Albin Lesky (*Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* [Göttingen 1964²] 30): "*σατυρικόν* in der *Poetik* nicht einfach dem entwickelten Satyrspiel nach Art des Kyklopen gleichzusetzen ist. Andererseits ist zweifelsohne eine von Satyrn bestrittene Form chorischer Darbietung mit dramatische Einschlag gemeint." We are told that "*σατυρικοῦ* too obviously and stubbornly means 'satyr-play' The only word we can supply with it is *δράματος*" (Else 173).

satyr-play because tragedy had betrayed its origins, because it had come to have "nothing to do with Dionysus."⁵⁷

But is it so clear that "it was evidently assumed by the writers of this notice that 'satyric' could only refer to the satyric drama?"⁵⁸ Nothing in the notices themselves requires it, and if it is true that the notices in question draw on a Peripatetic source, it is also true that other late notices embodying Peripatetic material relative to the origins of tragedy seem to point in the opposite direction.⁵⁹ What is more, nothing in Aristotle's own argument can have prepared the reader to believe that tragic drama developed from a dramatic performance. Nothing Aristotle has said so far can have suggested that what is properly "dramatic" in tragic drama originated anywhere other than in the poetry of Homer. To repeat, Homer was the first to compose "dramatic imitations." If tragedy developed from a "satyric drama," then, the drama in question, itself inspired by the example of Homer, must have been already a kind of tragedy. And if that earlier tragedy had developed from anything, it must have developed from a performance which was not properly speaking dramatic at all.

I suggest, then, the following explanation. When Aristotle says that tragedy *ἐκ μικρῶν μύθων καὶ λέξεως γελοίας διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ*

⁵⁷ Thus, for example, Lesky (*Trag. Dicht.*² 21). According to Chamaileon (fr. 38 Wehrli = *Suda* s.v. *Οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον*): τὸ πρόσθεν εἰς τὸν Διόνυσον γράφοντες τοῖς ἡγωνίζοντο, ἅπερ καὶ σατυρικά ἐλέγετο. ὕστερον δὲ μεταβάντες εἰς τὸ τραγωδίας γράφειν, κατὰ μικρὸν εἰς μύθους καὶ ἱστορίας ἐτράπησαν, μηκέτι τοῦ Διονύσου μνημονεύοντες. Cf. Plutarch, *Qu. conv.* 1.1.5, Zenobius 5.40.

⁵⁸ *DTC*² 125–26. Else (177–78) tries to argue that the notices stem from a Peripatetic author not earlier than Chamaileon—the ultimate source for the (on his view) interpolated reference to the *σατυρικόν* in the *Poetics*. It seems much more likely that the later material derives, directly or indirectly, from Aristotle's *On Poets*.

⁵⁹ Chamaileon speaks of contests of *σατυρικά*, Zenobius of choruses singing the dithyramb. According to Athenaeus 14.630c (probably from Aristocles' *περὶ χορῶν*, cf. 630b): συνέστηκε δὲ καὶ σατυρικὴ πᾶσα ποιήσις τὸ παλαιὸν ἐκ χορῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡ τότε τραγωδία. διόπερ οὐδὲ ὑποκριτὰς εἶχον. According to Diogenes Laertius 3.56: τὸ παλαιὸν ἐν τῇ τραγωδίᾳ πρότερον μὲν μόνος ὁ χορὸς διεδραμάτιζεν, ὕστερον δὲ Θεσπὶς ἓνα ὑποκριτὴν ἐξεῦρεν. . . . (The Peripatetic flavor of this passage is remarked by Patzer, *Anfänge* 26; it may derive from Chamaileon's *περὶ Θεσπιδος*. *διαδραματίζειν* is a rare word. *LSJ*⁹ gives the meaning "finish acting a play," which seems to be the sense in *M. Ant.* 3.8; here, however, it must at least mean "act a play all the way through;" but in what sense a chorus could have "acted" when there were as yet no actors is far from clear. Possibly the word reflects an earlier sense of *δρᾶμα* which has nothing to do with acting or "drama" [see note 81 below].) Finally, consider the remark attributed to Aristotle by Themistius, *Orat.* 26.316d (note 71 below).

μεταβαλεῖν ὃψὲ ἀπεσεμνύνη, he does not mean what he has been taken to mean—"discarding short stories and a ludicrous diction, through its passing out of its satyric stage, it assumed, though only at a late point in its progress, a tone of dignity" (Bywater). What he means to say is that tragedy discarded short plots and ludicrous speech only at a late point precisely *because* (διὰ) it had *originally* developed from a "satyric performance" (σατυρικόν) which was completely non-dramatic and had, so to speak, nothing to do with Homer. The μικροὶ μῦθοι and λέξεις γελοῖα of which Aristotle speaks do not belong to the σατυρικόν: "plots" and "dramatic speech" (λέξεις)⁶⁰ are indeed essential to tragic drama, but the σατυρικόν was not a form of tragic drama ("its satyric stage"). διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ μεταβαλεῖν is intended to explain two things: why the earliest tragedy was compelled to employ μικροὶ μῦθοι and λέξεις γελοῖα, and why it did not abandon them until "late."⁶¹ Only at a late point was tragedy able to free itself from the short plots and ludicrous speech it had at first been compelled to employ because of the strong and continuing influence of that "satyric" choral performance from which it had originally developed. It has been universally assumed that there are two stages in Aristotle's account: (1) dramatic σατυρικόν, (2) tragedy. In fact, however, there are three stages: (1) choral σατυρικόν, (2) early ("satyric") tragedy, (3) late ("dignified") tragedy.

At what point, then, did tragedy become "dignified?" I think there is only one possible answer. Tragedy did not attain its true dignity until the tragedy of Aeschylus—for it was Aeschylus who reduced the importance of the chorus and restored to "speech" its rightful place.⁶² Moreover, it would seem that Aeschylus was

⁶⁰ Throughout the *Poetics* Aristotle uses λέξεις to designate the spoken dialogue of tragedy as distinct from its choral songs (cf. Else 180, 236–37). To argue, as some commentators do, that λέξεις γελοῖα must refer to the "diction" of satyric choral odes is wholly gratuitous, especially in view of the fact that λέξεις obviously retains its normal meaning in a23.

⁶¹ Else points out that Bywater's version makes διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ depend on a verb ("discarding") which is not in the text (173 n. 171). His complaints regarding the indefiniteness of syntax and reference are satisfied, I think, by the interpretation given here.

⁶² ὃψὲ has point only if the change is to be referred to Aeschylus. It does not make much sense to say that tragedy became dignified "late"—in the work of Thespis (Gudeman); and to assume an evolution extending from the beginnings "au début de la carrière d'Eschyle" (Montmollin) is not a great improvement. The author of the

responsible for another and related change. For at the time that tragedy recovered its dignity it underwent, Aristotle says, a change of meter: *τό τε μέτρον ἐκ τετραμέτρου ἰαμβεῖον ἐγένετο* (a21). It was, as it seems, Aeschylus who substituted iambic trimeter for the trochaic tetrameter of earlier tragedy.⁶³ Aristotle adds this explanation: "At first they used tetrameter because the poetry was satyric and suited rather for dancing, but when speech [λέξις] was introduced, nature itself found the appropriate meter; for of the meters iambic is the most suited for speaking [μάλιστα λεκτικόν]" (a22-25). Aristotle's explanation seems at first to confuse the issue: if iambic meter and "speech" were introduced at the same time, then Aristotle would appear to be referring not to Aeschylus but to the changes which created tragic drama out of the *σατυρικόν*.⁶⁴ But, in the first place, it is not easy to imagine why trochaic tetrameter should have been the predominant meter of a predominantly or wholly choral performance, since tetrameter is not a meter of choral lyric; nor does Aristotle say that the chorus danced an accompaniment to its own (tetrameter) songs. He says only that tetrameters were particularly suited for dancing.⁶⁵ In the second place, Aristotle speaks no longer of a *σατυρικόν* but of a *σατυρικὴ ποίησις*. In short, his remark refers precisely to the "satyric poetry" of early or pre-Aeschylean tragedy. In pre-Aeschylean tragedy, trochaic tetrameter was indeed employed. It was employed, it would seem, only and exclusively as the meter of

Aristotelian *Problems* (19.31.920a11-13) seems to speak of the pre-Aeschylean poets as "more nearly song-writers" than tragedians *διὰ τὸ πολλαπλάσια εἶναι τότε τὰ μέλη ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίαις τῶν μέτρων*. Aristophanes has Aeschylus addressed: *ὦ πρῶτος τῶν Ἑλλήνων πυργώσας ῥήματα σεμνὰ καὶ κοσμήσας τραγικὸν λῆρον* (*Ran.* 1004-5; cf. 833-34 *ἀποσεμννεῖται . . . ἐν ταῖς τραγωδίαισιν*). And consider Athenaeus 1.21d-f = Chamaeleon, fr. 41 Wehrli (cf. *Vita Aeschyli* 2, 14, 16).

⁶³ The introduction of iambic meter is attributed to Aeschylus even by some (for example, Gudeman; cf. Montmollin) who assume that the other changes had occurred prior to Aeschylus. The attribution rests entirely on the authority of Aristotle, though it is supported by the fact that tetrameters appear in Aeschylus and are most conspicuous in his earliest surviving play. The fact that Phrynichus is known to have employed trimeter as well as tetrameter does not prove, as Pickard-Cambridge seems to suggest (*DTC*² 79), that Aeschylus could not have introduced it.

⁶⁴ This reading of Aristotle's argument has led Pickard-Cambridge (*DTC*² 79) and Else (180; cf. *Origin and Early Form* 61 ff.) to date the introduction of iambic meter to the time of Thespis.

⁶⁵ Cf. 59b37-60a1 as well as *Rhet.* 1408b36.

non-choral "speech;" it was the meter of the properly "dramatic" speeches delivered by the single actor. Tetrameter was adopted as the meter of the spoken parts of tragedy rather than the hexameter inherited from Homer primarily because it is precisely a form or variant of iambic meter—and hence particularly suitable for "speaking."⁶⁶ But tetrameter was chosen in preference to iambic trimeter proper because tetrameter was more suitable for "dancing." In fact, as it seems, the earliest tragedians were compelled to employ tetrameter. They were compelled to employ tetrameter for the same reason that they were limited to "small plots" and "ludicrous speech:" διὰ τὸ ἐκ σατυρικοῦ μεταβαλεῖν. Tetrameter had to be employed precisely in order to accommodate the dances of a "satyric" chorus.⁶⁷

This, I think, is the key to understanding Aristotle's hesitations regarding the role of "speech" in pre-Aeschylean tragedy. Prior to Aeschylus, it seems, the speeches delivered by the tragic actor were always accompanied by choral dances as well as by music. It is not difficult to imagine how this must have affected the actor's "speech." The delivery must have been rhythmical and artificially regular to an extreme; indeed, it must have been half-sung—in the manner of recitative—and it may well have seemed closer to singing than to ordinary speech.⁶⁸ Aristotle means no more than this, I would suggest, when he characterizes the "speech" (λέξις) of early tragedy as "ludicrous" (γελοῖα). Compared with the properly conversational speech introduced by Aeschylus, the λέξις of early tragedy was not

⁶⁶ In 226–27 Aristotle contrasts "iambs" not with tetrameter but with hexameter; consider also 59b34–37. The obvious affinity between the two meters is noted in this connection by Patzer (*Anfänge* 78–81), who regards it as proof that Aristotle's treatment of tetrameter as a meter suitable for dancing is the "krasseste Fehldeutung" of his entire account.

⁶⁷ The most striking evidence is supplied by a scholion to Aristophanes' *Clouds* (1352 ἤδη λέγειν χρὴ πρὸς χορόν): οὕτως ἔλεγον πρὸς χορόν λέγειν, ὅτε τοῦ ὑποκριτοῦ διατιθεμένου τὴν ῥῆσιν ὁ χορὸς ὠρχεῖτο· διὸ καὶ ἐκλέγονται ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις τὰ τετράμετρα ἢ τὰ ἀναπαιστικά ἢ τὰ ἱαμβικά, διὰ τὸ ῥαδίως ἐμπίπτειν ἐν τούτοις τὸν τοιοῦτον ῥυθμόν. Cf. Athenaeus 1. 22a: φασὶ δὲ καὶ ὅτι οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ποιηταί, Θέσπης, Πρατίνος, Κρατίνος, Φρύνιχος ὀρχησταὶ ἐκαλοῦντο διὰ τὸ μὴ μόνον τὰ ἑαυτῶν δράματα ἀναφέρειν εἰς ὀρχησιν τοῦ χοροῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔξω τῶν ἰδίων ποιημάτων διδάσκειν τοὺς βουλομένους ὀρχεῖσθαι.

⁶⁸ Xenophon speaks of a tragic actor who "recited" (κατέλεγεν) tetrameters to a flute accompaniment (*Symp.* 6.3); according to [Plutarch] *De mus.* 114of, iambic "recitative" (παρακαταλογία) was invented by Archilochus and employed later by "the tragic poets." See Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*² 156–58.

only "ludicrous;" it was not, properly speaking, λέξις at all.⁶⁹ When Aeschylus undertook to reform tragedy, he "reduced," in the first place, "the part of the chorus:" he reduced or eliminated the choral dances which had accompanied the recitations of the actors, and thereby freed himself to employ iambic trimeter, the meter "most suitable for speaking" (μάλιστα λεκτικόν).

IV

Any attempt at a reconstruction of Aristotle's view of the origin and development of tragedy must take account of two statements preserved by Themistius, of which one is explicitly attributed to Aristotle and the other probably derived from him; both are now generally referred to the lost dialogue *On Poets*.⁷⁰ According to the first: "Do we not pay attention to Aristotle's remark that originally the chorus came on and sang to the gods, that Thespis introduced the prologue and speech, that, thirdly, Aeschylus introduced actors and boots (?), and that the rest we owe to Sophocles and Euripides?"⁷¹ According to the second: "the Sicyonians discovered tragedy, but the Attic poets perfected it."⁷² With the first of these statements, Aristotle associates himself with the

⁶⁹ The Alexandrian theory of common origin for tragedy and comedy can have no place in the *Poetics* any more than in fact, but the notion that Aristotle attributes "spasshafte Redeweise" to the σατυρικόν still persists (Patzner, *Anfänge* 82-85). If Themistius' citation (*Orat.* 26.316d [note 71 below]) is accurate, Aristotle used ῥῆσις rather than λέξις to designate the non-choral part of early tragedy. ῥῆσις is the "set speech" of a dramatic character (cf. 54a21, 50a29 and the scholion to Aristophanes' *Clouds* cited in note 67 above); it does not suggest, as λέξις does, conversational speech. When Aristotle speaks of the λέξις γελοία of early tragedy, his choice of language is perhaps deliberately imprecise: he suggests that early tragedy must be measured by the standards of mature tragedy, and must be found wanting.

⁷⁰ Cf. Else 115-17. On the reliability of Themistius' testimony see Lesky, *Trag. Dicht.*² 41.

⁷¹ *Orat.* 26.316d (382 Dindorf): καὶ οὐ προσέχομεν Ἀριστοτέλει ὅτι τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ὁ χορὸς εἰσιὼν ᾗδεν εἰς τοὺς θεοὺς, Θέσπης δὲ πρόλογόν τε καὶ ῥῆσιν ἐξεῦρεν, Αἰσχύλος δὲ τρίτον ὑποκριτὰς [-τὴν Ψυ] καὶ ὀκρίβαντας, τὰ δὲ πλείω τούτων Σοφοκλέους ἀπηλαύσαμεν καὶ Εὐριπίδου; I would read ὑποκριτὰς rather than ὑποκριτήν. It is conceivable that Aristotle said this; it is also possible that his statement was slightly altered to suit the context. Themistius compares the development of tragedy to that of philosophy, and (implicitly) the position of Aeschylus to that of Plato: both are third in succession (which may explain τρίτον), and both, it would seem, are to be understood as "innovators" (318c). Cf. Diogenes Laertius 3.56.

⁷² *Orat.* 27.337b (406 Dindorf): καὶ τραγωδίας εὔρεται μὲν Σικυώνιοι, τελεσιουργοὶ δὲ Ἀττικοὶ ποιηταί.

tradition—widely attested in later antiquity—according to which Thespis of Icarus, in Attica, was the founder of tragic drama and the first tragic actor.⁷³ With the second statement, however, he appears to accept a second tradition, less fully attested and yet supported in part by good authority, according to which tragedy was a Doric invention and originated in the Peloponnese—more specifically, in the region of Corinth and Sicily.⁷⁴

In the *Poetics* itself, Aristotle shows greater caution as regards the claim advanced by “some of those in the Peloponnese” for a Doric origin for “tragedy.” This claim, which he mentions without elaboration or comment, apparently forms part of a larger Doric claim to dramatic poetry altogether. According to Aristotle (48a25–b2):

ὥστε τῇ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη μιμητὴς Ὀμήρῳ Σοφοκλῆς, μιμούνται γὰρ ἄμφω σπουδαίους, τῇ δὲ Ἀριστοφάνει, πράττοντες γὰρ μιμούνται καὶ δρῶντας ἄμφω. ὅθεν καὶ δράματα καλεῖσθαι τινες αὐτὰ φασιν, ὅτι μιμούνται δρῶντας. διὸ καὶ ἀντιποιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγωδίας καὶ τῆς κωμωδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς (τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμωδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἳ τε ἐνταῦθα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς παρ’ αὐτοῖς δημοκρατίας γενομένης καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας, ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἦν Ἐπίχαρμος ὁ ποιητὴς πολλῶ πρότερος ὢν Χιωνίδου καὶ Μάγνητος· καὶ τῆς τραγωδίας ἔνιοι τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ) ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημείον· αὐτοὶ μὲν γὰρ κώμας τὰς περιουκίδας καλεῖν φασιν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ δῆμους. . . , καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτοὶ μὲν δρᾶν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ πράττειν προσαγορεύειν.

Now it is generally assumed either that Aristotle takes a neutral position with regard to the Dorian claim or that he implicitly favors it.⁷⁵ The truth is, I believe, that he implicitly rejects it. As for comedy, Epicharmus and the Sicilian poets surely have a respectable claim, and when Themistius tells us that “comedy originally came from Sicily—for that was the home of Epicharmus and Phormus,” he is very probably reporting another pronouncement from Aristotle’s *On Poets*. But Themistius also adds: “. . . but it grew to become something nobler at Athens.”⁷⁶ In Aristotle’s own account in Chapter 5 of the *Poetics*, the

⁷³ The testimonia are collected and discussed in *DTC*² 69–89, and by Lesky (*Trag. Dicht.*² 39–44) and Else (*Origin and Early Form* 51–77). Thespis is also called an Athenian.

⁷⁴ *DTC*² 97–112; cf. Lesky, *Trag. Dicht.*² 34–37, Else, *Origin and Early Form* 20–26.

⁷⁵ Else (107–8, 122) has recently argued for the latter view.

⁷⁶ *Orat.* 27.337b (406 Dindorf): . . . κωμωδία τὸ παλαιὸν ἥρξατο μὲν ἐκ Σικελίας (ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἦσθην Ἐπίχαρμος τε καὶ Φόρμος), κάλλιον δὲ Ἀθήναζε συνηξήθη.

name of Epicharmus is not mentioned, and the Sicilian poets are explicitly credited only with the introduction of "plots" (49b5-7). I have tried to suggest that there is a good reason for Aristotle's reticence. Since the only name mentioned in Aristotle's account of comedy (apart from the Homer of the *Margites*) is the Athenian Crates, and since it is in connection with Crates that Aristotle explicitly speaks of the abandonment of "the iambic idea" (49b7-9), it looks very much as if he regarded Epicharmus as being in the decisive respect (like the Homer of the *Margites*) still a poet of "dramatic invective." Comic drama in the broad sense of the term may be said to have originated in Sicily; comedy in the precise sense of the term originated in Athens.

As regards tragedy, "those in the Peloponnese" were evidently unable to connect the name of a specific poet with the earliest tragedy as they could connect Epicharmus with the earliest comedy, and were accordingly compelled to rest their claim on the etymological argument which "the Dorians" used to prove a Doric origin for dramatic poetry as such. The Dorians argued, apparently, that tragic and comic performances were called *δράματα* because they imitated "men in action" (*δρῶντες*)—because they were "dramatic;" that *δρᾶν*, from which *δρᾶμα* derives, is a specifically Doric word; and, therefore, that dramatic poetry must have originated in Dorian lands. Now the argument for a Doric provenance of *δρᾶν* and its derivatives is in all probability correct, and I think there can be no doubt that Aristotle accepts it.⁷⁷ But the Dorian argument as a whole is fallacious. In fact, comedies had never been called *δράματα*, and the term did not come to be used of them until Roman imperial times.⁷⁸ *δρᾶμα* was a term applied exclusively to tragedy and to satyr-play.⁷⁹ I submit that Aristotle was aware of this fact, and that it prevented him from

⁷⁷ That *δρᾶν* is in fact an Attic word has, however, been argued (B. Snell, *Philologus Suppl.* [1928] 1 ff.).

⁷⁸ Else (106-7 and n. 47) argues that the term *δρᾶμα*, while it was never applied to Attic comedies, was "very probably" used of Doric and specifically of Megarian comedies. But the only real evidence, the citation of a remark of the Attic poet Epicharmides (fr. 2 Kock = Aspasius ad *Eth. Nic.* 1123a20), is textually uncertain, and it is doubtful whether the word *δρᾶμα* was in fact used at all. See H. Richards, "On the Word *Δρᾶμα*," *CR* 14 (1900) 388 ff., *DTC*² 109 n. 4.

⁷⁹ Aristotle himself observes the restriction in *Rhet.* 1415a8-22. For satyr-play see, for example, Plato. *Symp.* 222d3-4.

accepting the Dorian claim *tout court*. It must have seemed more likely to him that tragedies and satyr-plays had come to be called *δράματα* because of their common origin in performances of a serious or sacred character—in *δρώμενα*.⁸⁰ I would argue, in other words, that Aristotle accepts the Dorian claim only to the extent that he acknowledges the Peloponnesian origin of that non-dramatic choral performance—the *σατυρικόν* of *Poetics* 4—which was later to be taken over by “Attic poets” and transformed into tragic drama properly speaking. The *σατυρικόν* from which tragedy was to be developed was indeed a *σατυρικόν δράμα*, but it was not “dramatic.” *δράμα* was indeed a Doric word; it was soon to lose its Doric sense.⁸¹

The foregoing interpretation renders credible as it is supported by the neglected testimony of a Byzantine commentator on Hermogenes. According to Ioannes Diaconus, both tragedy and comedy “originated among the Athenians, as Aristotle says” (*παρ’ Ἀθηναίους ἐφεύρηνται, κάθ’ ἄνδρα Ἀριστοτέλης φησίν*). That Ioannes had Peripatetic authority

⁸⁰ An expression applied, according to Pausanias (8.15.1), to the Eleusinian Mysteries. According to Athenaeus (14.660a), οἱ παλαιοὶ τὸ θύειν δράν ὀνόμαζον.

⁸¹ The following remark appears in Ioannes Diaconus, *Comm. in Hermogenem* (H. Rabe, *RhM* 63 [1908] 150): τῆς δὲ τραγωδίας πρῶτον δράμα Ἀρίων ὁ Μηθυμναῖος εἰσήγαγεν, ὥσπερ Σόλων ἐν ταῖς ἐπιγραφομέναις Ἐλεγείαις ἐδίδαξε. Δράκων δὲ ὁ Λαμψακηνὸς δράμ’ ἀφῆκε πρῶτον Ἀθήνησι διδασκόμενον ποιήσαντος Θεσπίδος. This notice has been variously evaluated; I do not think it has to be dismissed as worthless (thus Else, *Origin and Early Form* 17; but see *DTC*² 99, Patzer, *Anfänge* 14–15 and W. Burkert, “Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual,” *GRBS* 7 [1966] 94 n. 15). Now Solon cannot have spoken of a “drama of tragedy,” for *τραγωδία* will not go into elegiacs, but there is no reason to suppose he did not use the word *δράμα*; I assume, with R. Flickinger (*The Greek Theater and Its Drama* [Chicago 1926³] 8–9), that Solon had spoken only of *δράμα*, and that τῆς τραγωδίας is an explanatory phrase added by Ioannes or his source. Webster (*DTC*² 100) objects that the explanation could not have been given unless Solon had used at least the adjective *τραγικόν*; if this were the case, however, it is hard to see why the phrase would have been altered to the very awkward “drama of tragedy.” It seems more likely that the commentator had found the word *δράμα* in isolation, assumed—perhaps on the strength of the vague connection between Arion and tragedy suggested, for example, by the Arion notice in the *Suda* (cf. note 43 above)—that *δράμα* by itself had to refer to tragedy, and understood Solon to speak of a “performance of tragedy” (τῆς τραγωδίας δράμα), an interpretation apparently supported by a similar use of the word by “Dracon of Lampsacus” (cf. note 82 below). *δράμα* is used of a sacred or ritual performance by Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 2.12); cf. *DTC*² 110 n. 1. I have not seen H. Schreckenberg, *Δράμα: Vom Werden der griechischen Tragödie aus dem Tanz* (Diss., Münster 1960), which assumes as the original meaning of *δράμα* “körperlich-mimetische Darstellung;” cf. Patzer, *Anfänge* 64 and n. 2.

for this statement seems possible and even likely.⁸² If it is granted that Themistius' parallel statements regarding the relation between Sicyonian and Athenian tragedy and between Sicilian and Athenian comedy were found together in Aristotle's *On Poets*, it makes sense to assume that Ioannes' report derives from a later stage in the argument of the same work.

The evidence for "Sicyonian tragedy" amounts to this. The *Suda* records a tradition according to which a certain Epigenes of Sicyon was the first tragic poet; Epigenes is said to have composed tragedies "in honor of Dionysus."⁸³ According to a story told by Herodotus (5.67), the Sicyonians had been accustomed to honor Adrastus and to celebrate his "sufferings" with "tragic choruses" (τραγικοῖσι χοροῖσι); but Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon, wishing to rid the city of the worship of an Argive hero, transferred the sacrifices and feasts of Adrastus to the Theban Melanippus, while he "gave the choruses to Dionysus." Now it seems clear that tradition knew of the establishment, at Sicyon in the early sixth century, of a certain kind of choral performance which honored Dionysus and which bore some resemblance to tragedy properly so-called. But there is surely no reason to suppose that the performance in question was either "dramatic" in form or properly "tragic" in content.⁸⁴ Nor is there any clear evidence that it was actually called "tragedy," or its choruses "tragic

⁸² Ioannes (*Comm. in Hermogenem* 150 Rabe [see last note]) mentions a Dracon of Lampsacus as authority for the statement that "drama was first produced at Athens by Thespis." If, as Patzer has suggested (*Anfänge* 29–30; cf. M. Nilsson, *Opuscula selecta* 1 [Lund 1960] 65 n. 4), "Straton" should be read for (the unknown) "Dracon," Ioannes' report of Aristotle could be assigned a Peripatetic provenance: the *περὶ εὐρημάτων* of Straton of Lampsacus (Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* 5.82). Burkert ("Greek Tragedy" 196 n. 19) rightly points out that there can be no grounds for rejecting Ioannes' report of Aristotle while accepting his report of Solon—and that as Aristotle knew Solon's elegies and still maintained the Attic origin of tragedy, it is necessary to wonder what Solon actually said.

⁸³ *Suda* s.v. *Θέσπης*, *Οὐδὲν πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον*. The uncertainty of the tradition is plain: by some Thespis is made the first tragedian, by others the second—or the sixteenth—after Epigenes.

⁸⁴ That "Sicyonian tragedy" is unlikely to have had anything to do with Homer or Homeric subjects may be inferred from the fact (Herodotus 5.67.1) that Cleisthenes abolished rhapsodic contests at the same time and for the same reason that he dedicated "tragic choruses" to Dionysus.

choruses.”⁸⁵ The “tragic choruses” of which Herodotus speaks were, it would seem, precisely the choruses of a *σατυρικὸν δράμα* in the original sense of the term.

Before turning to the Athenian development, something should be said concerning the vexed question of the relation between Aristotle’s *σατυρικόν* and the dithyramb. Aristotle informs us that tragedy came into being “from an improvisational beginning,” that is, “from those who led off the dithyramb.” Originally, the performance of dithyrambs was an improvised affair. According to a tradition to which Aristotle himself subscribed, the first man to compose literary dithyrambs and to train and lead the dithyrambic chorus was the famous singer Arion of Methymna.⁸⁶ Now Arion is also said to have been the first to “bring on satyrs speaking verses.” In addition, he is credited with the invention of “the tragic mode”—apparently, of the music of tragedy;⁸⁷ and Solon seems to have regarded him as the originator of a kind of performance which he calls, or which Arion had called, *δρᾶμα*.⁸⁸ Finally, Arion was active in the neighborhood of Sicyon—in Corinth—not long before and perhaps during the reign of Cleisthenes at Sicyon.

I would make this suggestion. What Arion did was to create two distinct kinds of choral performance. On the one hand, he created the dithyrambic performance in its classic form. On the other hand, he transferred the “form” of the (originally improvised) dithyrambic performance—the responsion of *ἐξάρχων* and chorus—to a pre-existing choral performance which was primarily or exclusively a dance performance by men dressed as satyrs or as something similar to satyrs

⁸⁵ Cf. *DTC*² 102–3. On the other hand, it should be said that an assumption of this sort would account for much of the confusion in the sources (cf. note 59 above); it would explain in particular why Aristotle felt compelled to speak of “Sicyonian tragedy” at all—unless, indeed, Themistius’ source was not Aristotle himself by a report already infected with the same confusion. Flickinger (*Greek Theater*³ 15) suggested that the name originated at Sicyon when a goat-prize was established for the newly-organized choruses of Dionysus. Although there is no evidence for such a prize at Sicyon, he may well be right (cf. note 92 below).

⁸⁶ Herodotus 1.23, schol. Pindar *Ol.* 13.25, *Suda* s.v. *Ἀρίων*, Aristotle fr. 677 Rose (cf. Burkert, “Greek Tragedy” 94 n. 15).

⁸⁷ *Suda* s.v. *Ἀρίων*. On the expression *ἔμμετρα λέγοντες* see Else, *Origin and Early Form* 16 and n. 26; on the interpretation of *τραγικὸς τρόπος*, *DTC*² 99 (the objections of Patzer, *Anfänge* 58 and n. 3, are not compelling).

⁸⁸ But not, as I have tried to argue (note 81 above), *τραγωδίας δράμα*.

(not necessarily as "goat men"), and which had been dedicated to the worship of the dead; and he accompanied this performance with what was to become the music of tragedy.⁸⁹ From Corinth to Sicyon is then a short step. Arion's *δρᾶμα* (or his *σατυρικὸν δρᾶμα*) will have been imitated in the rites of Adrastus at Sicyon, where, in time, a partly or wholly un-Dionysian celebration would be put wholly at the service of Dionysus.⁹⁰

In a sense, then, the Sicyonians—or Arion—may be said to have invented "tragic choruses." They did not invent "tragedy." Tragic drama in the proper sense of the term was the creation of "Attic poets." In its earliest form, it was the creation of one Attic poet in particular. That Thespis was a Homeric rhapsode before he turned his hand to tragedy is surely an attractive hypothesis.⁹¹ Taught, as it seems, by Homer, Thespis created tragic drama by giving to the Doric *σατυρικόν* a properly dramatic form and—most importantly—a new and "serious" poetic content. And it may be that Thespis gave to "tragedy" its name.⁹²

⁸⁹ The question of music has been oddly neglected in discussions of the origins of tragedy. One difficulty in the way of deriving tragedy from the dithyramb is the fact that dithyrambic music was Phrygian while tragic music was not (*Pol.* 1342b1–12, *Vita Sophoclis* 23). According to Aristoxenus (fr. 81 Wehrli = [Plutarch] *De mus.* 1136d), the Mixolydian mode—the mode of tragic music—was invented by Sappho and subsequently taken over by "the tragic poets," who then combined it with the Dorian. Now Sappho and Arion were both natives of Lesbos. It makes eminent sense to assume that the *τραγικὸς τρόπος* of the *Suda* notice is the Mixolydian mode, and that it was introduced by Arion from Lesbos. Mixolydian music is described as *παθητικὴ* by the author of the *De musica* (1136c), as *θρηνώδης* by Plato (*Rep.* 398e), and by Aristotle as disposing its hearers *ὀδυρτικωτέρως καὶ συννεστηκότως μᾶλλον* (*Pol.* 1340a40–b2): it would seem well-suited for celebrating the "sufferings" of the dead. As regards the conjunction of Mixolydian and Dorian music, Arion himself may have been responsible for it: *καὶ τραγικοὶ οἰκτοὶ ποτε ἐπὶ τοῦ Δωρίου τρόπου ἐμελωδήθησαν* (*De mus.* 1136 f.).

⁹⁰ That the choruses which celebrated the "sufferings" of Adrastus can have been choruses of satyrs has been widely doubted; but Webster (*DTC*² 103–4) has shown that such a possibility cannot be excluded, and there seems also to have been some connection between Dionysus and the worship of the dead. The simultaneous existence of a "satyric" choral performance (Corinth) and a "tragic" choral performance (Sicyon) is implied by Athenaeus 14.630c (note 59 above).

⁹¹ J. W. Donaldson, *The Theater of the Greeks* (Cambridge 1844⁵) 41, Else, *Origin and Early Form* 51–52.

⁹² Else ("Origin" 18–34, *Origin and Early Form* 55–57) has argued that *τραγωδία* is not a primary compound (from *τράγων ὥδή*, "song of goats") but presupposes the compound *τραγωδός*, that *τραγωδός* was originally applied to Thespis and was only used of the tragic poet-actor, and that it was formed (on the analogy of *ῥαψωδός*) from the circum-

According to Aristotle, it was Thespis who first introduced a prologue and "speech" (ῥῆσις). He did so, it seems, in his own person, by substituting himself for the ἐξάρχων of the satyric chorus. From the beginning, however, his position was very different from that of an ἐξάρχων. He did not "lead off" the chorus so much as he spoke for it. If Thespis had once been an interpreter of Homer, he now became the "interpreter" (ὑποκριτής) of choral representations of Homeric stories; he became the first "actor."⁹³ Thespis' "interpretation" included both the speaking of parts in character (ῥῆσις) and the delivery of an introductory prologue. By the fact that Thespis impersonated the characters of others, Thespian tragedy was genuinely "dramatic."⁹⁴ And an introductory prologue was required, as it seems, by the fact that the content of Thespian tragedy was not yet sufficiently familiar to its audiences. Thespis had made the μῦθοι, the plots or stories of Homer's "serious" poetry the central subject of tragedy; after Thespis, tragic "drama" would have "nothing to do with Dionysus."⁹⁵

If Aristotle indeed accepts, as he seems to do, the tradition regarding Thespis, the fact that he fails even to mention Thespis in his account of tragedy in the *Poetics* is at first sight astonishing.⁹⁶ It is less astonishing if the context and the purpose of Aristotle's argument are kept in mind.

stances of the performance—from the fact that a goat was offered as the prize at the earliest official performances of Thespis' plays (consider *FGrHist* 308 F 2). Even if Else's view of the original sense of τραγωδός is rejected, as perhaps it should be (cf. Calder, *Gnomon* 41 [1969] 231–32), it is likely that τραγωδοί was the original word—the performance was probably called δρᾶμα simply—and meant "singers for the goat-prize" rather than "goat-singers" (very persuasively argued by Burkert, "Greek Tragedy" 90–92, 97–102). Cf. *DTC*² 112–24, Lesky, *Trag. Dicht.*² 22–23.

⁹³ On the original meaning of ὑποκριτής ("interpreter" or "answerer") see Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*² 126–27, A. Lesky, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Bern/Munich 1966) 239–46. The interpretation given here was suggested by Lesky (246); but see Patzer, *Anfänge* 64 and 127 n. 4.

⁹⁴ Consider Plutarch's report (*Solon* 29) of an encounter between Thespis and Solon (cf. Else, "Origin" 38–39).

⁹⁵ If the titles of the plays given under Thespis' name in the *Suda* are genuine (cf. *DTC*² 82–83), it would seem that Thespis was not able to dispense entirely with Dionysian subjects; and Chamaileon (note 57 above) speaks of the development of tragedy εἰς μύθους καὶ ἱστορίας as a gradual process.

⁹⁶ Patzer (*Anfänge* 26–30, 72) thinks that Aristotle includes the earliest tragic actors among the ἐξάρχοντες of the dithyramb, and that "Thespis" was introduced by the later writers to fill the gap in his account.

Aristotle is indeed concerned with the origins of "tragedy," for he is concerned with the poetry of Homer. He is less concerned with the origins of "tragic drama," however, than he is with tragic drama in its completed or mature form. As I have tried to indicate, he is interested above all in those developments which transformed early tragic drama into mature tragic drama or which recovered for tragedy its proper "nature." For the purposes of the argument of *Poetics* 4, Thespian tragedy is of interest to Aristotle only in its limitations. Thespian tragedy represented an impossible compromise between "Dionysus" and "Homer." It was left to Aeschylus to assure, once and for all, the supremacy of Homer.