end." Cf. the commentary by Gauthier and Jolif, Vol. II, part 2, p. 144. On the role of desire and of the *nous praktikôs* in choice and decision, on the order of ends and means in the framework of an Aristotelian moral philosophy of *phronēsis*, cf. E. M. Michelakis, *Aristotle's Theory of Practical Principles* (Athens, 1961), ch. 2, pp. 22–62.

25. Cf. Gauthier and Jolif, pp. 202 and 212. Cf. *NE* 1147a29–31: "For example, let us take a universal premise: *One must taste everything that is sweet*, together with a particular case that falls within the general category: *this food before us is sweet*. Given these two propositions, if one can and is not prevented from doing so, one must necessarily [*ex anankēs*] immediately accomplish this action of tasting."

26. Gauthier and Jolif, p. 129.

27. Cf. Gauthier and Jolif, p. 217. The term *eleutheria* (*NE*, V, 1131a28) "at this period refers not to psychological freedom but to the legal condition of a free man as opposed to that of a slave; the expression "free will" only appears in the Greek language very much later when *eleutheria* acquires the sense of psychological freedom. It was to be *to autezousion* (or *hē autezousiotēs*), literally, self-control. The earliest instance occurs in Diodorus Siculus, 19, 105, 4 (first century A.C.) but it does not have its technical sense here. The latter is already firmly established in Epictetus (first century A.D.), who uses the word five times (*Discourses*, 1, 2, 4; IV, I, 56; 62; 68; 100); from this date onwards the word is fully accepted in Greek philosophy." The Latins later translated *to autezousion* as *liberum arbitrium*.

28. L. Gernet, *Recherches sur le Développement de la Pensée Juridique et Morale en Grèce* (Paris, 1917), p. 352.

29. Ibid., pp. 353–354.

30. Ibid., pp. 305 ff.

31. Ibid., p. 305.

32. Ibid., pp. 373 ff.

33. Cf. G. Maddoli, "Responsibilità e Sanzione nei "Decreta de Hecatomepedo"," *I.G.*, I², 3–4, *Museum Helveticum* (1967), I–II; J. and L. Robert, *Bulletin Épigraphique, REG* (1954), no. 63 and (1967), no. 176.

34. *Cyropaedia*, III, I, 38; cf. L. Gernet, *Recherches*, p. 387.

35. *Laws*, IX, 863c.

36. Cf. L. Gernet, *Recherches*, pp. 305, 310 and 339–348.

37. *NE*, 1135b ff.

38. L. Gernet, *Recherches*, p. 351; Gauthier and Jolif, pp. 192–194; P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris, 1968–80), Vol. I, pp. 189–190.

39. *NE*, 1112a17.

40. In Aristotle, *proairesis*, as a deliberate decision of practical thought, can be defined either as a desiring intellect, *orektikos nous*, or as an intellectual desire, *orexis dianoetikē*, *NE*, 1139b4–5, together with the commentary by Gauthier and Jolif.

41. *NE*, 1112a15–17.

42. *Cratylus* 420c–d.

43. If Aristotle declares that man is the principle and cause (in the sense of efficient cause) of his actions, he also writes: "For the originating causes of the things that are done consist in the end at which they are aimed," *NE*, 1140b16–17.

44. Cf., for example, *NE*, 1113b17–19.

45. Cf. D. J. Allan, "The Practical Syllogism," *Autour d' Aristotle* (London, 1955), who stresses that *autos* does not have the sense of a rational self opposed to the passions and wielding its own power over the latter.

46. *NE*, 1114a7–8.

47. On the correspondence of the character, *ēthos*, and the desiring part of the soul and its dispositions, cf. *NE*, 1103a6–10 and 1139a34–35.

48. *NE*, 1114a3–8 and 13–21.

49. Ibid., 1103b24–25; cf. also 1179b31 ff.

Acting: *Drama* as the *Mimēsis* of *Praxis*

Aryeh Kosman

To the memory of Paul Desjardins, who loved both philosophy and poetry.

Like poetry in general, tragic poetry is a form of mimesis; so Aristotle tells his readers at the beginning of the *Poetics*. He then goes on to describe tragedy more particularly (in what seems to be more or less a definition of the genre) as the mimesis of an action: *estin oun tragōdia mimēsis praxeōs*:[1] As part of the same account, Aristotle also describes *mythos* or plot (which he styles the "soul" of a drama, that is, the cause of its being what it is) as the mimesis of an action.[2] This characterization of tragedy as mimetic, and specifically as mimetic with respect to a praxis, is repeated several times in the course of the *Poetics*, and much of what Aristotle has to say about tragic poetry seems to depend upon it.[3] In this essay I offer some reflections on both parts of this characterization, on the view that tragedy is mimesis and on the view that it is the mimesis of praxis.

I

It would be hyperbole to attribute to Aristotle a *theory* of mimesis; there is no thematic discussion of the nature of imitation in the Aristotelian corpus such as we find, for example, in Plato. But it should be clear from the prominent place accorded mimesis in the *Poetics* (and should be expected given the prominent place that mimesis enjoys in Plato's discussions) that the concept is an important one for our understanding of Aristotle's account of tragic poetry. We may begin by noting the generality of Aristotle's claim: at the beginning of the *Poetics* mimesis is said to comprise *all* forms of poetry.[4] In thus characterizing all poetry as mimesis, Aristotle appears to diverge sharply from the account of mimesis that

we find early in Plato's *Republic*. Socrates, speaking with Adeimantus about what kind of poetry will and will not be allowed in their fantastic political utopia, there distinguishes between two modes of *lexis* or styles of poetic discourse.[5]

On the one hand, poets may accomplish their ends by what he calls *haplē diēgēsis*, straight narration or narration proper. This mode is one in which, as Socrates says, "the poet himself speaks, without attempting to turn our attention elsewhere as though someone else than he were the speaker."[6] On the other hand, poets may use what Socrates calls *mimēsis*, using the word which Aristotle in our text applies to poetry in general. A poet is said to employ *mimēsis* when he imitates or takes on the *persona* of someone else, speaking as though he were that person, creating a fictional voice through which his discourse is accomplished.

Socrates illustrates the difference between diegesis and mimesis by reminding Adeimantus of an early scene in the *Iliad*. The poet, having first described in narrative Chryses' approach to the Achaeans, then adopts the mimetic style; he "speaks as though he himself were Chryses, trying as hard as possible to make it seem to us that it is not Homer who is speaking, but the priest, an old man."[7] Socrates proceeds to show Adeimantus (after first warning him that he is no poet) what it would be like if Homer had spoken *without* mimesis. He offers this narratized version of the Homeric episode: "When the priest came, he prayed that the gods should grant them the capture of Troy and their safety, but that they should release his daughter, accepting the ransom and honoring the god."[8]

The distinction that Plato has Socrates here draw reminds us of how particular the notion of mimesis is in these contexts; it refers quite specifically to the poet's creation of a fictional voice. Mimesis is not (at least in these first books of the *Republic*) a feature of art in relation to the real world represented in art, nor a feature of discourse in relation to reality represented in discourse; it is not, in other words, described by a theory of how art in general or literary language in particular mirrors the world by representation. It is rather a feature of literary discourse in terms of the relation between poet and fictional voice, between dramatist and dramatic character, between author and *persona*.[9]

In claiming that *all* poetry is mimesis, it appears that Aristotle undermines Socrates' distinction and enlarges considerably his notion of mimesis. This impression is strengthened by Aristotle's later classification of mimetic modes. Chapter 1 of the *Poetics* differentiates mimesis in three respects; instances of mimesis may differ from one another either in medium, or in object, or in manner: *ē tō en heterois mimeisthai ē tō hetera ē tō heterōs kai mē ton auton tropon.*[10] In Chapter 3, the third respect is elaborated; it is possible, Aristotle writes, for the poet "to imitate by the same means the same objects either (1) sometimes narrating, sometimes becoming someone other than himself, as Homer does, or (2) by remaining himself without changing, or (3) entirely by acting, that is, playing out the parts [*prattontas kai energountas tous mimoumenous*]."[11]

The distinction between (2) and (3), presented in the *Poetics* as a distinction in *kinds* of mimesis, is precisely Socrates' distinction between what is not and

what is mimetic, between diegesis and mimesis, and (1), which is for Aristotle a composite form of mimetic poetry, is for Socrates a hybrid of nonmimetic and mimetic poetic discourse.

Socrates' distinction then, lives on in the *Poetics* only as a distinction of style within mimesis. But it does live on; and we may indeed discern a continuation of Plato's more restricted understanding of mimesis in Aristotle's praise of Homer as superior to other epic poets, although now the poles of valuation appear reversed. Homer, Aristotle writes, "deserves praise especially because he alone among the poets does not lose sight of what he must say in his own person; for in his own person, a poet ought to say as little as possible, since when doing that he is not a *mimētēs*."[12]

In so far as Aristotle, despite his more general characterization of all poetic discourse as mimetic, thus perpetuates the narrower Platonic understanding of mimesis, his account of mimesis may be subject to some of the same criticisms that have been directed against Plato. Gérard Genette, for example, argues that in poetry the narrower concept of mimesis can account for nothing other than the occasional reported speech. For in language nothing can be *imitated* in the narrower sense other *than* language itself, and such imitation finally collapses into mere reproduction: not the *representation*, but the unadorned *presentation* of speech.[13] The general point is made early in modern discussions of mimesis; consider this observation of an eighteenth century English scholar:

> There seems to be but *one* view in which Poetry can be considered as *Imitation*, in the strict and proper sense of the word. If we look for both *immediate* and *obvious* resemblance, we shall find it only in DRAMATIC – or to use a more general term – PERSONATIVE Poetry; that is, all Poetry in which, whether essentially or occasionally, the Poet personates; for here, *speech* is imitated by *speech*. The difference between this, and mere narration or description, is obvious. When, in common discourse, we *relate*, or *describe*, in our own persons, we *imitate* in no other sense than as we raise *ideas* which resemble the things related or described. But when we speak *as another person*, we become mimics, and not only the ideas we convey, but the words, the discourse itself, in which we convey them, are imitations; they resemble, or are supposed to resemble, those of the person we represent.[14]

In Genette this point becomes a critique of "personative" mimesis, and a critique which (ironically, given Socrates' manifest intent,) is an attempt to reclaim narrative at the expense of the dramatic; thus notice how Genette's argument ends with a celebration of diegesis: "the truth is that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words. Other than that, all we have and can have is degrees of diegesis."[15]

Such projects of reclamation are what we might expect from a critical tradition whose central concern has been with narrative, and which often sees itself as engaged in reversing the Jamesian Anglo-American valuing of the mimetic-dramatic over the narrative, of *showing* over *telling*.[16] But the issue in fact is a deeper one; for questions of the relative place of stylistic strategies in

fictional discourse (in the contemporary argument most notably in the novel) are here subsidiary to larger theoretical issues to which the question of mimesis is relevant.

To follow Aristotle in classifying diegesis as one of the modes *of* poetic mimesis rather than classifying it in opposition to mimesis, as Socrates appears to do in the Platonic dialogues, is not to argue that narrative is *per se* an act of mimesis. It is only to claim that narrative and mimesis are contingently related; narrative can be mimetic, but need not be. We will be prevented from seeing this contingency if we think of mimesis in the broader sense as an activity by which a mode of discourse is made to represent a nondiscursive reality; for then narrative will indeed become the privileged and indeed paradigmatic mode of poetic discourse. This is in fact how Genette views mimesis and what leads him to his critique of the Platonic understanding of mimesis as dramatic:

> If we call poetic imitation the fact of representing by verbal means a non-verbal reality and, in exceptional circumstances, a verbal reality (as one calls pictorial imitation the fact of representing in pictorial means non-pictorial reality and, in exceptional circumstances, a pictorial reality), it must be admitted that imitation is to be found in the . . . narrative lines [of the *Iliad*] and not in the . . . dramatic lines, which consist simply in the interpolation, in the middle of a text representing events, of another text directly taken from those events.[17]

This understanding of the nature of mimesis naturally makes Plato's distinction between mimesis and diegesis problematic, while at the same time elevating narrative to a privileged place above the dramatic as the most obvious mode of poetic mimesis. The theoretical issues concerning mimesis which emerge on such an understanding will then concern questions of the power of discourse to represent the nondiscursive and questions concerning the modes of such representation: issues of realism and verisimilitude, of referentiality and illusion, and most abstractly of the relative priority of word and world in the commerce of representation.[18]

But these are not the issues and this is not the understanding of mimesis which informs either Plato's discussion or Aristotle's more general characterization of poetry as mimetic. For Plato and Aristotle, mimesis is not primarily a feature of discourse in its relation to a nondiscursive reality that it represents; it is not, in other words, a mode of radically symbolic, that is, noniconic, representation. For Plato, it is, as we saw, initially a feature of literary discourse in terms of the relation between poet and fictional voice, or more generally between dramatist and dramatic character or between author and *persona*. In the mimetic mode of lexis, the poet, by an act of impersonation, submerges his being with and beneath that of a fictional *persona*. This sense of mimesis is clearly tied to a mode of what is more strictly *imitation*. The larger sense of mimesis which then derives from this narrower sense and which remains operative for Plato and Aristotle is that of mimesis as *iconic* representation.

In this sense, Genette's criticism may be viewed more revealingly as the

expression of a theoretical concern above all with structures of noniconic signification, with the rôle that the arbitrary sign plays in the economies of human cognition and creativity. Such a concern may be more faithful to the preoccupations of modern aesthetic theory, for which mimesis has come to figure the absolutely creative and not merely imitative powers of human thought and discourse. But for an understanding of ancient theories of mimesis, we may need to forsake that faithfulness in order to reclaim the iconic sense of mimesis common to Plato and Aristotle.

To reclaim that sense is not to disparage the creativity of noniconic signification, nor therefore to disparage the importance of narrative in the economy of our more human poetic activity. Our instinct for mimesis, marked by Aristotle as "natural to humankind,"[19] is not in competition with what is undoubtedly our more unique and fundamental capacity to manipulate arbitrary symbols and to invest them with meaning. But these are distinct capacities,[20] and it may be that the capacity for iconic representation is as central to our specifically *artistic* and *fictionalizing* activities as are the capacities that make possible narrative and our more general symbolic activities.

II

It may be appropriate, therefore, to think of mimesis as a richer concept for our understanding of literary art than is apparent from the narrow stylistic context early in the *Republic*. We may discern in mimesis a characteristic feature of poetic or of literary or fictional discourse in general, a feature which may be thought to distinguish literary from more ordinary modes of discourse.

In a literary work, an author has created one or several fictional *personae* who perform speech acts within the fictional world of the work. The author, however, performs no such speech acts in her own person, although she performs creative acts involved in making the linguistic artifact that is the work. But it is only the *personae*, that is, the characters created by the author, who perform first order locutionary acts and who speak within the work. From the point of view of the reader or author *outside* the literary work, these speech acts must therefore be thought of as mimetic or imitative.

The description of literary discourse as mimetic may indeed seem most appropriate to *drama*, where full-blown impersonation is encountered. This view is entertained in the *Republic* where Adeimantus, in the heart of his discussion with Socrates concerning mimesis, speaks as though mimesis were uniquely a feature of the dramatic genre.[21] So it was often understood in antiquity; Proclus for example *glosses* dramatic as mimetic, referring to the *Republic's* first category of lexis as "*to men dramatikon kai mimētikon*, the dramatic or mimetic."[22]

One may understand what draws us to think of the mimetic as uniquely dramatic; but it is not because mimesis applies uniquely to the *genre* of dramatic literature. For a theory of literature as mimesis does not apply selectively to one

genre and not to another, to drama, for instance, and not to lyric poetry; such a theory offers itself as a theory of literature in general, a theory which derives from the status of literary discourse itself.

Distinguishing among literary genres as mimetic and nonmimetic confuses specific stylistic and generic features of art with features of art in general. The fact that any object may become mimetic merely by being proclaimed or taken as mimetic by an artist or aesthetic subject has to do with the ontology of art; it cannot be true of this or that artistic genre and not another. Duchamps' bicycle wheel is no more or less mimetic than a Donatello or a Henry Moore, nor than a Brueghel or a Mondrain. In the same way, a theory of literature as mimesis has to do with the nature of literary discourse itself and therefore of literature in general, not with the nature of any *particular* genre of literature.

In some cases the mimetic nature of nondramatic literature will be obvious. Think of the poems of Browning; here the author characteristically creates a fictional voice distanced ironically both from himself and from the "meaning" of his poem. But although the *distance* between author and *persona* may be particularly striking in this case, the ontological *distinction* is not unique to it; it is equally true for any instance of poetic discourse.

Compare for example Wordsworth; the historical poet Wordsworth and the poetic voice which speaks in his poems are not the same person, even though their lives are strikingly similar. Wordsworth the poet lived in an historical place and time continuous with ours, but the poetic *I* which speaks in one of his poems lives in a place and time which is part of the fictional world invoked by that very poem which Wordsworth has created; it is thus in a sense a world generated by words. What is created in these poems, and equally in the poems of a poet such as Anne Sexton or Robert Lowell, who might seem to us on first thought to be speaking directly in their poems, is a fictional *persona*, a *persona* who greatly resembles the person of the author, but who is ontologically distinct from it. Such personae are the primary characters of fictive discourse; they live in fictional worlds to which we have access only through their fragmentary incursions into our world. A poetic voice – a fictive character – is thus part of a fictional world, elements of which correspond to the mimetic residue, so to speak, in our world that constitutes an art work; but a character has no direct connections into our world, and we have no access into his save through the small fixed window art provides.[23]

These facts, I am claiming, follow from the nature of literary discourse itself rather than from a special feature of certain poetry. It follows therefore that every *narrative* voice in a work of literature is also part of a fictional world created by its author. The narrative voice in *War and Peace*, for example, is authored by Tolstoy, but it is not the voice *of* Tolstoy; it is a voice which lives within the fictional world created by the novel and ultimately by the novel's author. An act of narrative, therefore, like any action (or indeed like any other entity) can be mimetic or not.

These reflections about narration and mimesis have been in the service of

revealing a view of poetic activity which is founded on more than the concern with the arbitrarily signifying powers of language. The more, I have argued, is iconic imitation, mimesis. A poet in this sense is not primarily a creator of things that imitate; it is the poet himself who is an imitator in that she makes imitation things. It is not, in other words, that the poet is an imitator because she creates a piece of discourse that imitates a non-discursive reality; she is an imitator because she imitates a speaker speaking about reality, though it is not her reality, but the reality of that fictional speaker's fictional world. It is this relation between the poet and the speaker that is the primary imitative relation. The poet creates an imitation speaker who makes real speeches in the imitative world, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them," as Marianne Moore once put it, not imaginary toads in gardens that are real. The fact that poetry is imitation does not mean that poetry imitates, but that it, like all literary discourse, is the internal object of an act of imitating.

III

The generality of Aristotle's claim, therefore, is a fruitful one, not in that it depicts art as a mirror of the world, but in that it reminds us of the iconicity, the fictionalizing modality of artistic representation.

But the critique of mimesis with which we began may still interest us; for if even narrative is mimetic in an iconic sense, it follows *a fortiori* that drama is also iconic. Thus the observation that poetry as speech can be strongly mimetic only *of* speech has as its correlate the fact that tragedy can be iconic of action only if the mimesis is itself an action. So Twining, in his discussion of imitation cited above, observes that: "In the poem itself nothing but *words* can be immediately copied. Gravina says well, Non è imitazione poetica quella, che non è fatta *dalle parole*." But in the same context, he notes that: "the drama, indeed, is said also to imitate *action* by *action*; but this is only in actual representation, where the players are the immediate imitators."[24] Drama, in other words, does not describe action, but re-presents it; a drama is a mimetic action.

So if tragedy is a mimesis of action, its medium in turn is itself action, but mimetic action. This fact is made clear in the further elaboration of Aristotle's definition of tragedy at the beginning of Chapter 6. Tragedy, we recall, is there defined as the mimesis of an action; the action, Aristotle then continues, must be serious (*spoudaios*) and it must be an action which is complete although taking place over time: *teleias megethos ekhousēs*.[25] The mimesis in turn is said to be accomplished in "sweetened" language, by which Aristotle explains he means language such as we might call *poetic* language, and it is to be: "*drōntōn kai ou di apangelias* – by means of acting and not by means of narration."[26]

The requirement that a drama be acted[27] and not narrated is one that we recognize; it is the requirement that it be *dramatic*. But the word of interest here is the word that gives rise to its being called dramatic in the first place, the word

drōntōn. This word is an inflected form of *dran*, which Aristotle has earlier reminded his readers is the Doric for *to act*, equivalent to Attic *prattein*.[28]

To describe a tragedy thus as *acted* is to make clear that the medium of the mimesis of an action is itself an action. But in using a term which is equivalent to but distinct from the standard Attic term for action (and which moreoever has the deep connections to the poetic and linguistic conventions of tragedy that *dran* enjoys) Aristotle makes clear that it is an action of a special and peculiar character. It is an action which is an instance not of *prattein* or *praxis*, but of *dran* or *drasis*, and its internal product is therefore not a *pragma* or *praxis*; it is a *drama*. We may describe such action using a scholastic distinction as *formally* a drama and *objectively* a praxis, and this way of putting the difference reveals the logical tie which the subtitle of this paper is meant to invoke; it is a *drama* because it is the mimesis of a *praxis*.

That a drama is a mimetic representation of a praxis was earlier made clear by Aristotle when he contrasted different modes of poetry with reference to the distinctions drawn in the first three chapters of the *Poetics*. Let us recall that contrast. One the one hand, Aristotle notes, Sophocles is an imitator of the same sort as Homer, for both imitate what is serious; but on the other hand he is an imitator of the same sort as Aristophanes, for "*prattontas mimountai kai drōntas amphō*: both imitate actors [*prattontas*] and actors [*drōntas*]."[29]

The sense here surely demands that the second likeness, that between Sophocles and Aristophanes, should be in terms of the *mode* of mimesis (the *tō heterōs kai mē ton auton tropon mimeisthai* of Chapter 1) in contrast to the first likeness, that between Sophocles and Homer, which is clearly presented in terms of the *object* which the mimesis is a mimesis *of* (the *tō hetera mimeisthai* of that chapter). But it may seem hard to find that contrast in the received text. Casaubon therefore suggests that we should read *prattontes* and *drōntes*, making them the subject and not the object of *mimountai*.[30] The difficulty is equally clear a few lines later, where Casaubon also emends. The manuscripts given *hothen kai dramata kaleisthai tines auta phasin, hoti mimountai drōntas*; Casaubon again suggests that we read *drōntes*, so as to yield, as it were: it is for this reason that they are called *acts*, because it is *actors* who do the imitating.

Casaubon's concerns are understandable, and his emendations, although they demand a tortured construction of the Greek, produce a text consistent with our observation that the mimesis of an action is itself an action. But they may be seen as unnecessary, and their dificulties avoided,[31] if we recall that *mimeisthai* carries with it the sense of acting a role, that is, playing a part.[32] In such cases, the object of mimesis is the *internal* and not the *external* object imitated. It is this very doubleness of mimesis – the fact that dramas (or more properly dramatic authors and actors) imitate praxis-acting persons by imitating dramatic-acting characters – that is captured in Aristotle's requirement: *prattontas mimountai kai drōntas* – they imitate agents acting, that is, you understand, *acting*.

We may express this fact in a Sassurian way: Casaubon wishes to prevent

Aristotle's phrase from capturing the *external referent*. He therefore reads the phrase as referring to the *physical signifier* (that is, to the actual flesh and blood actors), whereas what we want is reference to the *signified* (that is, to the dramatic characters). These are subtle distinctions and characteristically difficult to make; compare the difficulty I noted above with confessional poets. Sometimes the difficulty is expressed in our desire to say, for example, that John Wayne always plays John Wayne, or Marlon Brando Marlon Brando. The cinema in particular may lead to this temptation, or rather, as we should say, to this intriguing artistic possibility; it is what allows actors like Brando to play themselves in ways that lead to interesting intertextuality in the film medium.

Perhaps we can become clearer about the relation between praxis and drama by considering a representative action. Here is one for example: a man is hiding behind a curtain in a room in which another man is speaking to a woman, and when the first man moves, the second, taking him for a much hated adversary, stabs him through the curtain. Imagine this action being enacted on stage as part of a drama; imagine, in other words, that it is an *act* and not simply an action. On a September evening at Drury Lane Theater, we witness this acted action; we watch Mr. Garrick acting Hamlet stabbing Polonius, acted by Mr. Cibber.

How shall we describe what we see? Here are three descriptions: (1) Mr. Garrick runs a stage rapier through a curtain, carefully avoiding hitting Mr. Cibber, but so as to give the audience the illusion of one man stabbing another through a curtain. (2) A character named Hamlet (one of the *dramatis personae*) kills another character named Polonius. (3) Hamlet kills Polonius.

I suggest that it is fruitful to think of these three formally distinct but materially intertwined actions in this way: (1) describes a real action in the real world. (2) describes a mimetic action in the real world. (3) describes a real action in the mimetic world, that is, in the world which is projected from the actions and speeches we witness. Description (1) concerns the art of acting, and is importantly though subtly distinct from (2); to confound the two is a common confusion, and may be at the heart of much misunderstanding of the structure of mimesis, as well perhaps as of our distrust of the mimetic and of those who enact it.[33] But, nevertheless, (1) and (2) are in a sense aspects of the same ontological complex (as signifier and signified are aspects of a single sign).

The relations between (2) and (3) are even more subtle and more difficult to sort out. But the central point is the point above, that mimesis takes two different but logically related objects, one of which might be thought to be an internal object, the other not. The relationship is thus perhaps an instance of the inveterately philosophically perplexing relationship between the internal and external objects of intentional states. I see a sight: for example, Philadelphia. In a sense it follows that Philadelphia is a sight (e.g. for sore eyes); but it certainly does not follow that I live in a sight, or that William Penn founded a sight. We may try to guard against the inanity of such inference by the careful use of expressions like "the sight of Philadelphia." Matty Groves hears a sound; it must

be Lord Arling and all his men. But again it does not follow that poor Matty was slain by a mere sound, and again we may try to guard reason with protective phrases like "the sound of Lord Arling and all his men."

To trace the history of these and other moves, and of the attempts to deal with the larger issues behind them, is to trace the complex history of philosophy's (necessary) concern with the nature of *appearance*. The masters of philosophical discourse on this topic include (among others and with varying degrees of attention to its ontological and epistemological dimensions) Plato, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. A central curiosity about Aristotle is the fact that his name does not appear on this list; why is this question so relatively unaddressed in his writings? Why is Plato's virtual obsession with *image* not matched in Aristotle's thought?

One possible answer is that Plato's concern with the imaged and its image (his concern with the complex modalities of Socrates' divided line) is translated into Aristotle's concern with the *latent* and the *manifest*, with power and its corresponding actualizing activity. The medium of such translation may be the duality of *inner* and *outer*; recall that in the *Republic* this duality figures precisely the relation between a virtue and its expression that comes to be understood by Aristotle in terms of *hexis* and *energeia*.

But it may be equally revealing that Aristotle does express this concern, but expresses it almost uniquely in the context of his discussion of *fictional mimesis*. It may be no accident, in other words, that the *Poetics* is not part of the *Metaphysics*, and that there is no Aristotelian work that weaves together the issues of *being* and *mimetic representation* as the *Republic*, for example, does.

IV

It may be of interest to reflect further on this fact. Aristotle, we have seen, uses two different Greek words to refer to the mimetic and its object, but points to the affinity of these words to reveal the corresponding affinity of their referents, the reciprocal filiation of drama and praxis. We use one word – the word *act* – to do the job of Aristotle's (that is, Greek's) two words. This fact gives to a later master a wonderful device for the deep and significant word-play on the complex senses of "act" that we find in *Hamlet*.[34] When Polonius pairs "devotion's visage" with "pious action" as means by which "we do sugar o'er The devil himself" we hear the complexities inherent in the concept of acting, as when the grave-digger points out that "an act hath three branches – it is to act, to do, to perform."[35]

Shakespeare's punning mirrors more than his concern with theatricality as a figure of life. It reveals a respect in which all moral action is in a sense mimetic. I do not mean this simply in the sense that dramaturgical theories of action reveal to us. There is a further fact about the relation of action to virtue that is here invoked, the fact that in acting, we may merely be acting. When Hamlet counsels his mother to "assume a virtue, if you have it not,"[36] this fact is

registered. It is a fact about virtue and action for any moral theory which, like that of Plato and Aristotle, is founded on the *good*, that is, on the centrality of *virtue*; for such a theory, action in itself is morally thin. Recall Aristotle's remark that although "actions [*pragmata*] are said to be just or moderate when they are the sort of acts which a just or moderate person would perform [*praxeien*], a person is not just or moderate who performs these actions [*ho tauta prattōn*], but who also acts as the just or moderate act."[37]

On a moral theory of this sort, the moral status of any given action is thus by itself only contingently related to virtue. We may of course avoid this difficulty simply by abandoning a virtue ethic, and concerning ourselves only with *action*, since according to a moral theory founded on the *right*, that is, on the centrality of *action* alone, merely to act correctly in each given situation may be sufficient for moral success. But it is a critical fact for a virtue-based theory of ethics that a virtuous person can thus be impersonated by someone who is merely, as we might say, *acting*.

Hamlet's advice to Gertrude has another more familiar Aristotelian ring to it. For the assumption of virtue, by itself a mere act, is, when repeated, the instrument by which virtue is produced: "*ek tou pollakis prattein ta dikaia kai sōphrona [hai aretai] periginetai* – [virtue] comes about from repeated just and modern actions."[38] Virtue, in other words, is itself shaped by the impersonation of the virtuous. We know from Plato's sensitivity to the dangers of mimesis how double-edged this fact is; for it is not only virtue but vice as well which is engendered by impersonation. These dangers were not overlooked in the Elizabethan fascination with acting; witness Ben Jonson: "I have considered, our whole life is like a *Play*; wherein every man, forgetfull of himself, is in travaile with expression of another. Nay, wee so insist in imitating others, as wee cannot (when it is necessary) returne to our selves; like Children, that imitate the vices of *Stammerers* so long, till at last they become such; and make the habit to another nature, as it is never forgotten."[39]

The complex modalities of acting that are revealed in these facts are mirrored in a corresponding complexity in the meaning of *mimēsis*. For in the tradition to which Aristotle is heir, *mimēsis* and *mimeisthai* can clearly bear the meaning of a nonfictional impersonation, as well as the more standard sense of artistic impersonation. So we find it, for example, in Democritus: "it is necessary either to be good or to impersonate the good [*agathon ē einai khreōn ē mimeisthai*]"[40] or "it is difficult to imitate bad people [*mimeisthai tous kakous*] and not to wish to imiate good people."[41]

Similarly, Xenophon, discussing the charges brought against Socrates, asks:

> how could he, given his character, have made others either impious or lawbreaking or gluttonous or sexually intemperate or lazy? In fact, he kept them from these vices, making them desire virtue and leading them to expect that if they took care of themselves, they would become decent and respectable people. To be sure, he never claimed to be a teacher of such excellence, but by being a model of it [*phaneros einai toioutos*], he gave his followers the

hope that by becoming imitators of him [*mimoumenous ekeinon*], they could aquire it.[42]

In similar vein, the author of the *Rhetoric to Alexander* urges that children "imitate the actions of their fathers – *mimeisthai tas tōn paterōn praxeis.*"[43]

Above all, it is this power of imitation to mould character which creates the dangers to which Plato constantly alerts his readers, and which is the foundation of the Socratic critique of mimesis, the critique personified in the depiction of the sophist as a practitioner of the *doxomimetic art*.[44]

But once again, no such discussion of this dimension of mimesis occurs in Aristotle. With few exceptions, the Aristotelian treatment of mimesis is uniquely in the context of poetry; it concerns itself almost exclusively with mimesis as a mode of fictional representation.[45] It is as though Aristotle has carefully pruned from his discussion all senses of mimesis which might involve direct preparation for or actual connection with the affective and practical aspects of an agent's life. Mimesis with all its rich complexity has been channelled by Aristotle into the single context of artistic representation, condensed and intensified by being limited to the fictive contexts of poetry.

V

Recognizing the degree to which Aristotle's use of the term *mimēsis* is restricted to dramatic representation should remind us again of how important the notion of mimesis is to his account of tragedy. Nietzsche complained of the fact that

> Never since Aristotle has an explanation of the tragic effect been offered from which aesthetic states or an aesthetic activity of the listener could be inferred. Now the serious events are supposed to prompt pity and fear to discharge themselves in a way that relieves us; now we are supposed to feel elevated and inspired by the triumph of good and noble principles, at the sacrifice of the hero in the interest of a moral vision of the universe. I am sure that for countless men precisely this, and only this, is the effect of tragedy, but it plainly follows that all these men, together with their interpreting aestheticians, have had no experience of tragedy as a supreme *art*.[46]

Nietzsche's plea that tragedy be understood as an art accords with our recognition that Aristotle's account is elaborated in the context of his description of tragedy as mimetic poetry. This fact of course leaves open the critical and interesting question of the relationship between the peculiar pleasure appropriate to tragedy and the pleasure which, Aristotle tells us, we take in mimesis itself.[47] While these two pleasures may not be the same, it remains true that we can understand the tragic pleasure only if we keep in mind that tragedies are mimetic.

What is the force of the mimetic nature of drama for our understanding of tragedy? We may begin by reminding ourselves of this fact about mimetic

representation: we do not experience emotions in a theatrical context in the same way that we might be expected to experience them in real life. Our emotional responses to tragic events witnessed on stage, that is, to events mimetically represented in tragic poetry, are not the same as the responses which would be appropriate if we were to encounter such events in a nonmimetic situation.

Nor for Aristotle can they be; for he holds that the effect of witnessing tragedy is at once pleasurable and associated with the experience of fear and pity. But the experience of fear and of pity are not in themselves pleasurable; so how can the otherwise painful experience of fear and pity yield *pleasure*? It is the ability of tragic drama to cause this to happen that makes it such a miracle of rare device, its ability to raise a sunny dome of pleasure upon the icy caves of terror and commiseration.

One source of this ability lies precisely in the fact that the theater is an arena of *mimetic* representation. As such, it is a context in which emotions are *experienced*, but without their ordinary connection to the rest of our affective and practical lives. And not surprisingly; for the events that occasion these emotions are not happening to anyone who lives where we live. I do not mean that they are not happening to anyone in our *neighborhood*, but that they are not happening to anyone in our *world*; the deep ontological otherness of the fictional thus enables us to experience these emotions, as it were, *dispassionately*. Our awareness that we are not to rush down the aisle to prevent Hamlet's stabbing of Polonius, an awareness which is an important element in our grasp of the mimetic, has its emotional counterpart in our ability to experience fear and pity in the context of the theater without the affective consequences and connections that accompany fear and pity in the contexts of, as we say, real life.

We may wish, on such a view, to think of the uses of tragic poetry, and indeed of art in general, as analogous to the uses of ritual, not simply to intensify and enforce structures of communal life, but in addition to provide contexts of sanctuary in which dangerous activities of such intensification and ordering can be carried out.[48] By virtue of its mimetic nature, tragedy marks off a sacred space in which we are allowed to experience emotions safely; it enables us to confront terrible possibilities and the fears which they inspire, fears we cannot painlessly nor therefore easily admit in the ordinary contexts of our life. All of this is accomplished because dramatic action is *drama*, that is, because it is *mimetic action*.[49]

VI

We might thank that Aristotle sees tragedy as enabling us, by providing a context of mimesis such as I have described, to experience safely and thus to allay a more general and abstract fear: the fear that we may be subject to the sorts of terrible events represented in tragic poetry.[50] In a sense this is true. But the more

general fear which tragedy allows us to confront is not, on Aristotle's view, the fear that we may find ourselves in situations specifically identical to those of tragic protagonists; it is not, in other words, the fear that we might be led to slay our fathers or sacrifice our daughters. What we fear on Aristotle's view, I think, is far more general than the particular family troubles (if we may so under-describe them) of Agamemnon's or Oedipus' lives. It is rather the common feature of (tragically represented) action that derives from the universal possibility of *hamartia*: the general liability of action to mishap, and the consequent fragility of happiness and frailty of moral character and choice.

When we think of tragic action in this light, I shall now suggest, we may begin to have a different appreciation of the second aspect of Aristotle's theory with which we began, the centrality of praxis to his understanding of tragedy and the force of his repeated emphasis that tragedy is a mimesis specifically of praxis. I do not mean to argue that the linked vulnerability of action and happiness is a unique focus of Aristotle's interest in the *Poetics*; that work is too ample in scope for there to be a single focus. Aristotle's interest in tragedy, like his interest in so many things, has many sources. At one level the *Poetics* is simply an expression of his seemingly indefatigable curiosity concerning the whatever he finds about him, and particularly concerning the institutions of the *polis*. Perhaps at the most basic level, it is simply another theoretical treatise, this time about drama and the institutions of dramatic poetry which, Everestlike, were there to write a theoretical treatise about.

I mean to argue simply that in the *Poetics*, we may see Aristotle's fascination with how the plots of tragedy (particularly in his favorite example of *Oedipus the King*) reveal the complex problems involved in our understanding of praxis and, more importantly, the complexities in praxis itself that generate those problems. It is this fascination, I think, that is revealed in his repeated emphasis that tragedy is a mimesis, and a mimesis of praxis.

We have seen one aspect of this emphasis in remarking how the fragile relationship between action and virtue is registered in the mimetic status of tragic action; for mimesis, I have suggested, figures the unreliability of that *impersonation* by which virtue is acquired. But the more characteristic obsessions of Greek tragedy concern the nature of praxis itself rather than the relation of praxis to virtue. What is important here, I shall suggest, is the ambiguity of action.

Note first that actions are multiply individuated; a particular set of an agent's bodily motions, that is, may be thought of as any one of a number of actions. At one level, this multiplicity of action follows simply from a more general ontological multiplicity which Aristotle recognizes. In the *Metaphysics*, for example,[51] he remarks on the unity of an individual *entity* which under different descriptions exhibits different *beings*. His argument there relies on a simple fact central to his ontology: the fact that any single individual entity may be introduced under a plurality of descriptions, each of which determines one of a plurality of different *beings*. This inversion of the more conventional form of the one and the many,

central to the thinking of both Plato and Aristotle, is equally applicable to actions. There are, in other words, "alternative descriptions of the same action,"[52] witness Aristotle's discussion concerning actions as voluntary and involuntary at the beginning of Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[53] It is this multiplicity of human action – what one scholar has called "the doubleness of the deed" – that results in the phenomenon of "tragic conflict", a phenomenon which may be thought to characterize much of the central action of tragedy.[54]

This view of the tragic dimensions of action, however, takes as its paradigm such tragedies as *Agamemnon* and *Antigone*, dramas in which the protagonist's performing an action under one description entails choosing it as well under other equally applicable descriptions: "We [see] what an important part in Aeschylus' dramas the ambiguity of human action plays. It can be the fulfillment of a duty, obedience to a divine order; and yet at the same time be a dreadful crime."[55] But it is instructive that Aristotle takes as his paradigm *Oedipus the King*; for this fact suggests that it is a different ambiguity in actions which interests him.

This ambiguity is not lateral, between a series of coextensive and equally applicable descriptions, but categorical, between two fundamentally different modes of capturing and individuating actions. On the one hand, an action is the object of the intentional states of a deliberative and choosing agent; it is what we do in the sense that it is what we are about and what we take ourselves to be doing. On the other hand, however, an action is an act; it is what we do in the sense of what emerges as the result of our intentional activity.

What is revealed in tragedy is the ever-present possibility of a fracture between these two aspects of action. Tragic lives figure the chance of rift between actions understood as the expressions of the character and intentional choices of moral agents and actions as events in an objective world outside the control of such agents, actions with a life of their own which thus transcends the intentions and plans of their authors. But perhaps more central to Aristotle's concern is what follows from this fact: the distinction between guilt and blame-worthiness, and more critically, the power of an institution like tragic poetry to help us come to terms with the terrible weight of that distinction and of the fault line in our practical lives on which it rests.

In the background of the *Poetics*, we may thus witness Aristotle's interest in questions of moral action. But these questions concern, as it were, the pathology of such action; his attention here is on the ways in which our deliberations, choices, and moral plans may ultimately prove feckless or offer us no safe choice, and of the fear and pity which are occasioned by the recognition of this fact. At our best, acting out of good character and with good deliberation, we often will, at one crossroad or another in our lives, act in ways that bring about our downfall, killing men whom we take to be brigands, but whom the gods, in their diffident cunning, know to be our fathers.

The fears occasioned by this recognition, as I have urged, are more general than the fear that we might kill our fathers; they are the fears that lie at the heart

of our recognition that goodness of character and excellence of deliberation cannot guarantee our happiness, that actions good from the point of view of the agent may nonetheless, through no fault of the agent, be revealed as bad in that very world in which they are enacted.

These fears show the *Poetics* as the sequel to the *Ethics*, a sequel that reveals the terrifying frailty of virtue and the vulnerability of the happiness that we, correctly and for all the right reasons, aim at in the cultivation of such virtue. Behind these fears is thus the fact of human vulnerability, a fact that derives from the very structure and nature of human action and the tenuous relation between virtue and happiness which in turn results from that nature; tragic poetry, precisely because it is mimetic, provides a context in which these fears may be experienced in ways detached from the painful and paralyzingly frightful modes of experience in our daily life. But because they are not like the fear that I might slay my father – a fear which, however much it may reveal the deeply conflicted feelings that I harbor toward my father, is at once remote and neurotic – these fears are associated with the darker and more pervasive recognition of human limitation that is central to tragedy.

The nature of that limitation, on Aristotle's understanding of tragedy, is specific. For tragedies, on his view, mimetically represent the actions of human beings who are basically good, and who, moreover, have on the whole deliberated and chosen well, but who have ended up acting badly. The fear and pity which tragedy occasions are wed precisely to this recognition that goodness of character and goodness of deliberation can lead, not simply to disastrous *consequences*, but to disastrous *actions* on the part of an agent. It is the recognition of a strain of insouciant refractoriness to human agency that is woven into the very fabric of action itself, a recognition of the inability of agents to guarantee their well-being and happiness even when they attempt, *correctly*, to found that well-being and happiness on the cultivation of moral virtue and deliberation.

VII

These reflections should lead us to practice extreme care when we try to understand Aristotle's apparent and cryptic promise, at the end of the definition we cited above, that tragedy may effect a *catharsis* from these very fears that it occasions.[56] We ought not to read this promise to mean that tragedy may relieve us of these fears by revealing a deeper rationality and order of the world in which human agency operates, a perspective from which that world may be absolved and its fundamental goodness reaffirmed.[57]

For such a reading, I think, would blunt Aristotle's view that tragedy reveals to us a critical fact (though perhaps not the most important fact) about human agency: the fact that happiness is subject to vicissitude in a manner that neither character nor virtue nor deliberation can ultimately guard against. Aristotle means neither to deny that fact nor to characterize tragic poetry as denying it.

He rather thinks of tragedy as a human institution designed to help us accept it. We may think of such acceptance as ultimately restorative of our trust in the world, but it is not founded for Aristotle on a palliation of the tragic truth about the efficacy of human agency in that world.

Nor is it founded on a relief effected by simple emotional purgation. This fact may reveal one final respect in which it is helpful to remember that tragedy is a form of mimesis, the respect in which attention to the mimetic nature of tragic action might allow a new appreciation of *catharsis* both as lustrative rather than merely purgative and as objective rather than simply a feature of audience response.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the intense and voluminous discussion it has received, the exact sense of *catharsis* in its cameo appearance in the *Poetics* may well continue to elude us. But much of the controversy, and in particular the familiar opposition betwen lustrative and purgative interpretations, may be unnecessary; to stress the lustrative sense of *catharsis* is not *per se* to deny its purgative sense, for lustration is a purging of the purified object from its impurities and pollutions.[58] It is certainly this lustrative sense that we find prominent in Plato[59] (a fact which may help to balance the antilustrative weight characteristically given the single discussion of *catharsis* in the *Politics*).[60] But in any case, it seems to me that the opposition between these senses, as well as the vexed question of exactly where the *catharsis* takes place,[61] may seem less pressing when we attend to the mimetic character of tragic poetry.

We may see the *catharsis* which takes place in the theater as kin to those rituals of purification which effect atonement for agents who have acquired an objective guilt through no fault of their own or as the result of actions whose moral ambiguity is incommensurable with their guilt. Such purification is sometimes mimetically represented on stage. The witty ablution of Orestes and of a god that is at the heart of Iphigenia's ruse in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*[62] is perhaps the most straightforward instance, although Aristotle's description of the plot of which it is a part reads uncannily like an allegory of tragedy itself, culminating in a "*sōtēria dia tēs katharseōs*" – salvation by purification.[63] But we may think of more subtle cases. Something happens in the course of *Oedipus at Colonus* that allows Oedipus to characterize himself as now being *catharos*;[64] the *Oresteia* is in one sense a representation of the *polis* as the developed succesor to simpler institutions of purification by which Orestes may be not only cleansed from bloodstain but also released from the wearying and repetitive violence based upon an economy of blood vengeance.

We may, however, think of the purification as taking place not in praxis, but in action mimetically represented, but in the acting in drama, not, that is to say, in action mimetically represented, but in the acting which mimetically represents that action.[65] It is here, I think, that the double emphasis of Aristotle's theory is important; tragedy is the mimesis of praxis *drōntōn*: action acted. It is here that we might imagine the hero of *Oedipus the King* receiving in the mimetic action of drama the forgiveness and cleansing of

guilt denied him in the praxeis of his life, missing in his own (fictional) real-life role of *pharmakon*.

Such *catharsis* is achieved through the *apodeixis* in action of the events in all their complexity, and the resultant excitement in the compassionate audience of the fear and pity which are the occasion both of Oedipus' staged purification and of the audience's sympathetic purification. Through the ritualized and formalized action of tragic poetry, we as audience are thus enabled to participate in the restorative capacities of human society to forgive and thus to heal the guilty sufferers of tragic misaction. And in so far as we are able to identify with Oedipus, for example, and to do so by the very fear and pity we experience at the witnessing of his fate and which is the occasion of his theatrical purification, we are at the same time relieved of the more painful (and potentially paralyzing) aspects of the general fear we feel at the possibility of that identification; we achieve, like Orestes, a salvation through purgatory, a *sōtēria dia tēs katharseōs*.

The power of mimesis to effect an almost magical salvation for those who share in and witness it is, it seems to me, part of the mysterious force of the dramatic. Its recognition is not limited to ancient theory; consider this description, by a thinker some seven hundred years later than Aristotle, of Christian mimetic rites:

> O strange and wondrous thing; we did not really die, nor were we really buried, nor did we really rise again after being crucified; but although the mimesis was a representation, the salvation was a reality [*en eikoni hē mimēsis, en alētheiai de hē sōtēria*]. Christ actually was crucified and actually was buried and truly rose again, and all of this has been graciously given us in order that we might, by participating through mimesis in his sufferings, gain salvation in reality [*tē mimēsei tōn pathēmatōn autou koinōnēsantes alēthieai tēn sōtērian kerdēsōmen*].[66]

VIII

The *Poetics* may be seen as the sequel to the *Ethics* and the *Politics* in a deeper sense than that in which it continues philosophical interests central to the theory of human action in these works. For more importantly, the *Poetics* continues the vision developed in these companion volumes of the polis, or more generally of organized social and communal activity, as the source of our capacity to live satisfying and fulfiling human lives.

Both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* see civic life as the matrix in which virtue may be formed and nurtured as means to the achievement of human happiness and well-being. In tragedy our gaze is directed upon the vulnerability of that well-being, and we are invited to acknowledge the fears occasioned by that vulnerability. These are the realistic fears that politically nurtured virtue may not always be sufficient for the well-being at which it aims, and that our happiness is subject to the stern and seemingly irrational control of a destiny which may at any moment sunder the tenuous connection between

virtue and well-being, a destiny which is the result neither of some inner flaw of character nor of some external *daimōn* of ill-fortune, but of the very actions that we have thoughtfully and courageously chosen.[67]

The *Poetics* offers us the hope that we may be able, by acknowledging these fears, to cleanse our affective lives of their pollution, and be restored to the fellowship of parlous human agency. And that cleansing, the *Poetics* suggests, may be accomplished through the agency of institutions which are themselves artifacts of human cultural life, institutions and artifacts rooted in the human capacity for mimesis.

Notes

1. *Poetics* 1, 1447a13 ff; 6, 1449b24.
2. *Poetics* 6, 1450a37; 1450b3; for *psychē* as cause of being, see *Metaphysics* V. 8, 1017b16.
3. *Poetics* 6, 1449b36; 1450a16; 1450a37; 1450b3; 7, 1450b24; 8, 1451a31; 9, 1451b29; 1452a2; 11, 1452b1; 23, 1459a17.
4. *Poetics* 1, 1447a13–16.
5. *Republic* III, 392D.
6. *Republic* III, 393A6 f.
7. *Republic* III, 393A8 ff.
8. *Republic* III, 393D8 ff.
9. I have discussed this distinction at greater length and tried to sketch its implications for our understanding of Plato in "Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues" in *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues*, eds. J. C. Klagge and N. D. Smith, (1992 Supplementary Volume to *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*), pp. 73–92. There I argue that in fact the Socratic distinction is by no means Plato's considered view on this issue; mimesis is far more general and far more integral to Plato's views than the argument of Socrates in this context might lead us to believe. In this respect, Aristotle's recognition that all modes of poetic discourse, both narrative and dramatic, are mimetic, is in keeping with Plato's deeper intentions. I also argue that the account of *mimēsis* in Book III of the *Republic* extends into Book X.
10. *Poetics* 1, 1447a17 f.
11. *Poetics* 3, 1448a20 ff.
12. *Poetics* 24, 1460a5 ff.
13. G. Genette, "Discours du récit," in *Figures III*, (Paris 1972), published in English translation as *Narrative Discourse*, trans. J. Lewin (Ithaca, 1980), 164.
14. T. Twining, *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry Translated; With Notes on the Translation, and on the Original; and Two Dissertations, on Poetical, an Musical, Imitation* (London 1789; reprinted New York, 1971), 20 f.
15. Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 164.
16. The central manifesto of the view under attack is P. Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, (New York, 1921). It is instructive to compare W. Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961). Booth is cited by Genette as an internal critic of the valuing of mimesis (*Narrative Discourse*, 163); this strikes me as a misreading of Booth's larger argument, which asks how the rhetorical force of fiction operates in spite of the pervasive fact of mimesis. Booth's concern is not with the author, but with what he calls the "implied author," and that is a concept which lives in the field of mimesis.
17. G. Genette, "Frontières du récit, in *Figures II* (Paris, 1962), 53 f., published in English

translation as "Frontiers of Narrative," in *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York, 1982), 31.

18. See for example A. D. Nutall's plea for a realist aesthetic in *A New mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* (London, 1983), 181; "The new mimesis is a new theory, and its essence is the reconciliation of form with veridical or probable representation."

19. *Poetics* 4, 1448b5 ff.

20. Although we may wish to explain the one in terms of the other, as R. Girard for example argues that mimetic desire is the originary principle of structures of signification.

21. *Republic* III, 394D5 ff.

22. Proclus, *In Platonis Rem Publicam commentarii*, ed. W. Kroll (Leipzig, 1899), 14.20.

23. "Think for instance, of a striding statue; imagine the purposeful inclination of the torso, the alert and penetrating gaze of the head and its eyes, the outstreched arm and pointing figure; everything would appear to direct us toward some goal in front of it. Yet our eye travels only to the finger's end, and not beyond. Though pointing, the finger bids us stay instead, and we journey slowly back along the tension of the arm. In our hearts we know what actually surrounds the statue. The same surrounds every other work of art: empty space and silence." W. Gass, "The Concept of Character in Fiction," in *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston, 1979), 49. The operative word here is "actually;" it must mean "in this, and not the statue's fictional, world." For what surrounds the statue in its fictional space is a world, the world which contains among other things the object of the statue's pointing, the object of its intention. Indeed, it is by the "pointing" of those elements of a work of art common to its world and ours that it reveals to us the existence and nature of that part of its world hidden from us, the world behind the scenes. When a character looks offstage, we know that something is there. But we don't turn around in the theater to search for it, since it isn't *there*; it is just beyond our sight in another world, a world of which we're allowed only a glimpse.

24. Twining, *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry*, 21. Twining's reference is to G. Gravina, *Della ragion poetica libri due e Della Tragedia libro uno* (Venice, 1731).

25. The stipulation is important, since an action may be complete without taking any time: *Poetics* 7 1450b25: *estin gar holon kai mēden ekhon megethos*. See Aristotle's explanation at *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE*) X.5, 1174a14 ff.

26. *Poetics* 6, 1449b26–27.

27. This requirement is independent of the thorny question of whether Aristotle thought that tragedy must be actually performed on stage.

28. *Poetics* 3, 1448b1.

29. *Poetics* 3, 1448a27.

30. I. Casaubon, *De Satyrica Graecorum Poesi et Romanorum Satira* (Paris, 1605), Ch. 3.

31. For a discussion of these difficulties, see R. Dupont-Roc and J. Lallot's edition of the *Poetics*, Aristotle, *La Poétique, le text Grec avec une traduction et des notes de lecture* (Paris, 1980), 162.

32. See for example Aristophanes *Thesmorporiazusae* 851 in which Mnesilochus' playing the part of Helen is described by the verb *mimēsomai*, or *Plutus* 290, in which Cairo leads a rendition of a Cyclops play *ton Kuklōpa mimoumenos* – playing the part of the Cyclops.

33. See the various remarks about attitudes towards actors in J. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981).

34. See M. Mack's remarks about "act" as *Hamlet*'s "radical metaphor" in "The World of 'Hamlet'," *The Yale Review* XLI (1952) 502–523, and more generally A. Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London, 1962).

35. *Hamlet* 3.1.47, 5.1.11.

36. *Hamlet* 3.4.161.

37. *NE* II, 4, 1105b5 ff.

38. *NE* II, 4, 1105b4 f.

39. B. Jonson, *Timber: or Discoveries* (§§ 1093–1098), ed. R. S. Walker, (Syracuse, NY, 1953).

40. Democritus, DK B39, Stobaeus, III. 37.25.

41. Democritus, DK B79.

42. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.ii.2–3.

43. *Rhetoric to Alexander*, 1422a30 Cf. also the Aristotelian *Problems* XXIX. 10, 951a7.

44. *Sophist*, 267 E1.

45. The exceptions are these: in the *Meteorology* IV, 381b6, the fact that cooking helps digestion is described as an instance of art imitating nature; the mimetic powers of parrots and similar birds are mentioned in the *History of Animals* VIII. 12, 597b24 ff., while the ape's palm is said to imitate a heel in II. 8, 502b9; at *Politics* II. 10, 1271b22, the Spartan constitution is said to imitate the Cretan.

46. F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (§ 22), trans. W. Kaufmann (New York, 1967), 132.

47. *Poetics* 4, 1448b8 ff.

48. Think of M. Gluckman's theories of rituals of rebellion: *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (Manchester, 1954).

49. A similar view is suggested by J. Lear, "Katharsis," *Phronesis* XXXIII (1988), 297–326; J. Lear, "Katharsis" (this volume).

50. In the article in *Phronesis* noted above, Lear suggests that it is an important element in the Aristotelian view of tragedy that an audience should believe in its susceptibility to the events shown on stage. "A normal, educated audience", he writes, "going to a performance of a good tragedy, believes that the terrible events portrayed – infanticide, parricide, matricide, the tearing apart of the most primordial bonds of family and society – could happen to them" (321). I find this suggestion both correct and misleading. Aristotle indeed expects the audience of a tragedy to believe in its susceptibility to the events mimetically represented in tragedy, but not, as I shall suggest, qua those specific events.

51. *Metaphysics* Z 1031a19 ff.

52. See D. Davidson, e.g., "Agency," in *Agent, Action, and Reason*, ed. Binkley, Bronaugh, and Marras (Toronto, 1971), and "The Logical Form of Action Sentences," in *The Logic of Decision and Action*, ed. N. Rescher (Pittsburgh, 1967). Both are reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford, 1980), 43–61 and 105–122. In a sense, the argument I am here proposing about tragedy is a meditation on Davidson's outrageous claim in the former essay (59) that "we never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature."

53. This fact follows from the very possibility of mimetic representation and from the question of how an action is to be mimetically represented; as P. Ricoeur puts it: "If human action can be recounted and poeticized, in other words, it is due to the fact that it is always articulated by signs, rules, and norms. To use a phrase from C. Geertz, human action is always symbolically mediated." "Mimesis and Representation," *Annals of scholarship* II (1982) 19.

54. See A. Lesky, "Decision and Responsibility in the Tragedy of Aeschylus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966) 78–86, reprinted in *Greek Tragedy: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. E. Segal (New York, 1983), 13–23: "Many human actions have a double aspect – this holds true if not for all human actions, at least for all those which presuppose a decision. To protect the suppliants means disregarding the interests of the city; by giving preference to these, the king would prove his sense of responsibility towards the Polis, and yet he would gravely sin against Zeus, who protects the

fugitives'' (16). ''Thus, the deed of Eteokles, too, reveals the twofold aspect of human action; the king's defense of Thebes, which proves his heroism, becomes at the same time the terrible crime of fratricide'' (20). See also M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), 25 ff.

55. Lesky, ''Decision and Responsibility,'' 22. Both Lesky and Nussbaum take these plays as paradigmatic.

56. *Poetics* 6, 1449b27 ff.

57. Such a view is in Lear, *''Katharsis''*, who takes Aristotle to offer a view of tragedy as recuperative cosmodicy. ''In Aristotle's conception of tragedy, the individual actor takes on the burden of badness, the world as a whole is absolved'' (325); ''Even in tragedy, perhaps especially in tragedy, the fundamental goodness of man and world are reaffirmed,'' (326).

58. See E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, trans. W. B. Hillis (London, 1925), 294 ff.

59. Witness the pervasive presence of this sense of *catharsis* in the argument of the *Phaedo*, as also in the *Laws* 1831A inter alia. The characteristically Platonic extension of *catharsis* at *Phaedrus*243A to deal not simply with mistaken action but with mistaken mythological belief is connected with a much larger view of the philosopher's office as one of cleansing the city of the impurities of ignorance and error. See the beginning of the *Euthyphro*, where *aphosiōsis* is analogous to *catharsis*; and note the strong resemblances between the situation there and the situation at the beginning of *Oedipus the King*. For the analogy between *hosion* and *catharmos*, see Rhode, *Psyche*, 233.

60. *Politics* VIII 7, 1341b32 ff.

61. That is, whether in the audience, or on the stage as according to the now unpopular theory of G. R. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, 1957). See also L. Golden, ''Catharsis,'' *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* **93** (1962) 51–60.

62. Euripides, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 1030 ff.

63. *Poetics* 17, 1455b15.

64. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 548.

65. Lear, who finds Else's view ''highly implausible,'' presents what is to me a very convincing argument for its plausibility in the distinction he draws between objective and subjective katharsis; Lear, *''Katharsis,''* 319, n. 79.

66. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Cataches* II.5, in *St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, ed. F. L. Cross (Crestwood, NY, 1986), 20.

67. It would be fruitful here to consider further the relation between *ēthos* and *daimōn*, character and destiny, in relation to Aristotle's project of so refining character as to lead to a life which is well-daimoned. Think of Heraclitus' enigmatic remark (DK B119) that *ēthos anthrōpōi diamōn* – character is destiny – and R. P. Winnington-Ingram's comments upon its ''syntactic reversibility'' in ''Tragedy and Greek Archaic Thought,'' *Classical Drama and its Influence*, ed. M. J. Anderson (New York, 1965), 37, 47; see also J.-P. Vernant, ''Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy,'' in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (New York, 1988), 35 ff.