

Aristotle on *Mimēsis*

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Modern readers are often dismayed to find that Aristotle classified poetry, music, and dance under a heading that is usually translated "imitation." We take some comfort in blaming this usage on Plato, who put poetry under this heading in order to condemn it, and we expect Aristotle to defend poetry by providing us with a new, more positive, and even (dare we hope?) more modern understanding of "imitation." The comfort begins to turn cold, however, when we find that *mimēsis* – the Greek word commonly translated "imitation" – has an independent life in Aristotle. It is neither a throwback to Plato nor a precursor of modern theories of fiction. It has little to do with the problem of truth in poetry, and a great deal to do with explaining the effects poetry has on its audience.

Altogether, Aristotle's theory of poetry translates poorly into the idioms of modern criticism, and there is no help for this. *Mimēsis* and its Greek cognates defy translation. Besides "imitation," we find in English such renderings as "image-making," "imitation," "representation," "reproduction," "expression," "fiction," "emulation," "make-believe," and so forth. As any of these would beg important questions of interpretation, we shall have to be content with transliteration for discussions such as this. Mimesis is the production of *mimemata*; and though "images" is almost right for *mimemata*, we shall leave that word in Greek as well. I shall also use the adjective *mimetic* for any procedure of mimesis.

So stricken have we been by Plato's war on the tragedians that we keep wanting to read the *Poetics* as a definitive counter-offensive, and we keep trying to frame Aristotle's theory in Platonic terms, as a response to Plato. This is especially inviting in the case of mimesis, a term which Plato defined and which Aristotle did not. It seems natural to suppose that Aristotle took Plato's notion of mimesis, stretched it into something rather like the modern notion of fiction, and so found his way to the sort of answer we would like to give to Plato.¹ Now I think this is entirely wrong-headed: there is no good internal evidence that

Aristotle was driven in the *Poetics* by the need to answer Plato, and this is especially clear in the case of mimesis. What Aristotle has to say on mimesis is almost entirely free of Platonic influence; what he shares with Plato does not go much beyond their common language. Mimesis in Aristotle does stretch to accommodate itself to Aristotelian theory, but the result is light-years away from modern concepts such as fiction, representation, and expression.

The first part of this essay tries to develop a more exact understanding of Aristotelian mimesis, and to demonstrate its independence from Plato. The second part addresses the problem of deception in mimesis. The third develops a speculative account of mimesis in Aristotle, and applies this to difficulties that arise in connection with Aristotle's larger account of poetry. What relation does a product of mimesis bear to its object – to that of which it is a *mimema*? How can our emotions be aroused by made-up actions and characters? Whom do we fear, whom do we pity, when we watch mimetic drama or read mimetic poetry? How can our emotions be engaged by a process that aims at what is universal in human behavior? How, on Aristotle's theory, can deception through mimesis be benign?

I. *Mimēsis* in Plato and Aristotle

Aristotle used the word *mimēsis* and its cognates generously, without the pejorative connotation Plato attached to it, and in a wide variety of contexts. As most scholars have observed, this broader understanding of mimesis is part of Aristotle's more positive view of poetry. The word *mimēsis*, however, is as obscure in Aristotle as it is in other ancient authors. It is not just that modern languages fail to furnish precise equivalents. The problem is deeper: Aristotle is no clearer than his predecessors as to what place mimesis has in the family that includes likeness, image, sign, reproduction, impersonation, and the rest.

Mimēsis seems to be a technical term in the *Poetics*, and so ought to be used with reference to one focal meaning. From its debut at 1447a16 in defining the species of poetry (see also 47b15 and 51b28), to its last bow at 62b5, mimesis is brought on to settle one issue after another, as if its meaning were clear from the beginning. Yet readers do not know exactly how it settles things, and are unable to agree on a focal meaning for the term. Aristotle does not appear to be consistent in his discussions of mimesis. A particular worry is his apparent tendency to fall back on the Platonic concept from time to time: Aristotle seems occasionally not to have entirely freed himself from the influence of his teacher on mimesis. And as he nowhere stops to define the term, we are left to infer from the variety of contexts a variety of meanings the term seems to have had for Aristotle.

A. Plato's legacy

In Plato's work *mimēsis* is often understood to involve deception, and is very

often used pejoratively of arts or crafts which Plato considers harmful or at least inferior. When Plato does not use the term pejoratively he uses it as part of a metaphysical theory. Yet neither the pejorative nor the metaphysical use surfaces in the *Poetics*, though most scholars hear echoes of Plato there. What is even more remarkable, Aristotle makes no mention of any differences he may have with Plato on mimesis.

Not even Plato is entirely consistent on the subject of mimesis. Book III of the *Republic* treats it as impersonation, Book X as image-making, and although these are not the same, both seem to be inherently dangerous processes. Plato cannot think that mimesis is intrinsically bad, however, for he treats it elsewhere more positively.

1. Impersonation

In Book III of the *Republic*, Plato defines mimesis in poetry as impersonation: "to liken oneself to another either in voice or in appearance is to make a mimesis of the person to whom one likens oneself" (*Republic* 393c5, cf. *Sophist* 267a). Plato distinguishes mimesis from narrative (392d5), and illustrates mimesis with an example of direct discourse in Homer: when Homer gives the speech of Chryses (at *Iliad* I.17 ff.), he "tries his best to make us think that the speaker is not Homer, but a priest, and he an old man" (393b1–2). Here Plato is clear that it is the author who impersonates the speaker in direct discourse; later in the same passage he will treat the performer as the impersonator. An adequate account of mimesis as impersonation will have to explain why Plato treats these two cases in the same way.

Plato holds that mimesis so defined aims at a kind of deception. In the case Plato cites, it aims to make its audience believe what is not the case: that the author of the lines beginning at *Iliad* I.17 is an elderly priest, when in fact it is Homer. A performer of the same lines – and the lines would have been encountered most frequently in performance – would aim at a double deception: to make the audience believe that he himself is an elderly priest and that this priest is the author of the lines, when in fact he is not an elderly priest, and the lines are Homer's.

In this context, unlike Book X, Plato does not take either narrative or indirect discourse to be mimetic and therefore deceptive in aim (394a). This gives Plato three modes of poetry: pure mimesis (direct discourse) in tragedy and comedy, pure narrative in dithyrambs, and a mixture of the two in epic (394c, 392d). Because he holds that poetry can be made without mimesis, Plato can bar mimetic poetry from education without barring poetry altogether (398a).

The danger Plato sees in mimetic poetry is not deception as such, and he is not afraid that the audience will be deceived by mimesis. No audience is deceived by such things, as Plato well knows. Everyone knows Homer wrote the poem. And even if the audience were beguiled into thinking that the speaker is an elderly priest, they may still be undeceived by what he says. It is not part of Plato's thesis in Book III that mimesis disables the ability of an audience to judge

what is said. The trouble with mimesis is that it aims at deception concerning the identity of the speaker, and it entices us to do the same: the poet "tries his best to make us think" what is not the case, and so must the performer. Here is the kernel of Plato's concern. It is not that we are really likely to be taken in by a deception, but that we may be beguiled into becoming performers, and therefore into taking deception as our aim; and this is morally an unhealthy aim to take.

The difference between mimetic and narrative poetry is of greater importance to Plato than it could be to modern readers of poetry, because Plato belonged to a culture in which poetry was written to be performed. Ancient Greek education depended heavily on the recitation or performance of poetry by upper class youngsters, and Plato was afraid that students would tend to become like the characters they impersonated if they performed mimetic poetry. Certainly ancient poetry teems with characters we would not want our children to emulate. Another reason Plato condemned mimetic performance is this: each student must learn to play only his own role and to avoid all others, if justice is to be preserved in the city; but a course of mimetic performances will require each student to take many parts, and this would be bad practice for the life of a guardian.

It is important to observe that the distinction between history and poetry, which looms large in modern scholars' readings of *Poetics* 9, means nothing to Plato. His criticisms of mimesis in Book III would apply whether or not the subjects were historical: if an audience is led to think that a performer is Chryses, they are as much deceived if Chryses is historical as they are if he is a product of fiction.

2. Image-making

Plato seems to understand mimesis differently in Book X of the *Republic*, where he uses the example of the production of images in a mirror (596d) to illuminate the production of images by painters, and, in turn, the production of poems by Homer and the tragedians. Here he drops his earlier distinction between narrative and non-narrative forms, and builds a line of criticism aimed at poetry in any form. He treats mimesis as image-making not to show that it is deceptive as to content, but to show that a mimetic artist can succeed on his own terms without full knowledge of the original object.

The painter-poet analogy is supposed to drive home his point (new in Book X) that dramatic mimesis is deceptive if it makes an audience believe that it is based on knowledge of its subject (598c). It would be absurd if a painter who can produce a convincing image of a bridle could thereby persuade us that he knew how the the bridle should be made if it is to serve its purpose well. Plato argues that the same should be said of a poet. Poets, Plato claims, present themselves as the moral teachers of Greece: a poet who produces a convincing representation of a general does, at the same time, persuade his audience that he knows how a general should be educated if he is to serve his purpose well. Painters, of course, do not successfully deceive in the relevant way: no one entrusts them

with the manufacture of bridles or the education of cobblers, no matter how convincing their pictures of bridles or cobblers. Only children and fools are taken in by a painting (598c). But poets do deceive and are entrusted with moral education. The point of the painter-poet analogy is to show how silly the Greeks are to be taken in by poetry, when they are not deceived by painting, at least not in the same way or to the same degree.

Again, as in Book III, the danger is not that we may be taken in by false content in poetry. Indeed, the poem – like the painting – might be an excellent representation of its object, and may convey any number of true beliefs. The danger Plato brings up in Book X is that we may be taken in by claims that the poet has a certain sort of knowledge. The context makes it clear what knowledge this is – knowledge of how to design a state and how to educate young men in virtue. A poet might publish convincing and even accurate portrayals of virtue, and still not have this knowledge. Just so, a leader might achieve great success on the basis of true beliefs about statecraft without having the sort of knowledge that would enable him to teach. Plato's criticism of the poets in Book X is an extension of Socrates' famous resolve never to let a pretension to knowledge go untested by the elenchus.

Book X does not limit mimesis to impersonation or even to performance: a purely narrative representation of a general would be subject to the same Platonic criticism, and so would a dramatic representation of a general in a script that has not been performed. Still, Plato is most critical of mimetic drama in performance, for it is this that most bewitches our power to judge between reality and illusion, and most strengthens our nonrational responses. Again, as in Book III, it makes no difference whether this is fact or fiction: as far as we can tell, a convincing drama about Pericles could be just as dangerous as one about a generic general. Aristotle's distinction in *Politics* 9 has no purchase here.

3. Reproduction

Plato is more positive about mimesis in other contexts. In the *Laws*, mimesis is « a kind of reproduction that can be accurate (668b); in the *Timaeus* it is the ideal relation between thought or speech and the divine reality of the Forms (47bc); and in the *Statesman* the laws are mimemata of the truth that is known by experts; they are therefore a very good thing, though second best to direct rule by the experts themselves (300c, cf. *Laws* 817b). All of these positive uses of mimesis depend on the idea that a product of mimesis should have at least some of the good qualities of the original object. Sound thought, for example, is a mimema of reality in virtue of having some of the stability of the intelligible world. Thus a mimema can serve a useful purpose so long as its limitations are known.

This is not really a third theory of mimesis, for it can be absorbed by either the impersonation or the image-making view; but it is a new emphasis. Plato's argument in *Republic* III depends on assuming that mimesis can reproduce objectionable features of the original, and so interfere with the proper education

of the young. In *Republic X*, again, Plato's case against mimesis depends on his observation that by reproducing selected features of an object, mimesis gives a false impression of knowledge.

Mimesis in Plato, then, is the reproduction of at least some of the qualities of an original, either through impersonation or image-making, sometimes with the aim of deceiving its audience, and sometimes not. In itself, it is neither a good nor a bad thing to do.

B. Mimesis in Aristotle

Outside the *Poetics*, there are the slightest hints of a theory of mimesis. The *Physics* presents us with the engaging idea that a profession (*technē*) like medicine or architecture works like nature in that both *technē* and nature subordinate their products teleologically, for the sake of ends (194a21); and this relation between *technē* and nature he describes as mimesis. Later he will add, in a similar context, that *technē* completes nature by bringing about through mimesis what nature was unable to accomplish (199a15). Nature means us to be healthy, for example, but does not always succeed; medicine can intervene to bring about the effect at which nature had aimed. Medicine and nature, in this account, are alike in two ways: they produce the same ends, and they do so in the same way, by subordinating each thing they do to the ends at which they aim. Mimesis here has nothing to do with imitation or representation; it produces health, rather than a simulacrum of health. On the surface, there is no point of contact between this sort of mimesis and the sort Plato discussed, and little connection with Aristotle's own more representational treatment of mimesis in poetry and music, though there may be some resonance at a deeper level between the sorts of mimesis.² One possibility to keep in mind is that medicine must at some stage simulate nature. If medicine is to intervene and then let nature carry on the natural process of maintaining health, it must arrange for nature to take some medical artifice as if it were natural; that is, it must produce an artificial effect that merges smoothly in the health-promoting course of nature.³ There is a sort of benign deception implicit in this process. We shall see whether this idea is useful in explaining mimesis in poetry and music.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle considers mimesis under three headings: media, objects, and modes. The media of mimesis include dance, music, painting, and poetry; the objects include things as they are, things better than they are, and things worse than they are. The modes include narrative and drama – and, perhaps, impersonation as well.

1. Modes of mimesis in Aristotle

An echo of Plato's threefold classification in *Republic III* may sound in Aristotle's taxonomy of the modes of poetry, which can be read in two ways (1448a2–24):

1. (*Twofold reading*) It is possible to make a mimesis of the same object in

the same medium either (a) through narration (either (i) by becoming someone else as Homer does or (ii) by just being oneself and not changing), or (b) through representing characters actively doing things.

2. (*Threefold reading*) It is possible to make a mimesis of the same object in the same medium either (c) through narration [sometimes] becoming someone else as Homer does or (d) by just being oneself and not changing, or (e) through representing characters actively doing things.

Most editors prefer (1) simply as a reading of the Greek text; but scholars who wish to hear an echo of Plato's theory in this passage prefer the tripartite reading.⁴ If the passage echoes Plato, however, it does so faintly and through a serious confusion, because Aristotle regards all – or both – of the modes he discusses to be modes of mimesis, whereas Plato restricts mimesis in Book III to impersonation. Specifically, the second category (a (ii) or d) corresponds to Platonic narrative, but would not be mimetic under Plato's classification. The third category (b or e) is neither narrative nor explicitly involves impersonation, and has no place in Plato's scheme at all. The first category (a (i) or c) may be Plato's mixed class of narration interrupted by impersonation; but to take it this way requires us to understand more than is given us in the text, and a word like "sometimes" must be supplied.⁵ Furthermore, the impersonation that does interest Aristotle in the present passage must – by the grammar of the sentence – be a kind of narration, and this is impossible on the Platonic model. It is more likely that the impersonation of this passage really is a sub-mode of narration, namely, narration through a fictive narrator – a device for which Homer is especially famous in the *Odyssey*. If this reading is right, then there is no echo here at all of Plato's view of mimesis as impersonation, by the author, of a non-narrative speaker.⁶ In any case, the argument against the reading I propose depends on assuming that Aristotle is following Plato, which is the point at issue. So far, then, Aristotle pays little homage to Plato's narrow understanding of mimesis as impersonation. The distinction we have is between narrative and dramatic modes, with two subordinate modes of narration, depending on whether the poet tells the story in his own or in an assumed voice.

Just once in the *Poetics* mimesis appears to be confined to impersonation on the narrow model of *Republic III*. In *Poetics* 24, Aristotle praises Homer for his use of direct discourse: "the poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for doing this is not what makes him a *mimētes*" (1460a7–8). The passage stands out in the *Poetics* as uniquely Platonic, and, in the view of one scholar, playfully so.⁷ Every other relevant text in the *Poetics* implies that mimesis may or may not involve dramatic impersonation. So, for example, Aristotle makes a similar point about Homer in *Poetics* 4 by saying that his mimesis, by contrast with that of other epic poets, is dramatic (1448b35) – and this presupposes that mimesis can fail to be dramatic.

Indeed, a poetic text is equally mimetic whether or not it is performed. Whereas the effects of mimetic poetry that concern Plato in *Republic* III are directly linked to performance, Aristotle's discussion of mimesis in tragedy is quite independent of its potential for performance. A mimesis of an action is not necessarily an enactment – hence the need to specify action at 1449b26 – and it seems that a story alone counts as mimesis of an action (1450a4). If a poet has done her work well, her audience will be moved to pity and fear merely by hearing what happens in the play (1453b3–7). Aristotelian mimesis can be entirely literary, and requires nothing like enactment in the strict sense (Somville, *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote*, p. 52).

2. Media

Aristotle's theory of mimesis must make room for the making of visual images as well, though he need not give it pride of place as Plato does in Book X of the *Republic*. He treats it not as a mode or kind of mimesis, but as a medium. Painted images are of course mentioned in *Poetics* 1, and images (*eikones*) crop up again in *Poetics* 4 to explain our pleasure in mimesis (1448b11 ff.). In *Poetics* 2 and 25, also, Aristotle uses the analogy of poets to painters to make the point that objects can be represented as better than they are, worse, than they are, or just the same (1448a5 ff., 1460b8 ff.). Although Aristotle thinks of mimesis through color and form as the same sort of thing as mimesis through speech, rhythm, and melody, he does think that different objects can be represented in different media, and different effects achieved. We shall see, for example, that painting is less well adapted than poetry to the mimesis of character than poetry is, while it is better adapted for conveying information.

There is also mimesis by music without words, and there is mimesis by rhythm without music. This raises a problem: how can mimesis in dance, melody, or painting be carried out in all of the Aristotelian modes? In none of these media can mimesis be narrative in the usual sense; and only in some can it be dramatic. Dance and painting can represent action, but it is hard to see how this can be done by music without words. Perhaps Aristotle has forgotten the nonpoetic media when he introduces the modes, or perhaps he intends these modes to apply only to the medium of poetry. In any case, we must recognize that an adequate Aristotelian account of mimesis should accommodate all of the media he mentions in *Poetics* 1.

3. Objects

By "object" I mean what is referred to by the grammatical object of *mimēsthai*, the verbal cognate of *mimēsis*. It appears that mimesis can take as its objects characters, passions, or actions; but that the chief object of mimesis is people in action (*Poetics* 1 and 2). Aristotle makes two interesting points about objects of mimesis, of which the first seems fairly general, and the second is specific to tragedy.

(a) *Objects that are made up*. The people whose actions are the objects of mimesis

must be better than we are, the same, or worse (*Poetics* 2, cf. 1460b8 ff.). Aristotle borrows from Plato the idea that mimesis has people in action as its object (*Republic* X 603c4); but the division into three moral classes is his own, and leads, as we shall see, to a very un-Platonic consequence.

It is not clear who "we" are supposed to be; but "people of our time" evidently refers to the same group (1448a18). Those who are better are evidently those from the past – people who have the heroic names of myth-or-history (which Aristotle treats as a single genre). The actions of such people are the chief stuff of tragedy, though some tragedies use names and actions that are entirely made up (1451b15 ff.). The people who are worse are always entirely made up by comic poets, while the people who are at our level are particular people of our time who are picked out by the iambic poets for satire (1451b11 ff., 1449b8). It follows that the object of poetic mimesis can be entirely made up by a poet. The object of mimesis can be a fiction.

Here Aristotle diverges considerably from Plato, who treats mimesis consistently as having objects that are either real or – in the case of poetry and painting – as having objects that are themselves mimemata of real things. Mimesis in Aristotle, then, cannot be anything like *imitation*, which in modern usage implies the existence of something real which is imitated. We speak of imitation flowers and fake flamingos, but not of imitation goblins or fake fairies, because there are no goblins or fairies. Again, mimesis in Aristotle cannot be the same as fiction. The comic poet does indeed produce fiction – he makes up events and characters (the word for doing that is simply *poiein*); but then he accomplishes a mimesis which has as its object precisely the fiction that he has made up. If mimesis were fiction then it would make no sense to say that it can take fiction as its object. But if fiction is the making up of people and events, and if that is what a poet does, then what in the world could mimesis be? What role is left for mimesis if fiction is prior to it? Aristotle's way of speaking implies that there is a difference between simply making up actions, and producing a mimesis of actions that have been made up. A speculative hypothesis to which I shall return: the difference is that mimesis affects us, while simply making things up – without mimesis – does not. To produce a mimesis of a fiction is to give to that fiction the power of engaging our attention and our emotions almost as if it were real.

(b) *Universals*. Specifically tragic mimesis has as its object an action that is complete and whole, and has a certain magnitude; the main idea is that this action consists of smaller actions (*pragmata*) arranged in accordance with certain general principles (*Poetics* 7–9, cf. 1450a15 ff.). "The poet's job is to tell not what has happened, but the sort of thing that could happen – what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity" (1450b36–8). Poetry is more philosophical than history because it aims at universals of the form "this kind of speech or action belongs to that kind of person, by probability or necessity" (1451b8–10, cf. 1449b8). It makes no difference whether the events to be represented are historical, mythical, or fictional; mimesis of actions is poetic

so long as the actions are governed by probability or necessity (1451b29–32). As these are human actions, necessity in the strict sense does not seem appropriate: the probable is what happens “for the most part” (*Rhetoric* I.ii.15), and it is to this that Aristotle regularly appeals (e.g. 1455b10).

What is the connection between poetic mimesis and universals? Aristotle consistently says that the poet takes *actions* as his objects (as at 1451b29), and he very clearly does not say that the poet takes universals as his objects, though this might seem to afford him an elegant reply to *Republic* X. In fact, however, the universals that concern poetry are not at all like the objects of Platonic knowledge (see G. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 35), and there is nothing here that Aristotle could offer as a direct answer to Plato's concern.

Aristotle's discussion of universals in poetry is fertile ground for the reading-in of modern theories, a practice usefully discussed by Halliwell (*The Poetics of Aristotle*, pp. 109–111). Aristotle means at least that a poet should make sure the actions she represents are appropriate to her characters; but he must mean more than this: the poet “says what sort of things can happen;” she “aims at” universals, though she sticks in proper names. Plainly, Aristotle's poet takes as her material – in some sense of material – a set of generalizations about human behavior. But she does not take these generalizations directly as the objects of mimesis. Why does Aristotle resist the temptation here to say that poetic mimesis is the mimesis that takes universals as its objects? I offer the speculative suggestion that poetic mimesis in Aristotle's theory can take only a particular action as its object, because only particular actions can arouse pity or fear. Although a poet must have universal probabilities in mind when she writes tragedy, she must make us feel as if we were witnesses to particular events, if she is to affect our emotions; and this would seem to require that the objects of tragic mimesis be particular actions. If so, what is the role of universals in mimesis? Aristotle leaves us to speculate on this, a task I shall take up in Section II.C.

The object of poetic mimesis, then, is an action that may or may not be fictional but must in any case bear a certain relation to universals dealing with human behavior.

C. Consistency

We have seen that there is tension at the first level of interpretation of Plato's *Republic* between two views of mimesis – as impersonation and as image-making – and that these two views generate in turn narrower and wider bans on poetry. Nothing like this tension surfaces in the *Poetics*, or, indeed, in any other text in which Aristotle treats mimesis; from what we have seen so far we have no reason to doubt that a unified Aristotelian account of mimesis could be given. Halliwell has to labor to find an instability in the *Poetics'* treatment of mimesis between image-making and enactment (*Aristotle's Poetics*, esp. 130 ff.), and he succeeds only because he has assumed a stronger Platonic influence on the *Poetics* than is warranted (Janko, “Review of Halliwell (1989),” p. 154).

It turns out that Aristotle is neither echoing Plato on mimesis (except perhaps at 1460a8) nor directly answering Plato's mimesis-based criticism of the poets. Aristotle's independence from Plato on this score is underlined by his silence concerning Plato's use of the analogy of painting with poetry to show the ignorance of poets, and by his failure to answer the charge that poetry is deceptive.

Yet mimesis in poetry is deceptive, as Aristotle implies more than once in the *Poetics*, and this makes it hard for us to see how poetic mimesis can be at all like the sort of mimesis that works hand in hand with nature. We need to look closely at the kind of deception that is involved in poetry.

II. Mimesis and Deception

Although Aristotle ignores the sort of deception that worried Plato about poetry, his sort of mimesis is still deceptive. Perhaps this is inevitable. The tradition that poetry is inherently deceptive is an ancient one, and apparently made no one but Plato and perhaps Xenophanes uneasy. Aristotle, as we shall see, falls squarely into the tradition that does not apologize for the deceptive character of poetry. To this, the most famous of Plato's canards against poetry, Aristotle does not even deign to answer.

“Poets tell many lies,” says Plutarch, citing a proverb, and elsewhere reports that Gorgias said that a poet who deceives is wiser than one who does not.⁸ Philostratus presumably records an older view when he claims that it is pleasant and harmless to be affected by things that do not exist as if they did (*Proemium* 391k4). It is Plato who raises the alarm about deception in poetry. As we have seen, he has two concerns: first that students should not become deceivers, and second that none of us be taken in by pretensions to expert knowledge either on the part of poets or by poets on behalf of their characters (*Republic* 598c, cf. *Sophist* 267c). In his criticisms of poetry as mimesis, Plato is not concerned with the specific content of a poem: even if what is said in a poem is entirely true, Plato's concerns about its deceptive power remain. We might still be corrupted by performing it, and we might still wrongly think that its good qualities are due to knowledge.

Aristotle is not sensitive to either of these concerns. He does not address the ethical issue of the effect of impersonation on performers at all. As for the pretensions of poets to knowledge, Aristotle gives us texts in which we can find the germ of an answer to Plato (especially *Poetics* 4, 9, and 25), but he does not face the issue squarely.

A. Deception regarding content

In fact, the *Poetics* says nothing explicit about deception; it merely implies that poetry can be deceptive in content and, as we shall see, in the way it engages

our emotions. The clearest case has to do with the content of poetry – with the deception that occurs when an audience is led to believe in the probability of events that could not have happened. In several contexts, and especially in his chapter on problems (*Poetics* 25), Aristotle recognizes implicitly and applauds the deceptive power of mimesis:

In general one should deal with impossibilities by appealing to composition, or to what is better, or to common opinion. As for composition, one should prefer what is convincing but impossible over what is unconvincing but possible.

(1461b9–12, cf. 1460a26 and 1460a13 ff.)

A poem that takes an impossible sequence of events and makes it convincing does so through deceiving its audience, by making them believe that certain events have taken place, or could have taken place, when in fact it is impossible that they could have taken place.

Aristotle's treatment of this theme seems to imply that by the standards appropriate to poetry, deception of this sort is not a vice. Aristotle does not call attention to this as a point about deception; and in any case this could not be a serious answer to Plato, for Plato never criticized mimesis for being deceptive in this way. Plato does, of course, criticize poets for being wrong about gods and heroes, but this has nothing to do with the mimetic character of the poems in question. The closest Aristotle comes to an answer on this score is in his discussion of correctness in poetry, where he says that being right about subject matter is only *incidentally* part of a poet's job:

And besides, there is not the same correctness in politics as in poetry, nor in any other *technē* as in poetry. But two kinds of failure belong to poetry proper: one is essentially poetic, the other merely happens to be so. If someone intended a mimesis [of something to be correct, but failed through] incompetence, then this would be a failure of poetry itself; but if he intended to do this incorrectly – to show a horse with both right legs thrown forward, for example – then that failure would belong to the particular *technē*.

(1460b13–19)

A product of mimesis is a thing in its own right, but is also *of* something else. A poet who is good at mimesis in itself may still misrepresent his subject matter, if he is not well informed about that or does not intend to represent it accurately. This useful distinction between mimesis and the particular *technai* goes beyond anything Plato says on the subject of error in poetry, for it allows us reasons for praising poets who get things wrong; but it does not allow inaccurate poets to escape all criticism. The passage does not isolate poetry from real-world concerns, or judge poetry merely by its own autonomous standards. A *technē* like politics has one standard of correctness, its own; and a statesman can go wrong in just one sort of way. But a poet can go wrong in two sorts of ways, and poetry is to be judged by two standards, one belonging only to poetry as such, the other to the body of knowledge (*technē*) which governs the subject covered by the poet.

and which therefore incidentally governs the poet himself (cf. *Magna Moralia* 1190a31). The passage does not imply that the poet need not know anything of the subject of his poem – only that he need not know this *qua* poet. It is a common error among scholars to read into this passage a reply to Plato's criticism of poetry (e.g. Lucas, *Aristotle Poetics*, p. 235). But in order to answer Plato, Aristotle should address the specific dangers that accompany mimesis on Plato's view, and this he does not do. Though 1461b9–12, for example, does license some inaccuracies and deceptions, it does so merely by appealing to the principle that poetry should above all be convincing. Plato knew poets worked on such a principle; that is why he was afraid they would appear to be experts on subjects about which they knew only how to convince. But this fear is not addressed by Aristotle. As the passage is not marked by any clear allusions to the *Republic*, it should not be taken as Aristotle's response. Aristotle has provided us with elegant replies to Plato on other topics; it is kinder to see the present passage in another light: like Gorgias before him, Aristotle seems to think it obvious and unproblematic that a poet ought to deceive, and that his audience ought to be taken in at some level. Aristotle goes beyond what we know of Gorgias's theory not because he has attended to Plato's concerns, but because he has advanced independently towards his own theory of the effects of poetry on an audience.

B. Deception and the emotions

Poetry must engage our emotions through events which are merely represented on stage and which are in some cases purely fictional. This implicates the poet in a sort of deception that Aristotle does not recognize explicitly.⁹

In the case of tragedy we can easily see the complexity of the matter. Tragedy succeeds only in so far as it elicits the emotions of pity and fear, and these emotions (we are told in the *Rhetoric*) are felt on the presentation of something that is destructive or painful. According to the *Rhetoric*, in order to feel pity or fear one must have the impression that an action is taking place which is painful or destructive; but on the tragic stage, in fact, nothing is destroyed, and the actors do not necessarily feel pain on account of the actions they represent. So it appears that the audience or reader must believe what is not true in order to be affected properly by a tragedy.

On the other hand, the audience does know that nothing truly painful or destructive is taking place on stage; otherwise they could not take pleasure in the performance. Generally, on Aristotle's theory, we can take pleasure in mimesis precisely because we are not deceived by it; we can take pleasure in an image of a lion, for example, because we know that it is an image and not a lion (1448b9–15). If that is so, then how can the proper experience of tragedy depend on our being deceived by it? Part of the answer is that tragedy and painting have rather different effects according to Aristotle, and that tragedy has an emotional effect far greater than that of painting; but this is not the whole story. However tragedy affects us, it should not send us running from the theater

in fear and horror at the ghastly doings inside. The horror that drove King Claudius from the theater was not horror at the murder of Gonzago.

Apparently we must believe at the same time that an evil is taking place and that it is not. The poet must make us respond to events represented on stage as if they are actually happening, so as to evoke fear and pity, and as if they are not, so as to cause pleasure rather than pain. Our challenge is to give accounts of mimesis and the emotions that will explain how this is possible.¹⁰

C. Deception and universals

A related difficulty emerges from the fact that most emotions are elicited by particular events and people, while Aristotle seems to say that poetry aims at universals (*Poetics* 9). On this theory a poet must be able to convey universal truths to her audience, while eliciting an emotional response normally reserved for the experience of particular events. We will have to ask whether this can be done without some form of deception.

Aristotle distinguishes between hatred and anger in this way: hatred (*misos*) is directed against classes of people, such as thieves; while anger (*orge*) is directed against particular persons who are perceived as causing pain (*Rhetoric* II.iv.31). Pity and fear are more like anger than hatred; they are elicited by impressions (*phantasiai* – *Rhetoric* II.v, II.viii); and these, it seems, must be of particulars, since we do not have impressions of universals. And this seems to be right about the emotions: if the fear of death makes your blood run cold, it is the fear of a particular death – your own, or perhaps that of someone near to you – that does this. Death in general (unless personified) is not the sort of thing that can make a vivid enough impression on me to cause genuine fear or pity.

Here is an example to illustrate the point. Aristotle would accept the *Phaedo* as a case of mimesis (though not as a case of poetry), since it is a Socratic *logos*, and this presents vividly the death of a particular man, Socrates. The emotions evoked by this scene are an intense mix of admiration for Socrates, pity for his grieving comrades, and anger at those who caused his death. The mere occurrence of these emotions – to say nothing of their intensity – depends on our believing at some level that the event Plato described really happened, and happened in a particular place to a particular man at a particular time. Although we know that what Plato wrote about Socrates is mostly fiction, we cannot so easily dismiss the elements in his story that move our emotions. At the time we are moved by them, we do believe in them, at least at some level. Now medical science tells us what Plato and his audience all surely knew, that death by hemlock poisoning is an agony not at all like the cessation of warmth Plato describes easing its way up Socrates's limbs. Plato is making a general point about what death is to a philosopher, and not recording the scene that took place on Socrates's last day. But no statement of the universal truth would affect us in the way Plato's scene does; knowing this, Plato makes an impossible scene convincing and affecting. He makes us appreciate a philosophical point which is

arguably true — that death is nothing to a philosopher; but in doing so he makes us accept as history an account that is literally false. The passage is complex irony on a grand scale – deep truth dressed up as superficial falsehood. What the writer aimed at was the deep truth, and what aroused our emotions was the superficial falsehood. We recognize the general point, and are affected at the same time by the particular event. This is the possibility Aristotle intimated in *Poetics* 9, that a writer can tell us universal truths about human behavior and, in doing so, produce a mimema of an action that is both fictional and particular.

What is the relation of universal to particular in mimesis on this account? Aristotle does not say. Perhaps mimesis starts with a particular object, and then calls our attention to the universal that is exemplified by that particular. At best, mimesis reproduces only selected features of its object, and in doing this may reduce its object to what Redfield calls “form.” “Imitation,” he says, “is the discovery of form in things.” Without attempting to pry form out of the object that has it, mimesis arises “from some inclusive, if schematic, intuition of the patterns found in experience.”¹¹ This insight is especially helpful in explaining how we can learn from a mimema what we might not be able to learn from its object. If I came upon a lion in the veldt, I would probably be too occupied with running, and too preoccupied with fear, to learn much about lions. But if I see a lion in a picture, I can study it dispassionately and at leisure. The picture selects just those points about lions that I need to know, and makes the task easy for me. Generally, mimesis can present us with images that reveal the form that is common to a certain species; and this appears to be the point of *Poetics* 4. In such cases, mimesis carries the mind of its audience from the particular image to a universal truth which is instantiated by it, and does so partly by disabling the emotional response we would normally have to the object.

Although painting and various other types of mimesis can work in this way, tragic mimesis plainly cannot. The emotions that retard learning in the case of the lion-painting are precisely what is wanted in the case of Aristotelian tragedy. If painting calls our cognitive attention to what is universal in a general case, tragedy summons up our emotions on behalf of particulars that are contrived to represent a general pattern. Tragic mimesis must bypass not our emotions, but the cognitive power that normally keeps them in check, so that we may be led to experience emotions on behalf of characters and events that our minds could dismiss as unreal. The difference is this: a painter, with his eye on a particular specimen, can produce an image that reveals the universal form of lions; a poet, contemplating a universal truth about human behavior, can invent actions and characters that illustrate those, and then contrive to engage the emotions of his audience with these inventions as if they were particular and actual. Aristotle makes it clear in *Poetics* 17 that this is the order of composition for a poet: start with the universal (so as to be sure not to violate what is probable), and then add the particular names and circumstances. Poetry and painting seem to work mimetically in opposite directions: painting towards, and poetry away from, the

universal. Mimesis in Aristotle is broad enough to accommodate both kinds of processes.

A speculative hypothesis: Mimesis in poetry takes universals and dresses them up with particular names and episodes so as to enable them to play the part that particular people and events normally play in our emotional lives. A writer can make us respond to universal types of events and characters as if they were particulars, and this involves a kind of deception that is especially clear in the case of the death of Socrates. The important truth in a poem is too general to engage our emotions; and the particulars are often too severely constrained by the facts to illustrate the general point. If a poem is to represent universals, therefore, and if these are to be at all affecting, then the poet will have to represent them to us in the guise of particular events and characters. I am not saying that poets do this consciously, or even that Aristotle says that poets do this – only that it is a consequence of Aristotelian theory that poets do arrange to make universals affect their audiences in ways that are normally reserved for particulars.

We have already seen that Aristotelian tragedy makes us respond emotionally to representations as if they were real, and that this involves one kind of poetic deception. Now we see that a second, more subtle, kind of deception is involved in tragedy: in so far as a tragedy represents universals, it makes us respond to them as if they were particulars. Aristotle nowhere recognizes the need for either kind of deception in poetry, but both are consequences of his theory of poetry, taken with his theory of the emotions. These are benign consequences, and would give him no reason to turn back and change his views on poetry or the emotions; but they are deceptions nonetheless. This result invites us to consider whether poetic deception has anything in common with the benign form of deception we encountered earlier, in connection with the simulation of nature by medicine.

D. Benign deceptions

Aristotle knew that poetry could deceive, and that sometimes it ought to do so; but defenders of poetry might be upset at my use of the word “deception” for what is the usual stock-in-trade of poets. I take it that any process that causes us to believe what is not the case – at any level – is deceptive. Generally, neither Plato nor Aristotle was opposed to deception as such. Plato has no quarrel with the good lie; his objections to mimesis are subtle, as we have seen, and have nothing to do with the deceptive content of a poem, although he has independent reasons for objecting to the content of many poems. Aristotle does not take Plato’s concerns to heart, but accepts without defense a concept of mimesis that is inherently deceptive, at least in the case of poetry.

In my sense of “deception,” a poet can deceive her audience without misleading or intending to mislead them. I do not really believe that Oedipus has plucked out his eyes here and now; but while watching an effective production of the play

I feel as if I did hold that belief, and, indeed, at some level I do believe this. Otherwise I could not be moved. But I am not misled, because the deception does not affect my deep beliefs.

Deception that does not affect deep beliefs is on the way to being a deception-like process that does not affect belief at all. I shall call this process “functional deception.” Consider what happens when I use my desktop mini-computer to emulate a mainframe terminal. Then my desktop model does what is normally done by a terminal, but it is not a terminal. The mainframe computer responds to my desktop model just as if it were responding to the terminal for which it was designed; but my desktop model is not the terminal for which it was designed, and so the mainframe is taken in, and functionally deceived. In a similar sense, a predator may be deceived by a harmless beetle that carries the markings of a poisonous species: such markings were designed to deter predators from eating poisonous meals; but these markings simply deter predators. Neither the computer nor the predator need have any conscious beliefs in order to be deceived. Both are seduced by cases of functional deception.

III. A New Theory of Mimesis

We have seen that mimesis in Aristotle is either narrative or dramatic in mode, that it can occur in a variety of media from music and dance to painting, poetry and the theater, and that it can take as its objects people as they are, people as they ought to be, or people as they ought not to be. We have also come to realize that the texts do not determine a single account of mimesis. We shall have to speculate.

It would be good to be able to give a definition of mimesis that would serve in all of Aristotle’s contexts. No simple account of mimesis can explain why Aristotle classifies so many different arts under this heading; but the definition we want should do so. A second condition on successful definition is this: we have seen that mimesis selects certain features of its object to be reproduced in the mimema. What is the principle of selection? We often borrow the features of one thing and give them to another: when is this process a case of mimesis? An account of mimesis ought to answer these questions. Third, our account of mimesis should explain why it is deceptive in the ways that it is, and why those sorts of deception can be benign.

A. What mimesis is not

Aristotelian mimesis is not the same as imitation or fiction or reproduction or representation or make-believe; it is not expression; and it is not even the making of images or likenesses. Although to do some of these things may be a kind of mimesis, none of them goes to the heart of the matter.

We have already seen one reason why mimesis is not the same as imitation:

unlike imitation, mimesis can take pure fiction as its object. "Imitation" will not work in all contexts, in any case: in no ordinary English sense is narrative imitative, yet narrative is a mode of mimesis in Aristotle. "Emulation" is better than "imitation" for some contexts, but it too fails for the narrative mode.

Again, mimesis is not fiction, since it can take a fiction for its object. Mimesis is something that is added to fiction, probably with the aim of making it believable and affecting.

Mimesis in Aristotle is something like make-believe. Walton has shown how useful a model there is in child's play for understanding the various arts Aristotle considers mimetic (Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*). Still, mimesis is not the same as make-believe, though it does aim to make us believe certain things. Our response to mimesis may involve make-believe, in so far as we are in cahoots with the artist – like adults joining a child's game of make-believe. But what the Aristotelian artist does to draw us in, so that we accept at some level the truth of his work, and are moved by it – that is the heart of mimesis. The model of make-believe will not by itself explain this power of mimetic poetry to affect us.

The case of reproduction is complicated. In one sense, mimesis is reproduction; in another it is not. Reproduction in the full sense is not mimesis at all. There is a weak sort of reproduction that Plato identifies as a kind of mimesis: the reproduction of the qualities and proportions of an object in musical form (*Laws* 668b); but this is far from being a process that would truly reproduce an object. If a bridlemaker makes a new bridle on the model of an old one so as to get the right fit, he is not a mimetic artist but a bridlemaker, and the horseman who purchases a bridle reproduced in this way is in no way deceived if he thinks he has bought a bridle. Although the maker imitates his model, his product is not an imitation bridle. Reproduction in the full sense is never the sort of mimesis we are investigating.

But what of the sort of reproduction we encountered in Plato, that passes some qualities of the original on to the product? It probably is fair to say that every case of mimesis involves this sort of reproduction, and that every *mimema* has some features that belong also to its original. But not every case of feature-sharing is mimesis, for I have many of my mother's physical features, but I am not her *mimema* nor was meant to be. In any case an adequate account of mimesis as feature-sharing would have to explain which features must be shared for a given case of feature-sharing to turn out to be mimesis.

Mimesis is not the same as representation, because only some representations may be mimetic. The word "representation" is widely used to translate *mimēsis* in certain contexts, but it is not helpful in elucidating the ancient texts. Representation is at least as difficult a concept in modern philosophy as mimesis is in classical thought, and we achieve no advantage in clarity by translating the word in this way. Furthermore, we can always ask of a representation whether or not it is mimetic. Symbols, too, represent; but symbols are not mimetic, and have nothing to do with Aristotle's theory of poetry.¹²

Mimesis is not expression, although it is tempting to translate "mimesis" this

way when it is used for the sort of mimesis that is accomplished by music and dance. There is nothing wrong with this rendering as a device for producing a readable English translation, but it papers over one of the main difficulties about mimesis, which is to explain how it can have the broad range that Aristotle assigns to it – how music and dance and painting and poetry can all be mimetic.

Nor does it explain mimesis to say that it is the production of likenesses or images, though this is the closest of the candidates we have reviewed thus far, for Aristotle does gloss *mimema* as *image* (*eikon*) and as *likeness* (*omoïoma*). We have no trouble taking "image" as equivalent to *mimema* when Aristotle is speaking of painting (1448b11); but when he is speaking of music, we simply do not know what he means by "likeness," which he treats in this context as a synonym for *mimema* (*Politics* 1340a18, a39). We may say that a piece of music is *like* an emotion or a virtue, or a character,¹³ but it is not at all clear what we mean by saying such things, and that is what we want a theory of mimesis to explain.

B. Mimesis as functional deception

The hard cases for a definition of mimesis are music and dance. Here I shall propose a definition that works for music, and then ask if this can cover all the media in which mimesis occurs.

Aristotle says he knows that music contains likenesses of virtue and vice because he observes that our characters are changed when we listen to music (*Politics* 1340a22, a41). Why should this prove his point? In the *Problemata* he gives a sketchy explanation of the likeness of melody and rhythm to character. Melody and rhythm are motions, and so are actions; both kinds of motion, when perceived, set up corresponding motions in the mind of the audience.¹⁴ So far this would seem to explain only the likeness of music to actions. Where does character come in? Actions are both indicative and formative of character: the music that corresponds to a given type of character simulates that character in the listener by setting up appropriate motions in his soul. Listening to heroic music, I feel heroic rhythms pulsing through my soul, and these are just the motions I would feel if I were a hero engaged in an heroic action, and these are the motions to which, if I had an heroic character, I would become accustomed. This music, then, is like an heroic character – it does for me what it would do for me to have that character; and if I listen to such music regularly, my soul will become accustomed to motions of that kind, and I will in fact develop an heroic character.¹⁵

This suggests a general answer to the problem of defining *mimēsis*. Mimesis is the art of arranging for one thing to have an effect that properly belongs to another: *M* is a *mimema* of *O* just in case *M* has an effect that is proper to *O*. Mimesis is, in effect, an intervention in natural causal processes. The usual way to feel or to become heroic has nothing to do with music; but music can be contrived

in such a way that it has this effect. What goes for music goes for dance, as both are supposed to be kinds of motion.

This theory depends on the idea that there is a natural order in which mimesis can intervene. One reason mimesis has been hard for modern thinkers to digest is that it belongs to a nest of concepts that are intrinsically teleological. Mimesis is best understood as a goal-directed activity; specifically, it is an activity that aims at producing effects that are normally achieved by other means; but this makes sense to you only if you think of objects and their effects as somehow being designed for each other. Mimesis breaks the natural order of design and effect. That is why it is wonderful and exciting, and that is why it gives us a safe way to learn facts about lions – through pictures – and a pleasant way to develop courageous habits of mind – through music or dance.

1. *The range of mimesis*

It should now be clear why mimesis includes music and dance, but we still need to explain why it includes poetry only if it is governed by what is probable, and therefore does not include all fiction. Fiction invents, but mimesis allows those inventions to have effects that are normally reserved for actual experiences. It is not enough for a mimetic poet to make up characters and actions; she must also make them convincing and affecting. She must, in other words, endow her creations with something like the power to affect us that they would have if they were real. Fiction is mimetic not in so far as it is made up, but insofar as it is probable enough to trigger our emotions.

But what about pictures? Aristotle on the whole does not think that pictures arouse emotion or depict character,¹⁶ yet they are mimetic according to his standards in the *Poetics*, and they do satisfy the proposed definition. Pictures do have some of the effects that normally belong to their originals: the lion picture gives us information we would otherwise have to obtain at some risk from the lion himself; but the picture is safer and less emotionally demanding. Information in ideas can, according to Aristotle, have the same effect on us as perceptions;¹⁷ but it cannot be the case that every idea has the same effect that the corresponding thing would have. Otherwise, the lion-picture would pack the emotional wallop of its original.

2. *The selectivity of mimesis*

Mimesis does not aim at the same sort of effect in every case; but it does in every case aim at an effect, and that explains the selection of features that are reproduced in mimesis. The reason I am not a mimema of my mother, though I share a number of features with her, is that I was not produced to have an effect that is properly hers; and the physical features we have in common have nothing to do with my ability to function in her place. (This ability might be granted me by the law for very different reasons.) A mimema takes on just those features of its object – or takes on a likeness of just those features – which it needs to take over the effect at which it aims. The non-poisonous beetle, for example, need

only carry the marking that deters predators in order to be a mimema of its poisonous cousin; the lion-picture need only represent the lion features about which it seeks to inform us; and the tragic play need show us only enough of the invented lives of its characters to arouse the desired emotions.

3. *Benign deception?*

We now have to ask whether this definition clears up the various problems I raised earlier about mimesis and deception.

Let us begin with the difficulty about deception and the emotions: if tragedy is to have its effect on us, it must move us in ways we are normally moved only if we have certain beliefs; but in this case we do not really have those beliefs. For example, if I am to pity Agave, I must react as if I believed she had just now torn her son to pieces; but Agave has not just now torn her son to pieces. This is only a play, as I well know; if I had not known this, I would long since have called the police. In such a case, mimesis interferes with the normal process by which belief leads to emotion. It is as if mimesis deceives my emotions without deceiving me: it provides me with an impression to which I do not assent, but which moves me as if I did.

In the case of tragedy, the mimetic poet produces a script about certain actions. If you believed that those actions were happening, on Aristotle's theory of the emotions, you would have certain emotions. Of course in reading the script or seeing it performed, you do not believe that those actions are actually happening, but you are made to feel the emotions that you would feel if you did have those beliefs. In other words, the script has the same effect on you that the actions would have had, if you had believed they were taking place. In this way the poet's mimesis is aimed at producing a result that is normally achieved by other means.

Most important for Plato is the way in which belief is overridden by the mimetic process: actions that normally cause emotions affect you in this way only when you have certain beliefs about them; but it seems that an effective tragedy elicits those same emotions regardless of what you really believe. Thus mimesis has the effect of disabling our intelligence; it bypasses the conscious beliefs through which intelligence is usually able to control emotional responses.

The reason this does not disturb Aristotle as it does Plato is not given in the *Poetics*, but in the *Ethics*: we should aim at a sound emotional life not merely by controlling our conscious beliefs, but also by controlling the sorts of persons we turn out to be. We are responsible for the moral condition we are in, and this governs the emotions that a given impression elicits in us, and it even governs the impressions we can be given. In some sense, we are responsible for the impressions that we have.¹⁸ Mimesis of O gives us the sort of impression we would have if we were having an experience of O; but that sort of impression is partly a product of our moral character. Mimesis intervenes between me and actual experience in a particular case; but never (*pace* Plato) between me and the moral character I have developed over the years, which equally affects my

response to first-hand experience and my response to an experience that is simulated by mimesis.

Notes

1. This approach is so much the consensual one that Janko and Halliwell agree on it, though Janko does not agree that Aristotle is guided throughout by the Platonic notion (Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986) with Richard Janko's review of the same, *Classical Philology* 84 (1989) 154). The approach is wisely rejected by P. Somville in (*Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote* (Paris, 1975), pp. 48 ff. For useful summaries of treatments of mimesis see Somville, pp. 45–54, and, more recently, Halliwell, pp. 110 ff.
2. P. Somville, *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote* (Paris, 1975), p. 48.
3. Similar merging of *technē* and nature occur in other *technai*, though the point depends on a broader view of nature than comes naturally to us. On an Aristotelian view, the building of houses is as natural for us as is city-dwelling, and the *technē* that goes into this should merge as naturally as medicine does in the natural process of human life.
4. D. W. Lucas adopts the twofold reading in *Aristotle Poetics* (Oxford, 1968), p. 67, as does Richard Janko in *Aristotle Poetics* (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 72. Stephen Halliwell adopts the threefold reading in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, (London, 1987), p. 77.
5. Halliwell's translation, "first, by alternation between narrative and dramatic impersonation" would seem to require either *hote de* or *allote* before *heteron ti gignomenon* (Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, p. 33); I have captured this by supplying "sometimes." Without some such addition, the "mixed" reading of this classification will be lost.
6. Else achieves the same result by taking this category to be a Platonizing interpolation: G. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), pp. 90 ff.
7. R. Janko, *Aristotle Poetics*, p. 142; "Review of Halliwell (1986)," *Classical Philology* 84 (1989) 154.
8. The proverb is from "How the Young Man Should Study Poetry," Plutarch, *Moralia* 16A (available in Vol. I of the Loeb series, trans. by F. C. Babbitt, (London, 1927), pp. 74–197). The testimony on Gorgias is found in his "Were the the Athenians Famous in War or in Wisdom?" *Moralia* 348C (Babbitt, Vol. IV (London, 1936), pp. 492–527).
9. This is closely related to the sort of deception Plato feared, which disabled the watcher's judgment (*Republic* 605b) and incited him to emotions of which he would have been ashamed in real life (605c–d).
10. Aristotle does not seem aware of the difficulty, though I think he has the theoretical machinery he would need to deal with it. (For recent attempts at solving such problems, see R. Scruton, *Art and Imagination* (London, 1974); K. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 240 ff; B. H. Boruah, *Fiction and Emotion; a Study in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 64–74); and N. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (London, 1990), pp. 60–88).
11. J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 54 ff.
12. On this see S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th edn (London, 1911), pp. 124 ff., who follows Teichmüller, *Aristotelisches Forschungen*, Vol. II (Halle, 1869, repr. Aalen, 1964), pp. 145–154.
13. "In tunes themselves there are *mimemata* of types of character, and this is evident, for right away there are different natural harmonies, so that listeners are affected in

- different ways . . ." (*Politics* 134a38 ff., cf. *Problemata* 919b26). The idea that music can serve in the mimesis of character is at least as old as Plato (e.g. at *Republic* 399a ff., *Laws* 812c).
14. *Problemata* 919b26 ff. and 920a3 ff. For the link between motion and emotion, see *De Anima* 403a16.
 15. I am indebted to Victor Caston, who helped me reach my understanding of this passage.
 16. *Poetics* 1340a32 ff., cf. *Poetics* 4 and *Problemata* 920a3 ff.; the related passage, 919b26 ff., seems to give more scope to painting, however, as does *Poetics* 1450a27.
 17. "Impressions and percussions and ideas cause alterations, for perceptions are really a kind of immediate alteration, and having impressions or ideas has the effect of the things themselves. For in a certain way the form in our ideas of something warm or cold or pleasant or fearful turns out to be very like each of these things, which is why we shiver and are afraid when we have only had an idea." (*De Motu* 701b16–22, cf. 702a17–19).
 18. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1114a25–b3; R. J. Hankinson, "Perception and Evaluation: Aristotle on the Moral Imagination," *Dialogue* XXIX (1990) 60.