1-7-1989

Organic Models in the Poetics

David Gallop
Trent University, dgallop2@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp

Part of the Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons, Ancient Philosophy Commons, and the History of Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
https://orb.binghamton.edu/sagp/160

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter by an authorized administrator of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.
According to Aristotle, art (technē) imitates nature. This celebrated doctrine is not limited to what we call the 'fine arts', or to works of 'art' in any narrow modern sense; and it does not mean that such art-works copy things in the natural order. It means, more generally, that craftsmen adopt means to produce ends; and that in doing so, they follow a pattern found throughout organic nature. The crafts, in their respective domains, do what nature does everywhere. This parallel often provides Aristotle with analogies from the crafts to illuminate the workings of nature.

The Poetics is uniquely interesting in that it shows his mind moving, as it were, in the opposite direction. To illuminate a particular craft, that of the poet, he sometimes uses analogies from organic nature. In this paper I explore these analogies for the light they throw upon his conception of the poet's work, and especially upon his defence of epic and drama against the assaults of Plato.

Aristotle's use of zoological models is not, of course, new. Organic thinking pervades Greek philosophy from its earliest stages, and is especially common in Plato. But in Aristotle it assumes a distinctive form. He repeatedly draws ideas from his own arsenal of biological concepts and applies them in characteristic fashion to a variety of philosophical issues. Today, when the biological framework of his thinking has been widely appreciated in other areas, I hope that its bearing upon his literary theory will repay a fresh look.
By 'zoological' models I shall mean comparisons of poetic works not only with animals but also with likenesses of animals. zōion can mean 'picture' as well as 'animal'; and zōgraphia for painting embodies a connection between that art and its living subjects that is absent from our words 'painting', 'picture', or 'portrait'. Just as a picture commonly depicted a live subject, so Aristotle could naturally think of the subject-matter represented by poetry as analogous to a living thing. He could also think of the different types of poetic product as akin to living species, and as needing to be methodically classified, if they were to be scientifically understood.

This is apparent in the very first sentence of the Poetics (47a8-13), where Aristotle approaches poetry, as Northrop Frye has said,

as a biologist would approach a system of organisms, picking out its genera and species, formulating the broad laws of literary experience, and in short writing as though he believed that there is a totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry which is not poetry itself or the experience of it, but poetics.

But here the title Poetics (literally, 'On poetic [craft]'), like our own word 'poetry', is liable to mislead us. These words derive from poiēsis which meant, quite generally, 'making'. Plato had noticed (Symposium 205d-e) the peculiar narrowing of usage that restricted this word to the making of metrical verses. Carpenters and blacksmiths are not 'poets' in this sense, even though they are as 'poetic' in the original broad sense as any wordsmith. But in Aristotle's hands the word poiēsis, especially as used in conjunction with mimēsis, undergoes a further shift, in which, although still limited to verbal 'making', it is sharply
dissociated from the use of metre.

This shift is of fundamental importance. If metre is made a defining property of 'poetry', then Plato's Phaedrus or the Book of Revelation, for all the beauty of their language, would no more count as 'poetry' than the novels of Agatha Christie or the Canadian Constitution; whereas most of Hamlet and all of Paradise Lost would qualify as 'poetry', but so equally would the crudest limerick on a washroom wall. In combating this view of poïësis, Aristotle makes a momentous point. He says that Empedocles, though he used the same metre as Homer, should be called a 'natural philosopher' (phusiologos) rather than a 'poet'(47b17-20). And the works of Herodotus would not cease to be 'history of a sort' (historia tis) even if they were put into metrical verse (51b2-4). Empedocles wrote an account of the physical world, and therefore was primarily what we should call a natural scientist. Herodotus, who recorded the struggle between the Greeks and Persians, was what we should call an historian. On the other hand, Aristotle notices (47b9-13), there is no single word for what Plato's dialogues have in common with the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus, realistic sketches dramatizing the events of everyday life.

Aristotle is here remarking the lack of a word covering representational making (47b15), whether in verse or in prose. What made Homer or Plato 'poetic' in this sense was not the fact that they were making something in metre, but that they were making something up. Plato was not constrained by facts about real-life conversations of the historic Socrates. Homer was not constrained by facts about the Trojan Wars as Herodotus was constrained by
facts about the Persian Wars. When Homer and Plato produced their works, they invented conversations and incidents. They used their imaginations. In a word, they composed fiction.

That is what the Poetics is primarily about. It deals with those verbal products in which we invent, feign, or make up things that claim no fidelity to fact. These products can be made well or badly, but they are so not by virtue of being true or false to historical or scientific fact, but by virtue of quite different criteria, which Aristotle makes it his main business to explore. Thus, what he says, though mostly stemming from two verse genres, epic and tragedy, has a far wider relevance. Much of it applies to plays, stories, novels, and fiction in general. And the central idea in his defence of poiēsis was that Plato had radically misrepresented the nature and purpose of fiction. In broad outline that response will be familiar enough, but I shall try to bring some of its detail into sharper focus.

Plato’s charges against the representational poet may be briefly recalled from their famous formulation in Republic X. First, the tragedian and all other representers are ‘third from the king and the truth’ (597e6-8): the poet has only a tenuous grasp of reality or truth. Second, the poet appeals to an inferior side of our nature, to emotions that should not be indulged but held firmly under control. The emotional release afforded by representational poetry is injurious, because it weakens our ability to manage our emotions in the stresses of real life (Republic 604c-d).
Two points in this attack receive special emphasis, both made through analogies between poetry and painting. First, the poet is reproached for using alluring language: just as painters rely on colour and shape, so poets rely upon metre and melody. The appeal of both is spurious, the former beguiling us with shapes and colours, the latter with words and music, into thinking that they know what they are talking about (601a-b).

Secondly, the painter represents things in the world of sensible particulars, ordinary beds and tables, and the carpenters that make them (598a-c). Likewise, the poet represents particular battles and the generals that fight them. Such objects or events are the stuff of ordinary human experience, not the metaphysical realities or universal truths that can be grasped, in abstraction from their particular instances, only by a philosopher. So poets have no genuine knowledge, but only the most superficial grasp of the realities they purport to depict.

Aristotle responds to both those points. The first, he thinks, mistakes what is peripheral for what is essential to poetry. Metrical or lyrical language merely 'garnishes' the poet's work (49b28), but forms no essential part of it. To locate the pleasure of tragedy in its use of language is to miss what Aristotle calls its 'proper' pleasure, i.e. that which derives from its distinctive function. Lyric poetry, though said to be 'the most important of garnishings' (50b16), is peripheral. The same goes for spectacle (opsis), which Aristotle says is 'emotionally powerful but is the least integral of all to the poet's art' (50b16-18).
This last point is made several times, by emphasizing that tragic drama can achieve its impact even without theatrical performance or actors (53b1-7, cf. 50b18-20, 62a11-13, a17-18): it merely needs to be heard. Aristotle thinks of plays being read, as epics were recited, aloud. This confirms the view of poïësis taken above. For if it is essentially what we call 'fiction', then indeed its central appeal does not depend upon metrical or lyrical language, nor does it require theatrical performance. And for us, even if not for the ancients, the pleasure of fiction can be obtained from reading prose narrative or drama alone in silence.

The answer to Plato's second point is contained in Aristotle's famous contrast between 'poetry' and history. This turns upon a distinction between events which have occurred (ta genomena, 51a35-36, b4) and

the kind of events which could occur, and are possible by the standards of probability or necessity. (51a36-38, b5).

The former are the domain of the historian, the latter of the poet. Aristotle continues:

It is for this reason that poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. A 'universal' comprises the kind of speech or action which belongs by probability or necessity to a certain kind of character. (51b5-9)

The distinctions drawn here are not, Aristotle proceeds to argue (51b29-32), invalidated by the fact that dramatists often use actual events and real individuals for their subjects. Historic facts may serve the poetic purpose as well as purely imaginary ones. The depiction of 'the kind of events which could occur' can be achieved as well by the appropriate treatment of real events as
by inventing fictitious ones. Thus Plato's charge that the poet represents mere particulars misses its target, even in those cases where the events dramatized actually took place.

This passage, and a later one (59a17-29), which draws some further contrasts between the poet and the historian, have often been criticized for their primitive view of history. Much of the criticism is well-founded, and there is no point in trying to defend Aristotle against all that may be urged against him. But he can still be said to have put his finger on the fundamental difference between history and fiction. The historian's task is to discover and narrate the course of particular events. This task functions as an overriding constraint. It dictates, for example, that the temporal order of events not be altered; that significant events not be omitted from the narrative; that events which are not known to have happened, or are known not to have happened, not be invented; and that statements based upon firm evidence should be distinguished from speculation or gossip.

No such constraints limit the writer of fiction. Even in a play based on real events, fidelity to fact is not of primary importance, though we may prefer the historical record to be respected where it is known for certain. Where the facts are not known, story-tellers are free to invent, supplement, order events, introduce imaginary characters or episodes, to suit their purposes. And in pure fiction, they are free to do whatever they please. They can use events and characters in their stories to exhibit whatever general truths about human behaviour they wish to illustrate. The exhibition of such truths is, moreover, the dynamo that powers
their narrative. Here, they say, is a certain sort of person placed in a certain sort of situation, and this will show you the kind of thing that is done or experienced by such people when they are placed in such situations (51b8-10).

This is the sense in which \textit{poiēsis} is 'more philosophical' history. Historians are not committed \textit{ex officio} to exhibiting general truths about human life. Their central task as historians is simply to record events as they have grounds for believing them to have occurred. They are not entitled to trim, adjust, distort or supplement them, in order to support a generalization or point a moral, or to make the story more interesting.  

Historians are limited, then, by the facts about Alcibiades, whatever those facts were. Their primary purpose is, to that extent, particular, not general. Since they are in no position to generalize until they have established the facts, universals cannot be their starting point. Story-tellers, by contrast, \textit{start} from general truths to which they are independently committed, and aim to exhibit those truths to their audience or readers. That is why Aristotle says (51b9-10): 'this is what \textit{poiēsis} aims at, assigning names'. He means that it has a generalizing aim, \textit{despite} assigning names to the characters, or perhaps that it assigns names at a \textit{later} stage of composition.  

The fiction-writer has in mind, at least initially, not individuals but character-types, which the characters are chosen to exemplify. So indeed fiction-writers have often conceived of their task. It is what Aristotle saw as their task, and what he thought that Plato had disastrously ignored, when he damned the poet as 'third from the king and the truth'. 
So much for some highlights of Aristotle's response to Plato. It will now be profitable to review some 'zoological' texts.

In his analysis of the 'qualitative parts'\textsuperscript{12} of tragedy (ch 6), Aristotle places enormous stress upon the factor of plot-structure (muthos), which he calls 'the first principle (archē) and, so to speak, the soul (psuchē) of tragedy' (50a38-39). We should read the organic metaphor here in the light of Aristotle's mature philosophy of mind. The psuchē is the 'form' of the living body. It is the distinctive set of capacities in virtue of which an organism is a creature of whatever kind it is. Moreover, it is the attainment of those capacities in the adult member of any species that is the ultimate explanation for its physical structure, for the organs it develops, and for every stage in its growth. Hence, its 'soul' is the ultimate source of every feature that it possesses, which is why Aristotle here conjoins psuchē with archē.

This conception of the soul finds a clear analogue in tragic plot. The plot is what determines everything that happens in a play, including everything that the characters say and do. It shapes the entire action from start to finish, just as the capacities that a living animal must have, if it is to be whatever kind of creature it is, determine its physical make-up and direct each stage of its growth from conception to maturity.

The plot, then, determines the unfolding of the action, much as the soul determines the course of an animal's growth. It functions, in Aristotelian terms, as a 'final cause', a goal in the dramatist's design. Thus 'the events and the plot-structure' are called 'the goal' (telos) of tragedy; and the goal is said to be
'what matters most of all' (50a22-23, cf. 50b22-23). telos here does not mean the terminus of the play's action, but is applied to the whole nexus of events in which the tragedy consists.

That nexus must, however, have an ending, a single final outcome, which the events dramatized conspire to bring about. And this outcome will necessarily affect the dramatist's structuring of the events that produce it. For they will be placed where they are, so that they may bring about whatever ending the plot dictates, e.g. the downfall of Oedipus through the discovery of his own guilt. The play must unfold so as to lead intelligibly to that final outcome. The earlier events must be presented so that they appear to necessitate, or at least render probable, the later ones. But in terms of plot construction, the shoe is on the other foot: it is the final outcome that may be said to necessitate the events that bring it about.

Thus, governing the composition of a play there is something analogous to what Aristotle elsewhere (Phys. II.9, PA 639b24-640a11, 642a1-642b4) calls 'hypothetical necessity', which controls or directs the development of an animal. If that is how things are finally going to turn out, then this is what has to happen earlier to secure that result. A must happen, so that B may follow. C must say D so that E will believe F about G, and will therefore commit H, which will lead I to tell J that K has said L. This will ensure that M does N to O, in order that P may do Q to R. And thus S will ask T to say U to V, so that W may persuade X to get Y to kill Z!

In securing the final outcome there is a place in drama, as in organic growth, for the operation of likelihood or necessity,
for connections that show the sorts of causal relations that experience would lead us to expect. The impression must be given that later events are the necessary or likely outcome of earlier ones, since a plot will be plausible (pithanon, 51b16, 55a30, cf. 60a27-b1) only if it reflects an order of experience that is intelligible to us. But like animal development, dramatic structure is controlled essentially 'from the end', and therefore it is the ending to which we must ultimately look, if we wish to understand the construction of a play.

In this way we may understand Aristotle's stress upon the importance of familiar sorts of necessary or probable connection between the events of the play, even where the plot takes a surprising turn (52a1-11, cf. 52a18-21). What is contrary to our normal expectations, what does not form part of a coherent sequence of events, such as unlikely coincidence or the use of deus ex machina (54b1-2), will seem artificially contrived, demanded by the requirements of the plot, rather than a credible representation of human life and deliberately chosen action. To that extent the play will fail of its purpose, to enlighten its audience by exhibiting universal truths about human character and conduct.

In ch 7 Aristotle begins to lay down the principles of plot construction. He starts by resuming from 49b24-25 his earlier formal definition of tragedy as 'a representation of an action which is complete (teleias), whole (holēs) and of a certain magnitude' (50b23-25).

Teleios means 'mature', 'fully developed'. The word suggests that the action represented by the play must possess the wholeness
of a full-grown animal. 'Whole', which may be meant to explicate *teleics* in this way, is itself explicated as 'possessing a beginning, middle and end', notions that are immediately defined in terms of necessary or likely causal relations within a temporally ordered series of events (50b27-31). The plot must embody these relations so that the events of the play will be connected in the way we have just considered.

What exactly does Aristotle mean here by 'beginning, middle and end'? Does he think of the plot-structure in terms of animal morphology, comparing it with the beginning, middle parts and extremities of an animal's body? Or does he think of it by analogy with the beginning, middle and ending of an animal's life, i.e. its generation, middle life, and death? On the former interpretation, the thought lies close to that of Plato's *Phaedrus* (264c), where Socrates says that a speech

ought to be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own, not headless or footless, but having middle parts and extremities properly in keeping with each other, and with the whole.

This morphological comparison might not, at first sight, seem entirely apt for Aristotle's purpose. For an animal's 'beginning, middle and end' are not, if we take them in this way, related in a manner wholly analogous to the phases of a play's action. The parts of an animal are not temporally ordered and so do not exhibit the causal connection that links successive phases of dramatic action. They do not constitute 'beginning, middle and end', as Aristotle expressly defines them here, in terms of a temporal series. And *teleutē*, used (50b26-27, b29) for the 'ending' of the action represented by the play, might seem more closely analogous
to an animal's death than to an extremity of its body.

More to the point, therefore, might seem a comparison between the phases of the action and the stages of an animal's life, its generation, middle life, and death. Analogously, the action represented by a play must have a birth in time. True, it does not start ex nihilo and its antecedents must be revealed in the play if we are to understand it at all. But the beginning must be a fresh point of departure. Similarly, it has a continuous history, from conception onwards, like an animal, each phase being linked with what precedes and follows it, until the ending or 'death' with which it finishes. Any later consequences of the action, though they may be prefigured in the play, lie outside the action itself, like the descendants of an animal. If we are to understand the zoological model in this 'temporal' sense, then the action of a tragedy will be 'complete' or 'whole', not as an animal is 'fully developed' at maturity, but as it is 'finished' at death.

This interpretation of the model, however, must be wrong. For in a counterpart passage about epic in ch 23 (59a17-21), we find the same comparison used morphologically:

As for the narrative art of mimesis in spoken verse, it is evident that its plot-structures should have a dramatic coherence, just as in tragedy, and that they should concern an action which is unitary and complete (with beginning, middle (mesa) and end (telos)), so that, as with a living creature, the single and entire structure may yield the pleasure which belongs to it.

Here Aristotle uses the plural mesa for 'middle', clearly meaning (like Socrates in the Phaedrus) the middle parts of an animal's body; and telos for 'end', i.e. 'extremity', replaces teleutê. Moreover, the point is made that the epic must, like an animal,
produce its 'proper pleasure' through being 'one, whole' (59a20). But this must refer to the unity and wholeness of an animal viewed at a given time, rather than the unity and wholeness possessed by an animal's entire life-span. For Aristotle evidently intends a comparison between the pleasure proper to observation of a 'complete' animal and the pleasure proper to the appreciation of epic. Yet no distinctive pleasure is to be gained from surveying an animal's entire life-span; whereas there is a distinctive pleasure to be derived from synchronic observation of a unitary, whole animal. The source of this pleasure throws much light upon the pleasure proper to epic and tragedy, as we shall shortly see.

At 50b34-51a6 Aristotle considers the magnitude (megethos) of the action to be represented:

Moreover, any beautiful object, whether a living creature or any other structure of parts, must possess not only ordered arrangement but also an appropriate scale (megethos) (for beauty is grounded in both size and order). A creature could not be beautiful if it is either too small — for perception of it is practically instantaneous and so cannot be experienced — or too great, for contemplation of it cannot be a single experience, and it is not possible to derive a sense of unity and wholeness from our perception of it (imagine an animal a thousand miles long). Just, therefore, as a beautiful body or creature must have some size, but one which allows it to be perceived all together (eusunopton), so plot structures should be of a length which can be easily held in the memory (eumnēmeuton).

Here we need to understand the point of comparing our experience of the action represented by a tragedy with the viewing of a tiny or an enormous animal. We should first notice four occurrences in 50b38-51a2 of the rich words theōría and theōrein. They suggest not just the plain 'seeing' of an animal, or merely 'looking at
The study of an infinitesimally small animal is said to be 'confused' (sugcheitai), because the creature is too tiny for its internal complexity to be discerned. Without a microscope, which Aristotle of course lacked, one could not scrutinize it to see how its parts were structured, and how they functioned for the good of the whole. It would therefore lack any recognizable beauty. We could admire neither the individual animal nor its species.

Conversely, an animal one thousand miles long, though its parts could be inspected piece-meal over a long time, could not be observed as a whole simultaneously from any single viewpoint. An overview or conspectus of it would be impossible; and by the time one had examined every part, all sense of its unity and wholeness would be lost. Consequently, one could not understand how its parts were interrelated, or how they worked to enable it to survive and to flourish, in the manner proper to its species.

For Aristotle, however, synoptic viewing of the parts in relation to the whole, and of the whole as consisting of interrelated parts, is essential if we wish to understand a creature and admire its species. That is why a fine animal has to be of a certain magnitude. Likewise with our appreciation of a play. It requires close study of each of its 'parts', analogous to the study of an animal's anatomy. In the former case, when we see the end to which something is a means, we admire the cunning of the artist. In the latter case we admire the cunning of nature. But in both cases, what is fundamental to our appreciation is a grasp of the contribution made by each element to a properly integrated,
functioning whole. This implication of the analogy can be best understood from Aristotle's zoological writings, especially the Parts of Animals, where functional interdependence is illustrated in detail for a vast number of bodily organs, themselves often possessing huge internal complexity.

Just as, in the composition of an animal, 'nature makes nothing in vain', so each element in a well-constructed plot should be placed where it is for good and sufficient reason. For, as Aristotle will say in ch 8, when discussing the unity that should characterize the action represented by a tragedy,

... the plot structure, as the mimesis of action, should be a representation of a unitary and complete action; and its parts, consisting of the events, should be so constructed that the displacement or removal of any one of them will disturb and disjoint the work's wholeness. For anything whose presence or absence has no clear effect cannot be counted an integral part of the whole (51a31-35).

Any item that is genuinely part of an organic whole must be essential to it, or it will be a mere accretion. Similarly, every incident in a plot should 'have a clear effect' (poiei epidelon, 51a35), a discernible bearing upon what happens elsewhere in the action, and thus, ultimately, upon the entire play. Whatever is integral to the play's action must contribute to the whole nexus of events in which its plot consists. Our grasp of the whole and our understanding of the parts are thus interrelated, each complementing the other. We must therefore not only study each part in detail but also gain a conspectus of the whole play.

Just as a perceptible structure is needed for a fine animal, to determine an appropriate size for it, so likewise for the action represented by a tragic plot. Just as the animal must have a size
enabling it to be viewed all together as a whole, so the plot must
have such a length as can be readily remembered (51a4-6). By this
Aristotle means, I suggest, not that we must be able to remember
earlier stages of the plot while the later ones are still unfolding
before us in the theatre; but that after we have seen or read the
play, we must be able to recall the action as a whole, so that we
may discern and ponder the structural connections through which the
plot works. We must retain in the memory a conspectus of the plot
as representing a certain nexus of events. For only if we
recognize its structure as representing that nexus, can we admire
the whole play for its illumination of the interplay between
character and thought, motivation and action in real life. That is
why a synoptic overview of the plot is crucial for our learning
from the play, and hence for its proper magnitude.

If that interpretation is correct, it has an important bearing
upon what Aristotle means by the pleasure that is 'proper' to
tragedy (53b11). That pleasure is obtained not solely, or even
primarily, while we are watching the play, but rather in subsequent
reflection upon it. For if tragedy's proper pleasure depends upon
seeing the parts in relation to the whole, it will not be available
to any viewer who has not yet gained a conspectus of the whole.
That conspectus is not possible for an audience who are still
watching or hearing the play for the first time, especially for the
majority who have no prior knowledge of the plot. The pleasure of
pondering the import of a story in its entirety will not felt by
first-time viewers or hearers till they have finished it. And even
those who know the story, though they may recognize the ending as
foreshadowed in earlier episodes, will hardly be able to achieve a conspectus of the play while they are engrossed in the detail of any particular incident. The pleasure must come, to an significant extent, only after watching or reading.

That is why Aristotle, when giving practical guidance as to a desirable length for the action of a play, can prescind (51a6-7) from the dictates of competitive performance at drama festivals (tous agōnas) and the limits of an audience's attention (tēn aisthēsin), discounting these as irrelevant to the dramatist's craft as such. The dramatist need not be specially exercised about the length or conditions of performance. What matters is that the action represented can be easily remembered. It should be as large as is consistent with its being 'visible all together' (sundēlos, 51a10-11). The same notion of conspectus reappears later (59b19-20, cf. eusunoptos at 59a33) in the discussion of epic, where it is required that the beginning and the end be perceivable at one view (sunorasthai). The entire plot of the Odyssey can be summarized in a single 43-word sentence (55b17-23). But one cannot achieve such an overview unless and until one has finished reading or hearing the poem.

We must now notice a crucial feature of the pleasure gained from retrospect upon an entire play. This pleasure is distinguishable from the responses of pity or fear felt while we are in the theatre or while the play is being read. It is a pleasure of the intellect, not a frisson, a harrowing, stirring or venting of the emotions, even though those experiences may contain their own kinds of pleasure. It is a reflective, scientific,
philosophical, dispassionate pleasure, since it attends upon our learning or understanding the 'universals' about human action and suffering that the work has portrayed.

That this is the sort of pleasure that Aristotle has in mind as 'proper' to 'poetry' is evidenced, I believe, by a notorious passage in ch 4, to which we should now look back.

At 48b4-19 'poetic' representation is traced to two natural and distinctively human instincts: (a) to represent (b5-8); and (b) to enjoy representations made by others (b8-9). In connection with (b), Aristotle distinguishes between (i) pleasure due to learning from certain likenesses qua representations of a familiar original (b15-17), and (ii) pleasure due to other aspects, such as the workmanship or colour (b17-19). The former sort of pleasure is said to come about, because it happens that, in viewing, they come to understand and infer what each thing [is], e.g. that this [person is] that one'.

Thus, the enjoyment of looking at the likenesses is bound up with 'understanding' and 'inferring'; and these take place 'in viewing'. But how do the viewers 'understand' or 'infer what each thing is'? What exactly is understood or inferred from what about what? How does 'viewing' enable them to understand? And how are we to understand the schematic example, 'that this [person is] that one'?

The demonstrative pronouns (houtos ekeinos), in the received text just translated, are masculine. So it is usually assumed that Aristotle is talking about the pleasure of recognizing a picture as a likeness of a particular human subject: 'that [portrait] is [a likeness of] so-and-so'. But what do we 'understand' or 'learn' from this? As Lucas remarks (72, on 48b13), 'when we have learnt
what already familiar thing a picture represents we have not learnt much'. Moreover, there need not be any conscious 'inference' in such recognition. When we can simply see straight off whom a portrait depicts, there need be no particular feature from which its subject is consciously inferred, nothing that it would be natural to call an 'inference' (συλλογισμός) at all. Furthermore, it is hard, on this interpretation, to see why Aristotle should associate the relevant pleasure preeminently with philosophers (48b13), even though he does (somewhat grudgingly) extend the capacity for learning to others. He gives a prominence to philosophical pleasure in understanding which would seem out of place, if he were thinking merely of the delight that anyone may feel in recognizing the subject of a likeness. What he must have in mind, surely, is a pleasure which, although universally shared, is taken especially in the sort of 'viewing' or 'observing' (θεωρεῖν, 48b11, b16) in which philosophers engage more than most people. What can this pleasure be?

Fortunately, two other passages contain related lines of thought. The first occurs in the Rhetoric (1371b4-9):

Again, since learning and wondering are pleasant, it follows that such things as acts of representation must be pleasant - for instance painting, sculpture, poetic composition - and every product of skilful representation; this latter even if the object represented is not pleasant: for it is not the object itself which here gives delight; but there is an inference that this is that (αλλά συλλογισμὸς esti hoti touto ekeino), with the result that one learns something (Oxford trans, rev. Barnes).

Here we find the same emphasis upon learning or understanding, the same connection of learning with inference, and a similar schematic example to illustrate the observation that even where the
represented object is not pleasant, the representation will still give pleasure because it results in learning. But there is one noteworthy difference between this text and the Poetics one. The demonstrative pronouns here are neuter, so that Aristotle need not be thinking, at least primarily, and perhaps not at all, of human examples. We shall return to this point shortly.

Our second passage comes from the Parts of Animals (645a7-17):

For even in animals that give no pleasure as regards sense-perception (pros aisthēsin), nevertheless in terms of scientific study (pros theorian) nature who fashioned them provides unbounded pleasure for those who can recognize causes (aitiai) and are by nature philosophers. Indeed, it would be paradoxical and illogical, if when studying their likenesses we enjoy doing so because we are at the same time studying the skill that fashioned those likenesses, such as painting and sculpture, yet we do not love still more the study of the originals constituted by nature, at least when we can discern their causes (trans. Balme).

Here we have a contrast between failure to please the senses and boundless pleasure given to the intellect through scientific study. And Aristotle argues that the intellectual pleasure of studying even inherently unpleasant objects can compensate for their repugnance to the senses.

What is notable in this text is the extent to which the pleasure afforded by nature's products comes from recognition of their causes, 'for those who can recognize causes and are by nature philosophers' (645a10), and 'at least when we can discern causes' (a15). Our marvel at nature's skill depends upon our understanding the ends for which she makes her products, and the ingenuity with which their parts are adapted to those ends. The pleasure comes from grasping the 'final cause', i.e. understanding each part of the creature in the light of its function, which is the study upon
which Aristotle is just embarking in these lectures on animal parts (639a14-16, cf. 646a8-646b27).

If his analogical argument is to work here, the same must hold for our admiration of the skill with which a representation is crafted. We admire each element in the likeness, when we understand its final cause, its role in the larger whole to which it belongs. This requires us to see what item in the original it was designed to capture, and thus how it contributes to our detailed understanding of a real living thing. Hence we can learn from the likeness 'what each thing is'. By noting, for example, that that is the kidney or the bladder, we can learn what each of those organs is. In this way we can learn about inherently repulsive objects from 'those likenesses of them that have been executed with very great precision' 30, which are the ones that Aristotle says we enjoy viewing. His mention of 'precision' is particularly significant, for it is likenesses fashioned in precise detail that can teach us, often better than any real thing, just how the parts of an animal, or of each of its organs, are structured and interrelated, and thus how they enable the organ or the animal as a whole to function. That, indeed, is the purpose of a laboratory model or diagram such as Aristotle's lecture-room must have contained. 31 And the pleasure taken in studying such likenesses comes from what the Rhetoric calls 'learning and wondering', i.e. from gratifying our curiosity and from admiring nature's cunning.

An excellent example occurs in the History of Animals (510a30-34), where Aristotle is describing the testicles of viviparous footed animals, and explaining the complex ductwork that links them
with the aorta, the kidneys, the bladder and the penis:

all this may be studied by the light of the accompanying diagram (τὲς ὑπογραφὲς τῆςδε) wherein the letter A marks the starting point of the ducts that extend from the aorta; the letters KK mark the heads of the testicles and the ducts descending to them; the ducts extending from these along the testicles are marked ΔΔ; the ducts turning back, in which is the white fluid, are marked ΒΒ; the penis Δ; the bladder E; and the testicles ΨΨ (Oxford trans. rev. Barnes).

Students at this lecture are indeed 'coming to understand, and inferring what each thing is', for they are learning, by studying 'this diagram here', exactly how the genital apparatus of these animals is structured. To enjoy learning this from the diagram, they must already be able to recognize the testicles as such (and therefore must have seen such organs before). But the diagram enables them also to figure out how they are connected with other organs, how the seminal fluid is stored in them, and how the whole reproductive system works. In this way a visual likeness can enable the student to move beyond the mere ability to recognize certain organs ('those are testicles'), to a detailed understanding of what job they do and how they do it ('so that is what those things are!'). This is notably the case when the diagram makes visible an internal or 'deep' structure that escapes superficial observation, and can be discovered only by dissection, which has been mentioned just above (509b23).

If this is the class-room situation presupposed in our texts, we may understand the neuter demonstratives of the Rhetoric passage as identifying items in a diagram or replica with their counterparts in a real animal, perhaps a cadaver on the dissecting table. The words 'this is that' are accompanied by the lecturer's gestures towards an element in the likeness and its counterpart in
the real thing. We understand and infer 'what each thing is', when we grasp not only what each item in the figure represents but also what the real thing represented is for. The understanding and inferring are not merely a matter of correctly deducing which real item is represented by the likeness, but also of finding out something about the real item itself. 'Learning' from a representation depends crucially upon coming to see what job the represented item does and how it does it. Thus the 'understanding and inferring' that are made possible by the representation of even inherently disgusting objects are connected with an improved understanding of the natural order. Which is precisely the claim we have seen Aristotle making for epic and dramatic fiction with respect to human life and action.

If this is correct, it points to a suggestive and fruitful analogy in Aristotle's mind between learning from epic or tragedy and learning from the detailed study of nature. In both there is a tension between sensory or emotional revulsion and intellectual fascination; and in both cases the latter compensates abundantly for the former. Especially notable in this connection is the reference at Poetics 48b12 to corpses. These, we remember, are strewn all over the Homeric epics; and in tragedy, though deaths do not usually occur on the stage, they are often reported in gross physical detail. Pain and suffering, more broadly, are endemic in both genres; and in one passage (52b10-13) Aristotle treats suffering (pathos), exemplified by 'visible deaths, torments, woundings, and other things of the same kind', as a vital ingredient in tragic plot, even though he does not regard all such
suffering as appropriately 'pitiful' for tragedy (53b15-18).

The visual horrors that he is thinking of at Rhetoric 1371b4-9 and Poetics 48b10-12 do not seem specially likely to be the corpses that were occasionally represented in ancient paintings or sculptures. They are much more likely to be cadavers introduced in his own lecture-room, and used for instruction or research. These would very naturally prompt references during a lecture to 'things which in themselves we see with pain', and would provide handy analogues for the painful subject-matter of epic and drama. In viewing both sets of objects, we gain pleasure not from the grisly realities themselves, but from learning, through their representations, about the relevant living species.

Plato, we may recall, had viewed the horrors of drama as pandering to a morbid side of our nature. To illustrate one sort of psychological conflict, he had mentioned a certain Leontius (Republic 439e-440a), who gratified a ghoulish urge to peek at the corpses of some executed criminals, ashamed though he was of wanting to feast his eyes on the gruesome sight. The dramatist, in Plato's view of him, caters for just such a prurient impulse.

Aristotle's remarks about the representation of inherently painful things, such as base animals and cadavers, can be read as a response to this. What we enjoy in poetic fiction is not the horrible thing itself, but coming to understand that horror, learning about its genesis in human motivation and feeling, from the way the author has depicted the doings and sufferings of his characters. That is why Aristotle scornfully dismisses as 'quite outside the sphere of tragedy' (53b8-10) those who strive for
sensational effects by, spectacular or lavish staging. The mere relish of atrocity forms no part of the pleasure that is 'proper' to tragedy. If Aristotle lived in our time, he would pass similar judgment upon merchants of pain and cruelty in the film industry. But he would also contend that the fictional exploration of human suffering in film or theatre need no more be morbid than the clinical study of animal pathology need be pathological.

We can now return to the text of Poetics 48b17. If it contains the same thought as the parallel passages just discussed, we shall do well, with some critics, to read the demonstratives at 48b17 as neuter, an easy emendation. If we accept this change, what Aristotle has in mind is not the identification of the subject of a human likeness ('that is so-and-so'), but the recognition of each element within a complex diagram or replica as representing a corresponding part of a living thing ('that is the kidney'); and the learning through inference of general truths about living things of the relevant type ('what the kidney is', i.e. what it is for and how it works). This reading makes the passage prefigure the sort of dispassionate learning of universals from tragedy and epic that we have distilled from later texts.

It also frees Aristotle from a common suspicion of aesthetic naiveté. He says that a representation will not produce pleasure qua representation, 'if one happens to have no previous familiarity with the sight' (48b17-18). This has suggested to many readers that the pleasure basic to aesthetic response lay, for him, merely in seeing a picture's resemblance to a familiar original. To that view it may, of course, be objected that one may derive greater
pleasure, and a more valuable aesthetic experience, from a Ver Meer portrait of some wholly unknown person, than from recognizing a snapshot of one’s mother-in-law. But on our account of the passage, Aristotle does not mean that the pleasure produced by a likeness derives from seeing its resemblance to a familiar human individual; or that we can judge a portrait aesthetically only in terms of its likeness to someone we already know. For our interest in the likeness is not limited to mere recognition of the particular item represented. Rather, our pleasure comes from learning general truths about a certain sort of subject from parts or aspects of that subject upon which the likeness has focused our attention. We can gain pleasure from studying the likeness for what it can teach us, in general, about its counterparts in real life. It thus has the kind of instructive realism that is to be found in epic or drama. For much in these, as in other modes of fiction, strikes us as true to our own prior experience of human behaviour; and we learn from them with enjoyment because they recover for us what was implicit in that experience and enable us to view it with a deepened understanding. If some such perspective upon fiction is implicit in Aristotle’s visual example at 48b15-19, then the insights of ch 9 regarding its generalizing aim are already anticipated in ch 4.

* 

Several important aspects of Aristotle’s literary theory have been passed over in this paper. Almost nothing has been said of the emotional impact of fiction, or its contribution to the development of moral sensibility. The whole problem of katharsis, which no
overall interpretation of the *Poetics* can ignore, has been left aside. There is no space even to raise the key questions here. But perhaps we can learn something from the texts discussed above, without becoming entangled in more controversial issues. We have found in those texts a significant analogy between learning from tragedy or epic and the study of organic nature. In the light of that analogy, 'poetry' should be seen not, with Plato, as the arch-enemy of philosophy but rather as its ally. Tragedy and epic can illuminate human life and nature. The understanding to be gained from fiction in general is a rich source of intellectual pleasure, enough to give the Platonist a run for his money, even if it paid no emotional or moral dividends at all.

Aristotle's approach to poetry, in the aspect we have considered, may be broadly dubbed 'intellectualist'. By way of conclusion, and for the contrast it affords with that approach, it may be worth recalling a memorable protest once voiced by Wordsworth against the intellectual study of nature:

> Sweet is the lore that nature brings;  
> Our meddling intellect  
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—  
> We murder to dissect.

Aristotle did not, of course, share Wordsworth's romantic vision of 'nature's lore'. To his eye, our admiration of the 'beauteous forms' of things required the most intense scrutiny of their minute structure. This applied no less to the artefacts called epic and tragedy than to living things. By taking them apart, our intellects need not 'mis-shape their beauteous forms'. The 'anatomy' of criticism is not murder. On the contrary, works of fiction will come fully to life, will do their job for us, only if we will study
them patiently, analyze their detail, ponder the role of each element in the complex whole. It is in that way that a literary work can achieve its full impact, produce its 'proper pleasure'.

In that direction we may still seek a sane rationale for literary criticism. Along the Aristotelian trail we have followed, the paths of the philosopher, the scientist, the fiction-writer, and the critic will all ultimately converge in the human quest for self-understanding. And it may well be in some such way that the 'old quarrel between philosophy and poet-craft' of which Plato once spoke should be finally laid to rest.
NOTES

1. An early version of this paper, entitled 'Organic Models in the Poetics', was presented to the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy at Baltimore on January 7, 1989. I am grateful to the audience for discussion of a pre-circulated draft, and also to participants in philosophy seminars at the University of Western Ontario and Carleton University, where subsequent versions were read.

2. All references to the Poetics are to the Oxford Text of Kassel, with the initial '14' omitted from Bekker page numbers. The translation used for quotations, unless otherwise noted, is from the edition by S. Halliwell (1987). The early versions of this paper were written before I had an opportunity to study that edition or the same author's masterly study of the Poetics (1986). I hope that the present version, though differing from Halliwell at certain points, may serve generally to reinforce his views on the relation between fiction, plot-structure, and 'universals' in Aristotle, especially as expounded on pp 72-73, 98-101, and 105-110 of his 1987 commentary.

3. Besides Phaedrus 264c-d (to be noticed below), most notably in the Timaeus, where the physical world is a cosmic animal, and the Republic, where the polis is continually represented as if it were the painting or statue of a living thing. See my 'Image and Reality in Plato's Republic' passim.

4. The connection is especially well marked at Phaedrus 275d, where
'the offspring of zōgraphia' are said to 'stand like zōnta', but to remain mute if asked a question. They capture the static appearance, but not the powers of speech and movement possessed by live human subjects.

5. **Anatomy of Criticism**, 14. Biological influence upon Aristotle's distinctions among literary genres will not concern us further here, but it is evident in his sketch of their history. Tragedy, he thinks, evolved from earlier poetic forms into its present 'full-grown' state: after 'many changes', it stopped developing 'once it had attained its own nature' (49a15), having acquired 'parts' not found in its predecessors, even in epic (49b16-20).

6. See, especially, the clinching point of Aristotle's argument in ch 9 (51b27-29): 'it is clear, then, from what has been said that the poet should be a maker of plot-structures rather than of verses, in so far as his status as a poet depends on mimesis, and the object of his mimesis is actions'.

7. Following Halliwell, I use 'lyric poetry' to render melopoia (50a10, b16) This may remind us that the scope of Aristotle's main discussion in the *Poetics* is narrower as well as wider than 'poetry' in our sense. Aristotle's almost total neglect of the tragic chorus is connected with his view of poiēsis as fiction. There is no general theory of poetry in the extant *Poetics*. As Halliwell says (1987, 110), '... it is the fictional framework of a poem, not its verbal texture, which marks its poetic nature'. See
also his discussions of Aristotle's neglect of the chorus (1986, ch 8, esp 249-50; 1987, 152-154).

8. See Lucas's notes on 51b2, 51b8, 59a25.

9. For a concise appraisal, see Hubbard, 102, n 1.

10. My Roman history tutor at Oxford, the incomparable C.E. Stevens, used to say that if his own ingenious version of certain episodes in Cicero's political career were accepted, it 'made the history much more piquant'. So indeed it did; but we should bear in mind that 'history' in English contains an ambiguity (not shared by 'poetry') between historical facts and an historian's account of them. 'Piquancy', even when it is apt as a characterization of the former, is a dubious virtue in the latter. Historical facts may be piquant, or they may be dull as ditch-water, but either way the historian's first duty is to ascertain and report them. Dullness is obviously a defect in a play or novel, but in a history need not be a fault of the same magnitude. Good historical narrative, as we tend to think of it, has to be selective, and no less unified, organized, and focused than good fiction. It is also, preferably, no less readable; and the imaginative flair needed to 'make the past live' may be as important as the sober virtues befitting a judicious scholar. But when writers such as Thucydides (whom Aristotle curiously nowhere mentions by name) impart to their narrative the character of an epic or a tragedy, one may argue that their works embody literary values which are external to their
basic task, and which will even be inimical to that task, if they should lead the historian to project a fanciful pattern on to events. Aristotle does not, however, defend his contrast between poetry and history in any such way. His low view of history, particularly of the 'histories' disparaged at 59a21-29, may perhaps be conditioned by that usage of historia in which it meant merely a collection of 'raw data' from which generalizations have not yet been distilled. 'Histories' on that level will be limited to the recording of particular facts, since the general laws through which the facts might be explained or interpreted remain as yet unformulated.

11. Hubbard, Halliwell and Janko take epitithemenē (51b10) as concessive. Lucas (121, on 51b10) plausibly argues for a temporal interpretation, on the basis of the directions for plot construction in ch 17. See, especially, 55b12: 'after this [sc. after mapping out the plot in broad outline], the poet should now supply the names and introduce episodes'.

12. Space limits preclude adequate discussion of the relationship between the 'qualitative' (ch 6) and 'quantitative' (ch 12) parts of tragedy. But the distinction is, I suspect, zoologically based, the 'qualitative' parts being thought of as corresponding to the constituent materials of an animal, and the 'quantitative' to its organs. moria is used at 47a11 for both quantitative and qualitative parts of poetry, and seems interchangeable with mere. also used of both types of 'part' (50a8, 52b14, b25). In the
zoological works, as Peck has noted (Loeb ed. *Parts of Animals*, 28), morion (unlike the English 'parts') covers 'uniform' stuffs (blood, bone, etc) as well as the 'non-uniform' organs made of them. Aristotle could, then, have thought of the 'quantitative' parts of tragedy (*prologos, epeisodion*, etc) as blended together from the 'qualitative' ones in different proportions, just as an animal's organs are variously composed of blood, bone, etc. Strictly, this conception of 'qualitative parts' would not suit the 'part' called *muthos*, to be discussed below. For *muthos*, as 'the soul' of tragedy, is not comparable with any material stuff composing a living thing, but only with its 'form'. But the analogy between plot-structure and 'soul' may not yet have suggested itself to Aristotle when he distinguished broadly between 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' parts.

13. *teleutē*, though commonly meaning 'death', is used for the tail-end of a creature at *PA* 685a1 (cf. *GA* 720b18), and for the end of a bone at *PA* 654b24. At *Metaphys.* 1021b28 Aristotle notes that *teleutē* ('death') is called *telos* ('fulfilment') in a secondary sense, because both are extremes (*eschata*). Here, though *teleutē* means 'death', it shares with *telos* a connection with the idea of 'extremity'.

14. The text at 50b39 is uncertain, and there is reason to suspect *tou anaisthētou chronou*, if this is taken to mean 'time that is imperceptible', or 'an imperceptible instant of time' (Janko), or even 'for perception of it is practically instantaneous'.
Aristotle says elsewhere (De Sensu 448b18, b24-25) that there could be no imperceptible period of time; and one may doubt the explanation of Lucas (113, on 50b38), that Aristotle believed in a connection between the size of an object and the length of time needed to look at it. Seeing an object is, in Aristotelian terms, an 'activity' (energeia), the exercise of a capacity that is as fully realized at any one moment of its use as at any other. In those terms it takes no time at all to see an object, hence no more time to look at an elephant than at a flea. There is much to be said for deleting chronou with Bonitz, or perhaps for emending the text more radically, to read sugcheitai gar hê theôria tou eggus anaisthêtou: 'for the observation of what is nearly imperceptible is confused'. The difficulty with chronou is somewhat lessened, however, if theôria is taken, as I suggest below, to mean 'study'. And the textual uncertainty casts no doubt upon the reason why the viewing of a minute creature is said to be 'confused'. As Lucas (loc cit) says, 'once an object is too small for its parts to be distinguishable, so that their relations cannot be seen, it cannot be beautiful'.

15. Halliwell's version, quoted above, seems to me not to capture the force of either theôria or sugcheitai at 50b38, or of theôrousì and ek tês theôrias at 51a1-2. The sense required in b38 is that what is barely perceptible is too confused to be studied; and in 51a1-2 that unity and wholeness are lost on the observers as a result of their studying, i.e. they can't see the wood for the trees. My argument below turns partly upon understanding theôrein
and theōria as 'studying', but I sometimes speak of 'viewing' or 'observing', in order to avoid prejudging interpretation in translation. See also n 16.

16. Halliwell ('it is not possible to derive a sense of unity and wholeness from our perception of it') misses the suggestion that the viewing process itself actually destroys awareness of unity and wholeness. Janko and others ('its unity and wholeness vanish from the observer's view') make ek tēs theōrias redundant. Else ('so its unity and wholeness are lost') omits the phrase altogether, as does Bywater ('the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder'). Hubbard (101) comes closer to the sense needed: 'since our view of it is not simultaneous, so that we lose the sense of its unity and wholeness as we look it over'; but ek may, I think, have 'causal' rather than (or alongside) 'temporal' force.

17. At De Mem. 449b15-30 Aristotle argues that memory has the past for its object: 'No one would say he was remembering what was present, when it was present'. cf. 451a29-30: 'For a person remembers now what he saw or experienced earlier. He does not now remember what he experiences now'. It follows that we could not be said to 'remember' the plot as a whole while still watching or hearing the play. Aristotle notes at De Mem. 452a2-4 that 'whatever has some order, as things in mathematics do, is easily remembered (eumnēmoneuta)', because of the easy mental passage between successive items. If the same point were applied to a well-ordered dramatic plot, the causal links between its events would help us
to remember the play as a whole. Thus, eumnêmoneuton at Poetics 51a5-6 would refer to our retrospect upon an entire play, rather than to our experience of it while it was still in progress.

18. At 51b19-26 Aristotle notes that although most tragedies of his time were based upon traditional legend, the few that were not so based could please an audience just as much; and that even the traditional stories were familiar only to few of the audience, yet could still please everyone. Lucas (123, on 51b26) has questioned whether the traditional stories were, in fact, 'known only to a minority'. But whether or not Aristotle's premiss is true, the direction of his argument is remarkable: a play could give pleasure, he urges, not in spite of prior knowledge of the story, but in spite of prior ignorance of it. He is not concerned, as a modern critic might be, about prior knowledge 'spoiling it' for the audience or 'giving it away'. His appeal to invented plots (which were common in comedy, 51b12-15), effectively reinforces his contrast between poiēsis and history, which stands out more clearly in pure fiction than in plots based upon legend. For in the latter, especially if legend is not differentiated from historical fact, the fiction writer's aim becomes more readily confused with the historian's. This confusion still bedevils historically based fiction in our own time, as the current furore over Salman Rushdie's novel well illustrates.

19. Aristotle's prescriptions for plot-construction, especially his emphasis upon surprise (chs 9, 11) and denouement (ch 18), seem to cater for an audience ignorant of the story; although even in
Oedipus Rex, which he so greatly admired, these elements are arguably less crucial than in a modern whodunnit (contra A.E. Taylor 111). Agatha Christie's The Mouse-Trap is said to have been ruined for the passenger of a London cab-driver who shouted, as his client walked into the theatre, 'The detective did it!', in revenge for an ungenerous tip. Was Oedipus Rex ever ruined for an audience by telling them that? If so, much irony in the play would have been sadly lost upon them. But whether the story of a play is known in advance or not, the unified structure upon which Aristotle insists can be properly appreciated only in retrospect.

20. Aristotle would not, indeed, deny that a play can, and indeed should, be enjoyed during performance. Elsewhere (NE 1175b12) he notes that it is when we are not greatly enjoying something that we are most readily diverted, remarking that people eat sweets in the theatre when the performance is poor. By implication, they enjoy the play most while thoroughly absorbed in it. Since he argues, in the context of that example, that the pleasure proper to an activity is inseparable from, and enhances, our engagement in it, there must, presumably, be pleasure concurrent with the watching or hearing of a good tragedy well performed. But in chs 13-14, when he discusses plot-structures that will elicit pity and fear, and thereby afford the pleasure 'proper' to tragedy (as distinct from other sorts of pleasure, which need not, or should not, be aimed at, 53b10-11), his preferred structures include the entire dramatic action from start to finish (esp. 52b34-53a2, cf. 51a9-15). And by way of charging certain dramatists with pandering
to audience weakness (53a33-36), he criticizes their endings for giving a pleasure proper to comedy rather than tragedy. This implies, I think, that the pleasure 'proper' to plays in both genres depends crucially upon our response to their final outcome. What happens to the central figure 'in the end' is vital for the total impact of the play. Hence the pleasure taken in an overview of the plot, through appreciating its unity and wholeness, must await a retrospect upon the completed action.

21. For a sequence of actions performed or represented over time, it is arguable that no conspectus will be possible in a single moment. Even a quick retrospect in memory will take some length of time, unless a diachronic series can somehow be synchronically reviewed. But this truism does not invalidate Aristotle's demand for conspectus, or annul the distinction between a plot that can be readily remembered and one that cannot.

22. A speaker at Baltimore helpfully drew attention to Rhetoric 1409a24-b8, which has a similar analogy between visual conspectus and retention in the memory. Aristotle there contrasts two kinds of prose style: 'strung together' (lexis eiromenē) and 'periodic'. The latter is easier to follow, (1) because listeners can anticipate the end of each period while it is still being uttered (like runners who can keep going as long as they see the goal ahead of them); and (2) because each period, once its sense is complete, 'has reached some definite conclusion', and is easily remembered. A period has 'a size that can be seen as a whole' (megathos
eusunopton, b1). It will stay in the memory (eumnēmoneutos, b5-6) because it has a self-contained structure, with a beginning and an end, and the listener thinks that 'something has been made definite for him'. The same will apply mutatis mutandis to the comprehension of a tragic plot. It requires anticipation of the ending while one is following any given episode, but also a memory of each episode after one has followed it, and thus a coherent memory of the entire action after the play has been seen or heard. For retention in the memory, see also n 17 above.

23. This point is bound up with a reading of 53b12-13 which cannot be fully elaborated here. I take it from the reference to 'shuddering and pitying' at 53b5 that Aristotle does indeed require the tragedian to elicit fear and pity in the audience; but it seems to me consistent with that to take 'the pleasure which derives from pity and fear by means of mimesis' (53b12) to attend their retrospect upon the whole play. See nn 20 and 24. A similar retrospect upon epic will be suggested by the comparison of its 'proper pleasure' with that derived from the unity and wholeness of an animal (59a20-21).

24. This is by no means to say that the pleasure is 'unfeeling' or 'insensitive', or to underrate (let alone to deny) the importance of tragedy's affective impact. On the contrary, the more deeply we have been moved by a play, the more we shall be disposed to reflect upon and learn from it. Our cognitive faculties are engaged through
our feelings ('through pity and fear'). That point, I suspect (but cannot here argue), is the key to interpreting the text about katharsis (49b27-28).

25. In what follows regarding ch 4, it will be seen that, with Halliwell (1986, 79), I favour 'adjusting our interpretation of it, and particularly of the status of its illustration from visual mimesis, in the light of what is to be learnt about poetic mimesis later in the treatise'. Although my way of doing this diverges from his (see n 38 below), I share his concern to bridge the apparent gap between ch 4 and later pronouncements, and to dispel any impression that Aristotle's thought in ch 4 lacks its usual subtlety.

26. sumbanei theōrountas manthanein kai sullogizesthai ti hekaston, hoion hoti houtos ekeinos (48b16-17). I have translated as literally as possible. manthanein, given here as 'coming to understand', can also mean 'realize' or 'learn'. cf. Hubbard, 86.

27. This is the implication of Halliwell's translation, as of eight out of the ten other English versions or commentaries I have consulted. The exceptions are Else and Nussbaum, both of whom emend the text at 48b17 (see nn 28 and 36 below). For Halliwell's view, see his 1986 book, 72 with n 36, 77 with n 42, 124, 129-130.

28. On this point, cf. also Else (1957) 132, as well as (1967) 85, n 33. But his own interpretation, 'This individual is a So-and-so',
is poorly served by emending _houtos ekeinos_, as he proposes, to _houtos ekeino_: it would need _toioutos ekeinos_, as noted by Levens, 190. For further difficulties with _houtos ekeinos_ see also nn 37 and 38 below.

29. Occasionally, to be sure, inference is needed to identify a portrait, though less often when the subject is already familiar than when it is not. At _Topics_ 140a21 Aristotle mentions the works of early painters which could not be identified unless there was an inscription on them. In such cases, presumably, a viewer might try to infer the subject's identity from features in the picture that the original was independently known to have possessed or from other evidence not connected with pictorial content. There may indeed be great pleasure in solving such puzzles, and much to be 'learnt' beyond the subject's bare identity. But why should Aristotle have chosen such relatively unusual cases to typify our responses to likenesses (or to 'works of art') in general? And why should he suppose that such inferences will give pleasure only if the subject has been previously seen? May we not enjoy figuring out that a portrait depicts Socrates (say), even without having previously seen him? The subjects of 'early painters' had presumably long been dead by Aristotle's time, so at least in their case the contention of 48b17–19 would be implausible. See also n 39 below.

30. My translation of _toutōn tas eikonas tas malista ēkribōmenas_ ( _Poetics_ 48b11). The phrase refers not to all likenesses of
repulsive objects, but to a subset of them, viz. those that have been executed with very great precision. This nuance is easily missed in translation, and some versions are badly misleading: Janko, 'the most proficient images of things'; Bywater, 'the most realistic representations of them in art'. It is important to ask whether *tas eikonas* at b15 should be taken to mean 'likenesses' *in general*, as by e.g. Halliwell, Janko, and Nussbaum (388), or to mean 'these likenesses', i.e. the likenesses of repulsive objects mentioned at b11 (as by Hubbard, Potts, and Else). With the latter translation, the visual example at b17 should be an instance of those horrors, in which case it can hardly be an ordinary human portrait, and the grounds for suspecting *houtos ekeinos* (as usually interpreted) will be strengthened. Else legitimately renders *malista ekríbômenas* 'when executed in very great detail', but he prefaces this with a gratuitous 'even'. There is no basis for this in the Greek; and the implication that we enjoy the likenesses of horrible objects *in spite of* rather than *because of* their detail is unwarranted. Janko (xv) most curiously offers Aristotle a defence against the objection that, on his theory, a sketch of a cow (recognized from its four legs, horns etc) 'involves a loss of detail', when detail is precisely what Aristotle himself stresses! On the interpretation proposed here, the detail in the likenesses is just what makes them enjoyable objects of study.

31. For Aristotle's lecture-room and its equipment, see the entertaining article by Jackson.
32. The implicit relevance of this example to tragedy is rightly observed by Halliwell (1986, 64, n 23).

33. Thus Lucas 72, on 48b12. 'The lowest animals' would consort somewhat oddly with such corpses (as Lucas seems to realize), whereas they could quite naturally be paired with cadavers.

34. Leontius' voyeurism is not fully explained. As Annas notes (129), it may have had a sexual basis, in view of his penchant for cadaverous youths, evidenced in a fragment from contemporary comedy (cf. Adam, I 255, on 439e). But his story also reminds us of 'mixed pleasures' in the Philebus (47d-50e), for it exemplifies the pleasure felt in suffering. Although this particular 'mixed pleasure' is explicitly discussed only in connection with comedy (48a-50a), Plato mentions it as typical of a wider class of mixed feelings aroused in drama as well as in real life (50b-d). The indictments of mimetic poetry at Republic 603b-d and 606d1-7 are, I think, broad enough to cover many such paradoxical alloys of pleasure with pain.

35. These remarks once prompted Dorothy Sayers (222-223), tongue-in-cheek, to attribute to Aristotle 'a stout appetite for the gruesome ...The crawling horror of The Speckled Band would, we infer, have pleased him no less than The Corpse in the Car, The Corpse in Cold Storage or The Body in the Silo.' Of course we need infer nothing of the sort, any more than we need attribute macabre tastes to a pathologist merely because he is keen on his job.
36. Nussbaum (388) has recently adopted this emendation, also citing *Rhetoric* 1371b5–ff. But she reminds us, lest the passage should sound 'too flat to support any sophisticated account of tragic pleasure', that 'Aristotle is here speaking very generally of human delight, at all ages, in works of art of many types'. To my ear the words sound by no means 'too flat' to support the required extension to pleasure in learning from poetic representation. Although their intended application is indeed general (and they lend themselves to further 'sophistication'), they were prompted not by 'works of art', but by the specific sort of learning that is achieved with visual aids in a classroom. This would explain the prominence of 'philosophers', downplayed by Lucas (73, on 48b17), but properly stressed by Halliwell (1986, 78). The connection with zoological diagrams or replicas and cadavers was seen by Else (1957, 128) and by Janko (74, on 48b10), but neither identifies the specific learning about 'final causes' and organic functioning that can be heard in the text, if *touto ekeino* is read at 48b17.

37. By reading *touto ekeino* we avoid the switch to masculine demonstratives, which is strange after *ti hekaston* (48b16-17), as Lucas notes ad loc. For *touto ekeino*, cf. also *Rhetoric* 1410b18. If we retain *houtos ekeinos*, understanding the subject of the likeness as human, the pronouns cannot refer to an anatomical diagram. If Aristotle (or his listener) wrote *houtos ekeinos*, he may have had in mind the identification of each figure within a composite picture containing several human subjects recognizable
by members of his audience. (Jackson suggested that two such pictures in Aristotle's lecture-room depicted well-known scenes from Plato's *Protagoras* and *Phaedo*). Or the portrait might have depicted an individual present at the lecture, who could be indicated as 'that person' (*ekteinos*), such as Coriscus (*De Mem. 450b31*, cf. *De Insomn*. 461b25). But whatever likenesses Aristotle is thinking of, 'understanding' and 'inferring' are harder to interpret if the demonstratives are masculine; and scarcely less so (pace Else 1957, 132; 1967, 85, n 33) whether the likeness is recognized as being one of a familiar species ('that is a squid, an antelope or whatever') or of a familiar individual ('that is Coriscus'). For either way it remains obscure just what is 'understood' or 'inferred', how the understanding or inferring is supposed to take place, and why no pleasure is produced for a viewer who has not seen the item before. If anatomical learning is not the key to the passage, Aristotle might be thinking of our ability to 'understand and infer', from the representation of an individual, something about the type to which that subject belongs, through the highlighting of significant features of the type that we had not noticed before. That interpretation would be more plausible if we emended *houtos ekeinos* to *tou toutos ekeinos*, a fairly small textual change. In that way, as in mine, the text could be seen to prefigure the claim of ch 9, that poetry aims at 'universals'. But the link with Aristotle's repeated emphasis in the *Poetics* upon causal nexus is far stronger if we read *touto ekeino*, and take the demonstratives as advocated above.
Halliwell (1986, 79, n 45) considers this assertion, together with Rhet. 1371b4 ff. to refute Else's belief that Aristotle is thinking of scientific models and diagrams; hence he thinks Else mistaken in seeing any reference to universals in the visual example. But the assertion at 48b17-18 is surely puzzling on any view. It seems hardly more plausible to claim for a portrait that it will produce no pleasure qua representation for one who has not previously seen its subject, than to claim this for a replica or diagram. And Halliwell himself (1986, 77, n 42) finds difficulty in applying the visual example to poetry if it contains no implicit reference to universals. It is not, indeed, clear exactly what Aristotle is supposing at 48b17 not to have been 'previously seen', since no grammatical object of 'seen' (proeōrakōs) is expressed. But could he really have meant, or even believed, that a likeness can give pleasure qua representation only if one has previously seen the real particular subject represented? An enjoyable picture may have no real subject; and even when it has one, why must one have seen that very subject in order for the picture to produce pleasure qua representation? That might be so if the pleasure in question depended upon the viewer's ability to compare the likeness with the original; but no such ability is here stressed (as it is at Phaedo 73c-74e). It would be slightly more plausible to claim that one must have previously seen an item of the relevant type: to enjoy a picture of a horse qua representation, one need not have seen Dobbin, but must at least have seen a horse before, to be able to recognize the likeness of one. But even that much might well be disputed, so it will seem advisable to refine the claim still
further, by saying, e.g., that the picture must portray 'an identifiable (though not necessarily a real) figure' (Halliwell, 1986, 73, ital. added), or by speaking of 'the representation of a possible reality which it embodies' (ibid 74, ital. added). Yet how exactly, with such refinements, are we to understand προεδρακός? In what sense must we have 'previously seen' a centaur or a cyclops, in order to enjoy a picture of one? By connecting the passage with scientific models and diagrams, and interpreting it as I have proposed, we avoid such problems, but we can still relate it to the doctrine about universals in ch 9.

39. Lucas (72, on 48b13) says that the mere recognition of a resemblance to the subject 'has no relevance to the aesthetic enjoyment of a picture'. Compare Collingwood (44): 'The sitters [for portraits by Raphael, Titian et al.] are dead and gone, and we cannot check the likeness for ourselves. If, therefore, the only kind of merit a portrait could have were its likeness to the sitter, we could not possibly distinguish, except where the sitter is still alive and unchanged, between a good portrait and a bad'. Collingwood goes on to recall a wealthy art-collector, who refrained from buying portraits on the ground that there was no way of telling a good portrait from a bad when once the sitter was dead. 'He was', Collingwood adds, 'a very good stockbroker'. See also n 29 above.

40. A parallel point about the learning of 'universals' could be derived from Aristotle's first explanation for poetry at the start of ch 4 (48b5-8), i.e. the distinctive human tendency to represent.
When he says that the earliest lessons are learnt through mimesis, (48b7-8), he may be thinking (possibly inter alia, cf. Halliwell 1986, 70 with n 34) of children learning to draw. At Politics 1338b1 he says that this should be taught, not for its commercial utility, 'but perhaps rather because it makes them observers of bodily beauty'. Similarly, at 1338a1-5, drawing is said to make them better judges of the products of craftsmen. We may remain totally blind to certain visual properties of an object, despite seeing countless instances of it, until we try to draw it. And by drawing a particular, we may learn something about the class to which it belongs.

REFERENCES


M.E. Hubbard, 'Aristotle' in Ancient Literary Criticism, ed. D.A.


