

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

PAPER: ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

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ARISTOTLE (384-322 BC)

Aristotle, the peripatetic philosopher  
And He also known as Mathematician and  
Biologist

His writing run to four hundred  
volumes. He knew him as the tutor of  
Alexander the Great who almost conquered  
North-Western India.

Aristotle was an academic, a man of  
letters & naturalist, the words given by  
Eliot, 'a perfect critic'. Aristotle owes  
his philosophical career to his great  
Master Plato. He addresses many problems  
that Plato.

Rhetoric and poetics is major critical  
works of Aristotle. Many of his concepts  
are still being discussed and  
re-interpreted to suit the present day.

He seems to be more modern than most  
modern critics.

No other work of literary criticism  
or theory has exerted as strong an impact  
as this treatise.

Mimesis, Katharsis, Hamantia, Spoudaios  
Aristotle holds among four part of work the words  
derived from Greek. These are chief features  
of Aristotle method of writing.

Mimesis the most commonly accepted  
English equivalent of this Greek term is  
imitation.

In a critical or literary context  
the word imitation carries a special meaning.  
This term was peculiar to Greek thought.  
The concept of imitation is central  
to Aristotelian logic even as it is to  
the Platonic.



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Plato banished poets from his ideal Commonwealth. Aristotle rejects Plato's doctrine of ideas.

According to Aristotle's view the artist is the maker and his creation are imitations of human action, and human emotion.

It is representation and not just copying that he has in mind.

The artist imitates things as they are to be. again imitation bears relationship to learning and acquiring knowledge. We derive pleasure from the artistic representation.

Aristotle gave a new dimension to the word 'imitation' it does not mean photographic reproduction.

### Katharsis

This is a key word in Aristotle, occurring only twice in poetics.

the meaning of the latter usage is  
what concerns us.

By its means (Tragedy) Katharsis is defined  
as an imitation of an action that is  
serious, complete and of a certain magnitude

Aristotle's theory of Katharsis may be  
considered to be his reply to Plato's  
emotion of pity and fear

the meaning of the term has given  
room to a lot of discussion

Hamartia this term is usually rendered  
into English as "Tragic Flaw" It denotes  
its meaning etymologically

"to miss the mark" "to err to fail"

In the Gospel according to St John

the term means "sin"

Spoudais (Noble character) For Aristotle  
character is what determines moral choice.  
He even classifies genres using this  
principle.

Tragedy imitates noble characters,  
and comedy based character.

Some critics especially the neoclassical  
critics mistake this as socially determines  
Arthur miller accuses Aristotle of social  
snobbishness and Arrogance.



often poetry presents gods as unjust or revengeful. Thus poetry corrupts both the citizens and the state.

**Q. 10. Analyse Aristotle's observations on Poetry.**

**Ans. Instinct for Imitation**—Man instinctively loves imitation. Man also instinctively loves melody. From these two instincts, according to Aristotle, springs poetry. Therefore Aristotle calls the poet an imitator. According to Aristotle, man instinctively imitates three things: 'Things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be.' In other words, man loves to imitate what is past or present, what is commonly believed, and what is ideal. What the poet imitates in the form of poetry has deeper implications. He not only imitate but also recreates. He is a creator too. His poetic creation is not 'twice removed from reality', as Plato believed it to be. The pictures of poetry are not mere reproduction of facts but universal truths that apply to all places and times. Poetry is, therefore more philosophical and a nobler creation than history.

**Aesthetic Pleasure**—Since poetry originates from man's instinctive love of imitation and melody, it gives permanent aesthetic pleasure. It gives pleasure both to the poet and the reader alike. According to Aristotle, the poetic pleasure has a morality too—'an aesthetic enjoyment which is not divorced from civic ends.' Poetry combines in itself both philosophy and morality.

**Emotional Appeal**—Poetry also makes an immediate emotional appeal. It purifies and ennoble our feelings and sensibilities. It elevates and humanises the reader imperceptibly.

**Q. 11. Discuss Aristotle's definition of Tragedy.**

**Ans. Definition of Tragedy**—Aristotle's definition of Tragedy has been accepted as the standard definition from his own times to the present day. He defines Tragedy thus: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not in narrative."



narration; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." There is not a single superfluous word in this definition. However, there are certain words or phrases which need to be explained and clarified.

**Action**—The action or plot of a tragedy must be 'serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.' It means that a tragedy cannot be written on a trivial subject. It should have a fairly large magnitude. It can be a tragic story of a king, a prince or a general with whose fate may be bound the fate of a whole state or a race. With the fall of the hero, the whole state or race should fall. Further, the action should be complete, which means that it should have a proper beginning, development, and an end. Then only it would make a powerful impact on the mind and heart of the spectator.

**Pity, Fear, and Catharsis**—The hero of the tragedy should be essentially a good man with a slight flaw in his character. As such, his sufferings, fall and death should produce powerful currents of pity and fear, which may purify or cleanse our own heart and feelings. The final impact of the tragedy must be purifying and ennobling.

**Q. 12. What are the constituent parts of a Tragedy according to Aristotle ?**

**Ans. Six Parts**—According to Aristotle, there are six constituent parts of a Tragedy. They are : Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Song and Spectacle. The Plot is the most important part of a tragedy. The plot means 'the arrangement of the incidents.' Normally the plot is divided into five Acts, and each Act is further divided into several scenes. The dramatist's main skill lies in dividing the plot into Acts and scenes in such a way that they may produce the maximum scenic effect in a natural development. Characters are men and women who act. The hero and the heroine are two important figures among the characters. Thought means what the characters think or feel during their career in the development of the plot. The thought is expressed through their speeches or dialogues. Diction is the medium of language or expression through which the characters reveal their thoughts and feelings. The diction should be 'embellished with each kind of artistic ornament.' The song is one of these embellishments. The spectacle is theatrical effect presented on the stage. The decoration of the stage is the major part of the spectacle. But spectacle also includes scenes of physical torture, loud lamentations, dances, colourful garments of the main characters, and the beggarly or jocular appearance of the subordinate characters or of the Fool on the stage. These are the six constituent parts of a tragedy.

**Q. 13. What are the characteristics of a good Plot in a Tragedy ?**

**Ans. Artistic Arrangement**—The Plot is 'the soul of a tragedy'. Therefore it should have a very effective artistic arrangement. It should have, first, unity of action. No action should be presented on the stage which may not help in the development of the plot towards its conclusion. Broadly speaking, the plot is divisible into two parts—complication and catastrophe. The first part is called rising action, and the second falling action ending into catastrophe.

**Simple or Complex Plot**—The plot may be simple or complex. A simple plot has no complications, surprise or suspense. Therefore it falls flat on the spectator without arresting his attention. A good plot is a complex plot. Its complications, sudden turns of events, and situations of suspense keep the spectator spell-bound. The occurrence of *Peripeteta* and *anagnorisis* is possible only in a complex plot. *Peripeteta* is reversal of fortune from good to bad, or from high to low. *Anagnorisis* is recognition of the cause of his fall. These two elements arouse the emotions of pity and fear which constitute the real spirit of the tragedy. Therefore a 'perfect tragedy'