

SOURCES OF DRAMATIC THEORY

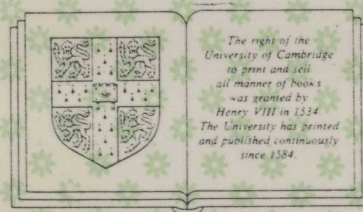
1: Plato to Congreve

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with

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
New York Port Chester
Melbourne Sydney

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

This collection, general introduction, notes, and introductory
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The translation of the selections from d'Aubignac, Racine and Saint-Evremond, and the
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selections from Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Torres Naharro © Michael J. Sidnell 1991

First published 1991

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Sources of dramatic theory.

1. Drama. Theories

1. Sidnell, Michael J. (Michael John). 1935-
808.2

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Sources of dramatic theory / edited and annotated by Michael J.

Sidnell, with D. J. Conacher ... [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

Contents: v. 1. Plato to Congreve.

ISBN 0-521-32694-X (v. 1)

1. Drama. 2. Theater.

PN1631.S6 1991

801'.952 - dc20 90-1564 CIP

ISBN 0521 32694 x hardback

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following permissions to use published material are gratefully acknowledged:

John Pershing, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, IN and Cambridge, MA, for the use of G. M. A. Grube's translations in *Aristotle on Poetry and Style* (1958)

Niall Rudd for the use of his translation of *The Art of Poetry* (*Ars Poetica*) published in his *Horace: Satires and Epistles / Persius: Satires* (revised edition, 1979)

The publishers for the use of Andrew Bongiorno's *Castelvetro on the Art of Poetry: an Abridged Translation of Lodovico Castelvetro's Poetica d'Aristotele Vulgarizzata et Sposta* (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 29; Binghampton, NY, 1984).

D. J. Conacher thanks Professors Elaine Fantham and Niall Rudd for their help with bibliographical and other matters in connection with the Horace section. Pia Kleber thanks Juris Silarajs for his assistance with the translation of Corneille. The encouragement and support of Ronald Bryden and Brian Parker has been most welcome, as has the material assistance given by Trinity College, Toronto. Ralph Blasting's contribution to this volume not only in systematizing the bibliographical references but with administrative chores and by his cheerfulness has been much appreciated. Michael Sidnell also wishes to express his appreciation of the stimulus afforded by members of his seminar in the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at the University of Toronto. He hopes that, when it is completed, this collection of texts will go some way to meeting the needs of their students. He also thanks the staff of Cambridge University Press for their resourceful expertise and their constant courtesy and Sarah Stanton, especially, for her vital contributions to the conception and production of this volume.

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Most of the translations included in this volume have been specially made for it by the editors, as indicated below. The other translations used are: Paul Shorey's of Plato; G. M. A. Grube's of Aristotle; Niall Rudd's of Horace; and Andrew Bongiorno's of Castelvetro. Publication details of these are given in the bibliography. The punctuation and spelling of the originally English texts have been lightly modernized. Whether newly or previously translated, all the texts included here are annotated by the editors of this volume.

Though there has been extensive collaboration among the editors, the primary responsibilities for the notes, commentary and the new translations are as follows:

D. J. Conacher: the introductory note and footnotes to Aristotle's *Poetics*, and to Horace's *The Art of Poetry*

Barbara Kerslake: the translations of, and the introductory notes and footnotes to the selections from d'Aubignac, Racine, and Saint-Evremond, and the passages on *Le Cid*

Pia Kleber: the translation of the selection from Corneille, and the introductory note and footnotes to it

C. J. McDonough: the translations of, and the introductory notes and footnotes to the selections from Donatus, Robortello, and Scaliger

Damiano Pietropaolo: the translations of, and the introductory notes and footnotes to the selections from Giacomini, Giralaldi, Grazzini, Guarini, Ingegneri, and Oddi

Michael J. Sidnell: the general introduction; the translations of, and the introductory notes and footnotes to, the selections from Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Torres Naharro; the introductory notes and footnotes to the selections from Castelvetro, Congreve, Dryden, Edwards, Heywood, Jonson, Rymer, Sidney, and Whetstone.

Ralph Blasting compiled the Bibliography.

ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the volume a system of cross-references has been used to signal and locate passages for comparison. These are in the form of an abbreviation followed by a page number, inside pointed brackets: (Cv/129) refers to the text of Castelvetro on p. 129 of this volume. In the case of Horace's *The Art of Poetry* the line number follows the page number: (Hr/69:180). The abbreviations used are:

Ar	Aristotle	Ig	Ingegneri
Cd	On <i>Le Cid</i>	In	Introduction (chapter 1)
Cg	Congreve	Jn	Jonson
Cn	Corneille	Lp	Lope de Vega
Cv	Castelvetro	Nh	Torres Naharro
Db	d'Aubignac	Od	Oddi
Dd	Dryden	Pl	Plato
Dn	Donatus	Rb	Robortello
Ed	Edwards	Rc	Racine
Gd	Giraldi	Rm	Rymer
Gm	Giacomini	Se	Saint-Evremond
Gu	Guarini	Sg	Scaliger
Gz	Grazzini	Sy	Sidney
Hr	Horace	Tm	Tirso de Molina
Hw	Heywood	Wh	Whetstone

Where more than a simple internal reference is required it is supplied in the footnotes.

1

INTRODUCTION

"Theory" is now the usual term for the kind of texts included in this volume though it was not used in this way by any of the authors included here. For the Greeks, who coined the word, it had the sense that it retains of contemplation, of viewing not doing. "Theory" has, in fact, a common etymological root, signifying "see," with the word "theatre." From this it might be surmised that both theory and theatre are modes of contemplation and that theorizing about theatre is thus a distinctly introverted activity. But the theatre is *in* the world as well as a place for observing it; drama never represents the world with complete objectivity and the spectators are never wholly detached observers. Nor, for that matter, has the theory of drama been uninvolved with its practice – on the contrary. So it is fitting that, far from being purely contemplative, the most renowned and influential work of dramatic theory, Aristotle's *Poetics*, is concerned with the *making* of tragedy, not just with its appreciation, and with drama as something *done* and experienced, as well as something contemplated.

Sometimes dramatic theory is dismissed as useless, but it is precisely when it tries to be practically useful that it becomes most contentious. One scenario goes something like this:

PRACTICE (aggressively): What *use* are you?

THEORY (cunningly): Perhaps to consider what use *you* are. (After a moment's silence.) But, tell me, do you know what you're doing?

PRACTICE (insolently): Possibly not, but it works!

In a more civil encounter Practice asks, "Can you tell me how this was done?" Theory, flattered, attempts an explanation and, yielding to temptation, goes on to offer some general rules, which Practice joyfully breaks.

Scientific theories have sometimes been tailored to prevailing moral, political, or religious codes but the historical tendency has been for experimental science to expose contradictions between nature's laws and current understandings of them, or by practical applications to validate existing theories. Since the arts are entirely human productions, theories about them cannot be objectively tested and are therefore more liable to be

subsumed under the prevailing orthodoxies. Theologies have often attempted to govern the arts and supply their theory for them and some influential present-day artistic theories have been derived from Marxism. The theory that, to the exclusion of all others and of theoretical discourse itself, attempts to deliver the arts from such subordination holds that artistic works themselves wholly and solely embody whatever principles inform them. Plato seems to be aware of the invincibility of this position when he rules out of order any defense of poetry in the form itself of poetry (Pl/31). Other theories, recognizing that such a claim to full autonomy for the arts would involve theoretical self-contradiction, have acknowledged varying degrees of dependence of larger philosophical or ideological constructs, and have concerned themselves with the defense or elucidation of particular works or with such key issues in the understanding of a specific art as its origins, its present function, the aesthetic principles by which it may be appreciated or judged, and the precepts to be followed in its production. Such theoretical statements have appeared in a variety of forms, from extensive and comprehensive commentaries to short prefaces. Not surprisingly, dramatic theory has often been presented in dialogue form.

Since dramatic theories of the past are the products of their time and place, they are sometimes considered as essentially historical documents. But the history of dramatic theory does not recount a continuous development: many new starts are made in ignorance of what has gone before and certain issues recur so often as to suggest that they are always relevant, despite the particularity of the social and intellectual contexts in which they arise. Some of these recurrent issues are: what it means to represent or imitate something dramatically; how written texts are related to live performances; by what means, in what ways, and to what ends spectators may be affected; how the various contributory arts such as poetry, dance, painting, and music may or should be combined in the theatre; to what degree the actor may be an artistic medium for some other artist such as a playwright or director, or be an interpreter of a role, or be a primary creator; and what constitutes or legitimizes certain dramatic genres and how they are to be distinguished and used.

The intellectual method of treating such theoretical questions as historical ones is comparatively recent. One of its founders was A. W. Schlegel, whose influential *Lectures on Dramatic Poetry* were published in 1812. Up to that time, the interest in theories of the past was almost invariably in their contemporary aesthetic applications. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *Art of Poetry* were treated as active elements in the thought of the times and were often distorted, consciously and otherwise, in the process. In our own century, many once-influential theories have been relegated to history or simply forgotten, but the *Poetics* has been redeployed, both positively and, in some

highly significant instances, with a sharp antagonism.¹ Brecht's quarrel with Aristotle, for instance, was an important element in the shaping of his own theory, his plays, and his productions.

By contrast with the modern tendency towards historicism, many commentators in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were intent on making Aristotle and Horace, even when they took them as "guides not commanders" (Jn/193), as thoroughly prescriptive (and so as useful) as possible. Whatever else may be said about it, this approach did, at least, try to keep theory in contact with practice. Nor was it an out-and-out abuse of the ancients, for Aristotle is prescriptive in a rather complex way and Horace is clearly so. Stephen Halliwell observes an "affinity between the *Poetics* and various Greek *technai* or didactic manuals which were produced in a variety of fields, perhaps above all in rhetoric, but also in more practical crafts such as painting or sculpture" (1986, 37). But Halliwell insists on "the difference between theoretical and practical prescription, and that the *Poetics* is essentially an exercise in the former not the latter" (p. 38). The way in which his interesting argument first posits a distinction between theory and prescription and then gingerly merges them in "theoretical . . . prescription" is an illustration of how suspect prescriptiveness has become in modern times.

Theory remote from practice is also suspect, and it was particularly so in 1938, when R. G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* appeared. Collingwood, who took up many of the classical issues, was much less worried about being prescriptive than about being "academic." He insisted that he did "not think of aesthetic theory as an attempt to investigate and expound eternal verities concerning the nature of an eternal object called Art, but as an attempt to reach, by thinking, the solution of certain problems arising out of the situation in which artists find themselves here and now." His book, he said, was intended, primarily, to be of "use" to artists (p. vi).

In distancing himself from "academic philosophers" (such as himself) and ranging himself with "poets, painters, and sculptors" (whose "often chaotic" attempts at aesthetic theory were a motive for his own), Collingwood was assuming a rather paradoxical, but by no means unprecedented, role. It may be extravagant to imagine (as the nineteenth-century scholar Teichmüller did) that aspiring Athenian dramatists went to hear Aristotle to learn more about their craft, but it is possible that Aristotle, like Collingwood and many other theorists, wanted to be of some use to makers of plays. His Renaissance commentators certainly did. Robortello and Castelvetro, for example, interpret the *Poetics* very differently but they share with each other and with their contemporaries the assumption that

¹ As for instance by Francis Fergusson in his *The Idea of a Theater* ([1949] 1968) and the "Chicago School" (for which see Crane 1952) in a positive way, and by Antonin Artaud in *The Theater and its Double* (1958) and Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1976) negatively.

sound theory is a prerequisite of good practice.

The combination of understanding and practical skill was called "art," in a sense that survives today in "the art of medicine" or "state of the art." And the term "art" was also applied to a literary form (related to the modern "guide," "handbook" or "manual") modeled on Horace's so-called *Art of Poetry*.² Lope de Vega treated this form with an interesting ambivalence. His *New Art of Making Comedies* undermines the very idea of an "art" that lays down guidelines for the dramatist. He may, indeed, be intimating that "art" is an indefinite but quintessential quality, using the word somewhat in the modern way for certain painted, sculptured, or written works. "Art" in this modern, honorific sense does not usually include ceramics, quilts, chairs, or textbooks, for the production of which some "craft" is required or for which a practical use is intended, and is distinguished from "science" (such as medicine), which is based largely on a body of transmissible knowledge and definite principles.

Lope de Vega's brief theoretical statement is imbued with irony and with an overriding confidence in his achievements, whether they were those of an artist or a crafty entertainer. For Corneille, however, the question of "art" was a vexatious one. He insisted (Cn/235) that the object of drama was pleasure but that "to find this appropriate pleasure and to give it to the audience one must follow the precepts of art and please in accordance to them. It is axiomatic that there are precepts, since there is an art; but it is not established what the precepts are." He formulated the precepts by correlating his own plays with received theory, occasionally finding shortcomings in the plays and frequently finding reason in the plays to qualify the theory.

Corneille's antagonist the abbé d'Aubignac called his own attempt at prescriptive theory a "pratique" (which an anonymous English translator rendered as "whole art" (Db/220)); in the eighteenth century, Lessing gave the title "dramaturgy" to the series of essays that he had begun with the practical objective of hammering out, in a theatrical context, principles of performance; and, in this century, Brecht chose the crusty Greek word *organon*, meaning – much like "pratique" – an "instrument" for doing something. These titles indicate their authors' ambitions to produce something equivalent to an "art" in the Renaissance sense: a theory of the subject with explicit practical applications.

The works just mentioned are devoted specifically to drama, written and performed, but many of the most comprehensive treatments of drama in the sixteenth century appear as parts of general theories of poetry, or "poetics," in which dramatic poetry is traditionally accorded most attention. Some of these, such as Castelvetro's, are in the form of expositions of

² The work had acquired the non-authorial cognomen *Ars Poetica* by the time of Quintilian (35–96 A.D.), who refers to it as such.

the (original) *Poetics* that offer to interpret, to complete, to update, and even to correct Aristotle's thought and thus to achieve the status of independent theories; others, such as Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* are presented as intrinsically independent. As pertaining to drama, the concept of a "poetics," and the word itself, were formerly less awkward than they have since become.³ Tragedies and comedies were classified as poems, prose drama was widely regarded as an anomaly (Gd/123), and playwrights were called "poets." It was not until the later seventeenth century that the distinction between poet and playwright was regularly made. This verbal distinction not only separates writers of plays from writers in general but also confirms (rather paradoxically) the separation of the writers from the other artists (or "wrights") who contribute to the making of plays.

It should be noted that "poetry" in these earlier contexts does not necessarily exclude theatrical expression: the poet who writes for the theatre is commonly supposed to exercise at least some command of the non-verbal arts of the stage. But the supremacy of the script – the dramatic poem – is assumed by almost all the theorists represented in this volume and, if they address the matter at all, they are mostly vague about the relation between the non-verbal elements of performance and the text. This has since become a prominent issue, as is indicated by the common usage, in English, that distinguishes "drama" (meaning written texts) from "theatre" (implying performance). Considering the root meaning of "drama" as something *done*, this usage is rather inappropriate but what is much more important is that this semantic division of "drama" and "theatre" obscures the basic question of how the semiotics of theatre (which includes non-verbal "languages" of the staging, as well as the words) and its phenomenology (which includes the delivery of the text) may be related.

Castelvetro's clear recognition of a non-verbal language of the theatre is one of several new departures in his theory. It comes about as his ingenious resolution of a difficulty passed down from antiquity concerning the difference between recitation and impersonation. Aristotle, like Plato before him, had distinguished between the narrative (*diegetic*) and dramatic (*mimetic*) modes. Given that the poet speaks in his own voice in the narrative mode, is the dramatic mode to be understood as consisting of speeches assigned to *characters* and delivered by the poet (or rhapsode), or as implying the use of *actors who impersonate* the characters on a stage? The Greek description of the single narrative voice Castelvetro accepts, but the corresponding description of the dramatic, he says, requires a subdivision. To discourse in the form of dialogue he assigns the term "similitudinary" and to drama for performance the term "dramatic." The difference

³ Currently, the term "poetics" is used very elastically: it may refer to the aims of a poet's practice, or to its effects, or be a general theory of literature. Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* (1977) may be said to be an anti-Scaligerian title.

between them, he says, is that "similitudinary" dialogue is like narrative in being a representation of words and things by means of words alone, while the "dramatic" is a representation of words and things by means of both words and things (Cv/132). This distinction is the theoretical basis for Castelvetro's insistence on performance as essential to the dramatic genre. Many important corollaries follow from it and though some of these (notably the idea of a required "unity of place") found an all-too-ready acceptance, the fundamental premise was virtually ignored.

Castelvetro's idea of a non-verbal dramatic *language* of things is naturalistic to the limited extent that he envisages the representing things as belonging to the same order as the things represented, whenever that can be done: hats by hats, swords by swords, and men by men. But Castelvetro is not interested solely in the *meaning* of theatrical representations. On the contrary, he de-emphasizes the importance of meaning in drama in favor of the sensuous gratification it can afford (Cv/132).

Shakespeare seems to have had much less confidence than Castelvetro in the representation of things by things. The Chorus in his *Henry V*, forestalling criticism, asks the audience to compensate imaginatively for the inadequacy of both the verbal and the material parts of the representation, but the two kinds of imperfection are differentiated. The admission that "four or five most vile and ragged foils, / Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous," are a paltry attempt to represent the battle of Agincourt, indicates a real material limitation (Jn/199). But the supposed verbal inadequacy is transcended even in the very admission of it: "Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them / Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth." We do not, in fact, get mere talk but the lively verbal image of horses. Similar imagery is called upon to present, verbally, the shipping, the battlefields, and the crowds to the mind's eye. With a disarming affectation of modesty, Shakespeare dexterously uses the medium that lies within his control – the words – to compensate for the material deficiencies of the presentation. He seems to share with Scaliger the conviction that, even in drama, "words serve as signs for reality" (Sg/106) and he goes as far as any playwright in meeting Scaliger's demand that "all of the playwright's ideas about the setting, or about the movements, costumes, and gestures of the characters, that are necessary for understanding the story, must be expressed in the lines that are spoken" (Scaliger/Padelford 1905, 117).

Unlike d'Aubignac, who follows him in insisting on the self-containment of the dialogue (Db/224) Scaliger intends to preserve the integrity of the dramatic poem as a literary artefact independent of whatever non-literary means of expression might also be employed. This is in keeping with his insistence on versification, rather than imitation, as the primary and defining characteristic of dramatic (and other) poetry (Sg/108). On this fundamental issue he dissents from Aristotle and precisely and deliberately

does what Aristotle is often said to have done: he privileges the written text.

Aristotle's own position is more complex and difficult to interpret. His ranking of "spectacle" as the least important of the six parts of tragedy, with the explanation that it cannot be of the essence since tragedy can be effective in reading, has earned him much opprobrium, particularly in the present century. He stands accused of the original sin of separating text from performance and subordinating the latter (Halliwell 1986, 337ff.). But it should be noted that what Aristotle here called "reading" we would call recitation, and that, though the Greeks read play texts, it was only after printing became common that solitary readers with ideal theatres in their heads became a considerable "audience," and a phenomenon to be reckoned with (as it is by Ben Jonson (Jn/192)). Nor is it entirely clear what Aristotle means by "spectacle": whether the whole *mise-en-scène* or only the masks and costumes of the actors – perhaps Copeau's bare stage, on which no clutter of objects was allowed to distract the audience from the concreteness of the verbal presentation,⁴ would have seemed to him an absence of spectacle. It is also significant that Aristotle puts the development of tragedy in a theatrical setting, describes a dramatic structure that implies performance and insists that the poet keep the theatre firmly in mind. Nevertheless, Aristotle does, apparently, regard the mature tragic genre (but not necessarily, it should be remembered, comedy or other kinds of drama) as *literature* for the theatre.

According to Aristotle the tragic essence is embodied in a certain kind of imitation of an action of a certain kind, which produces certain effects, notably *catharsis*: "by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of such emotions" is a conventionally worded translation of the formulation in the *Poetics* (Dorsch 1965, 39). In Gerald Else's translation, however, this becomes "through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics" (Aristotle/Else 1967, 25). The interpretation involved in this rendering is dubious and it can be aligned with the many interpretations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that locate the pity and fear in the tragic action rather than in the spectators. Scaliger, Castelvetro, and many others after them regard the "purgation" as a *rational* response to the tragic *example* of the potential consequences of these emotions. Analysis is certainly made simpler in this way, though it may be quite wide of the mark: the emotional element can be readily discussed since it supposedly lies in the tragic action itself and the spectators' response, being a rational one, can also be predicted or deduced. This way of interpreting (or perverting) the *Poetics* makes it seem more compatible with a long tradition of didactic theory, and with the almost universally accepted Horatian maxim that the function of drama is to teach and delight (Hr/74:344).

⁴ See Copeau 1923.

Among those interpreters who have assumed the reality of a cathartic effect on the spectators there have been major differences. Some have supposed that the spectators feel the pity and fear so intensely that these emotions are evacuated as though by medicinal purgative; some that the specified emotions are purified and remain active in that form as an effect of the tragedy; and some that the tragedy acts as a homeopathic remedy, operating on the spectators like small doses of poison, or the experience of battle on soldiers, leaving them less vulnerable to the enfeebling emotions of pity and fear. In our time, Augusto Boal has adopted the medicinal theory but sees in its operation a means of oppression, a sublimation of the spectators' potential for political action.

Aristotle holds that the cathartic effects of tragedy are produced by the choice of an appropriate subject and, even more emphatically, by its treatment, especially in terms of such structural features as the integrity of the plot and the organization of its incidents in keeping with probability, the changes of fortune visited upon the protagonist, and the uses of reversal and recognition. These will affect the spectators in vital ways, but just how the tragic imitation is supposed to satisfy the spectators' sense of reality or belief – whether, for instance, as an illusion of actuality or as a consciously ritualized enactment – is not made clear in the *Poetics*.

The theorists and commentators of the sixteenth century and later foregrounded this question, partly displacing the Aristotelian criterion of *probability* (within the plot) with complex notions about *credibility*. So d'Aubignac declares that "Considering the action as real, [the playwright] must look for a motive or a plausible reason, which is called a pretext [*couleur*], for these narrations and these spectacles really to have happened in this way. I dare say that the greatest art in writing for the theatre lies in finding all these pretexts" (Db/223). This credibility stems from the choice of subject and from its treatment but is not necessarily, or usually, confined to a likeness to ordinary reality. It can come also from the poet's ability to represent ideal worlds in such a way that they too are believable; for imitation includes the representation of things that do not exist "as if they did, and in the manner they might and ought to exist" (Sg/100).

The credibility of imitations is usually referred to as "verisimilitude," a term that has a range of meanings, even in single texts. Verisimilitude may consist in a successful copying of actuality, in a credible presentation of ideality, or in making a particular representation conform with what is supposed to be typical of the class. Horace's much-quoted advice on characterization is to this end: that young men should be presented in the rashness of their youth, old men as dithering and greedy, and so on (Hr/69:176–78). In this way verisimilitude is achieved with, and by means of, decorum. The playwright, says Torres Naharro, should exercise a decorum that is like the command of a ship: servants will not be made to speak and act like masters (Nh/113). The spectators find such characters

credible because they are drawn according to their expectations and these same expectations are thereby strengthened with respect to drama and – very significantly – to real life as well. By making the ought-to-be look lifelike (and therefore possible) drama brings the ought-to-be closer to realization in actuality. Plays written and performed on this understanding, and the judgments of them, tend to conform, of course, with the dominant ideology of their time.

"History" (inclusive of myth) is frequently thought of as a requirement for tragedy and an enabling factor for verisimilitude. By using one kind of truth (such as the names of historical personages and the outlines of known episodes) another, ideal, kind is made credible. Corneille, however, ingeniously argues for the use of history as a means by which the constraints of verisimilitude may be transcended. The marvelous is by definition unlikely but it becomes credible when it can be said to have happened. Moreover, it is more interesting to the audience to be presented with marvels that are thus made credible than with what is credible merely because it is likely (Cn/236). Castelvetro regarded this blending of historical truth and invention in dramatic plots as more difficult than sheer invention, since the poet had to fill in the details of a received story instead of being free to invent details and story together (Cv/137).

Verisimilitude (with its range of meanings) is thought to stem not only from the choice of subject matter (whether historical or otherwise) and from the treatment of the subject with decorum, but also from dramatic structure. George Whetstone scorns the typical English dramatist for failure in all three areas: for grounding "his work on impossibilities" such as monsters; for making "a clown companion with a king" and the "gross indecorum" of using "one order of speech for all persons"; and for inventing plots so loose that they allow for infant characters to grow into men (Wh/166). He does not refer to the "unities" or "rules" as such, but he is making the assumption, common in his time, that in order to achieve verisimilitude it is necessary to adhere to the unities of action, time, and place. If, for example, unity of action is not preserved and the dramatist relies instead on the unity deriving from concentration on an individual character, then the spectators will be confronted with the incredible spectacle of that character going from youth to old age in the space of two hours or so. This would also be a violation of the supposed "unity of time," which theoretically restricts the temporal scope of the action to a maximum of one day, and aims for a minimum disparity between stage time and real time. Again, such a plot would probably involve the need to make the stage represent many different places, with a consequent strain on the credulity of the spectators for whom it is supposedly easier to think of the stage as one location only (Sy/180).

Verisimilitude was the main but not the only argument advanced in favor of the unities. Another source of the neo-classical attachment to

them was their supposed provenance from the *Poetics*. Aristotle does, indeed, insist on unity of action (Ar/42), but the idea of a unity of time had its very insecure basis in Aristotle's remark (Ar/41) about tragedy taking place within a revolution of the sun, and, as to unity of place, it was Castelvetro's strict logic about stage illusion that implanted it as a "rule" (Cv/132). Overall the doctrine was riddled with misunderstandings and plain errors and was the occasion of disputes as unproductive as they were tortuous. But one reason for not dismissing the whole discussion of the unities as the product of barren scholasticism is that, right up to the present, dramatic structure has often tended towards just such a concentration of fictional time and space as adherence to the unities produced. Another is that since drama is a medium that combines sequentiality (as in music and speech) with juxtaposition (as in painting or sculpture), the coordination of the temporal and the spatial elements is critical. In the eighteenth century, the question of the differentiations between, or fusions of, the various arts on the basis of their representations of time and space became a central one in the new science of aesthetics but by this time the "rules" were already falling into disrepute and the obvious connection between the new aesthetics and the old precepts was never made.

The doctrine of the unities was foisted on Aristotle by the theorists of the sixteenth century as they tried to formulate their own structural principles. Their basic concept of genre, however, was a genuine inheritance from antiquity and one that has survived (vestigially, at least) up to the present. From the *Poetics* came paradigms in which the structural and attitudinal distinctions between tragedy and comedy corresponded with predispositions of the respectively tragic and comic playwrights and certain effects on the spectators. Furthermore, in Aristotle, these two genres appeared to be ultimately attributable to the basic possibilities of human existence itself, which is experienced or perceived as tragic or comic (Ar/39).⁵

The absence in the *Poetics* of a theory of comedy parallel with that of tragedy was not an insuperable obstacle to the generic duality. The deficiency was (and still is) commonly attributed to the loss of a second book of the *Poetics* and, beginning with Robertello's in 1548, a series of attempts to reconstruct the hypothetical work have been made.⁶ Other definitions of comedy – notably the one attributed to Cicero by Donatus

⁵ In his *On Comedy* (1548) Robertello writes: "Aristotle seems to intimate that both simultaneously arose from nature itself. For he states that since some men were *semmoteroi*, that is rather august and serious, and others *eutelesteroi*, that is light and playful, the former wrote serious productions, that latter light and amusing works and thus two kinds of poetry arose, one serious, the other jesting. That such was the case he proves with an example from Homer, in whom may be seen both natures, the light and the serious." (Translation by C. J. McDonough.)

⁶ The most recent work in this vein is Richard Janko's *Aristotle on Comedy* (1986). (In Umberto Eco's entertaining fiction, *The Name of the Rose* [1983] a copy of Aristotle's work on comedy is deliberately suppressed by reactionary clerics, rediscovered, and destroyed.)

(Dn/79) – were adduced on the assumption of a fundamental generic duality.

It is interesting to observe how ideas about genre are made to conform with social ideas, as when tragedy is assumed to be fit entertainment for princes, who are capable of suffering it in life, and comedy for commoners, whose harshest misfortunes could be represented in terms of comedy. The reasons given for making tragic protagonists of princely rank also reveal an interesting interplay between social ideas and aesthetics: since princes have further to fall than other men, they are suitable figures for a significant tragic action (Rb/95); since the decisions and falls of princes have consequences that affect many other people, tragedies concerning them will be of wide interest (Sg/101); or, rather subversively and existentially, princes are suitable tragic figures since they are not bound by the laws they make and are therefore free to be self-destructive (Cv/140). Questions about the rank of tragic protagonists – especially about the possibility of tragedy of the common man – continued into the present century.

In Italy in the sixteenth century, strenuous theoretical efforts were made to assert the legitimacy of genres other than tragedy and comedy. The basic Aristotelian division was expanded in order to accommodate modern plays in the pastoral, tragicomic, and other genres. Polonius' command of an elaborate taxonomy of dramatic genres satirizes a pedantic extreme of this development (*Hamlet* 2.2.412).⁷ The test case was tragicomedy: whether it had existed among the ancients or was a new but legitimate (or bastard) genre, and how it might include features of both comedy and tragedy, whether separately or mixed, or not at all, and to what effect. Some of the attempts to justify tragicomedy led to new insights about the nature of drama in general, as for instance in Guarini's theory of tragicomedy as a self-conscious fiction (Gu/158). In Spain the Aristotelian duality was evaded by the practical and theoretical development (despite belated but fierce opposition) of the *comedia*, which did not conform with Aristotelian generic categories or their derivatives and which has important implications for theories of genre generally (Tm/211).

One of Sidney's objections to the "mongrel tragicomedy" is that unlike "right" tragedy and comedy, it mingles kings and clowns (Sy/181). But Lope de Vega slyly observes that there was no knowing whether King Philip's irritation at seeing kings in comedy was based on artistic or social criteria (Lp/187). In either case decorum is involved, but the Spaniard does not assume, as the Englishman does, that the social solecism is also an aesthetic defect, and that it will produce emotions that will tend to

⁷ Polonius' categories are: "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited." The last two refer not to genre but to plays that respectively do and do not preserve unity of place and time.

neutralize each other. Where Sidney appeals to artistic precepts, Lope de Vega argues from nature, which derives beauty, he says, from variety (Lp/187). But the real force in making tragicomedy acceptable (and even in escaping from the idea of genre altogether) was audience demand. Giving the spectators what they want and allowing them to spend their time in the theatre in ways that best please them often results, it appears, in mixtures that defy generic classification.

Aristotle's brief sketch of the origins and development of tragedy and comedy has been much emulated, with the objective of eliciting the essential significance and function of theatre from the study of its beginnings. But ideas about where theatre *ends* are at least as important as those about where it began. The shows put on in Roman amphitheatres, which included actual deaths as part of the entertainment, may be distinguished from the dramatic art in which all deaths are acted: "acted" in the double sense that something is actually done and that that something constitutes a pretense. The importance of being able to make this distinction between an enacted imitation and the thing itself is brought out in Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626). In the plot of this play a professional actor is dragged into an amorous and deadly theatricalization of actual life. A theatre in which all passions are pretended and no actors die is juxtaposed with an "actuality" in which real passions and real deaths are "staged." Thematically Massinger's play examines the disastrous results, in an extreme case, of the inability to perceive, and the refusal to acknowledge, the differences between theatrical imitation and theatricalized actuality. But the play, being merely a play, belongs unequivocally in the former category, of course, and with this understanding we may perceive a fusion of the pretended and the actual that takes place in a distinctively artistic realm. For us, the actual is the performance itself and the pretended what is represented: for d'Aubignac (Db/224) the pretense lay in the acting, the truth (which might be historical) in the text.

In *The Roman Actor*, as commonly in plays using plays within plays, attention is drawn, teasingly, to the fact that the spectators' attention is given simultaneously to the acting and to what is acted. This doubleness occurs in the interplay between the predetermination of a text, in which everything has been decided, and the freedom of a performance, in which there is something unpredictable in every successive moment. The role of the actor-protagonist is so devised by Massinger that, in the playing of it, it will ultimately be impossible for the spectators to differentiate between an actor acting a role and an actor acting the role of an actor acting a role. But thematically the difference is a matter of life and death. Thomas Heywood, on the contrary, and like many others before and since, cheerfully asserts the theatricality of all existence and hence the vast importance of actors and theatre. This conception of a *theatrum mundi* attributes to the

theatre (and the world) the self-reflexivity that some modern literary theorists find in literary and phenomenal "texts."

It has been observed that the notion of the "dramatic" may be almost indefinitely extended "to the television situation comedy or, indeed, to that briefest of dramatic forms, the television or radio commercial" (Esslin 1977, 12-13). But, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, there is "no greater contrast than that of the stage play to a work of art that is completely subject to or, like the film, founded in, mechanical reproduction" (1968, 231). The drama found in the live theatre is quite distinct from the "drama" of cinema and television and the distinction is as significant as the fact that, despite many dire prognostications, the dramatic theatre has survived into the second half of the twentieth century. The theatre in which a playscript is performed remains a distinct and significant artistic form, and this is the form with which the texts in this volume are concerned.

The choice of texts and extracts for this volume has been difficult. The editors have tried to do some justice to closely reasoned and detailed theoretical arguments, even when they have to be extracted from long works, and not to reduce documents to "representative" snippets in an effort to be nominally more inclusive. Even so, some harsh cutting has been required. Also regrettable is that, with the exception of the Jonson selection, extracts from plays have been excluded because the theoretical matter in them is usually too deeply imbedded in the text and structure of the whole work. With much less reluctance, documents that defend or attack the stage without addressing theoretical questions have also been excluded, notwithstanding their historical importance. Plato is allowed (though briefly) his say but thereafter we have assumed that the question of whether or not theatre should be permitted is not a critical one for this volume. Finally it should be noted that though, for convenience, the arrangement of texts is chronological (as it will be in the subsequent volumes), they have been chosen for their intrinsic theoretical interest.

2

PLATO

(429-327 B.C.)

Not until the fourth century B.C. (the century following the great age of Greek drama) do we find any extensive treatment, in Greece, of such subjects as "the arts," including poetry and drama, and of their place in society. Most philosophic speculation before Socrates (Plato's mentor), who lived towards the end of the fifth century, had been concerned with larger matters, such as the nature of the universe. Socrates and the Sophists (his frequent dialectical opponents) were the first Greek thinkers to be primarily concerned with man and his works. Of the thought of Socrates (who wrote nothing) we have only what is attributed to him in Plato's dialogues; of the writings of the Sophists (who were more interested in rhetoric than in poetry and drama) little has remained extant. However, it seems likely from echoes in contemporary dramatists (Euripides, for example, and most notably Aristophanes) that such matters as criteria of poetic excellence, standards of taste, stylistic parody, suitable topics for dramatic competition, and so on, were at least the subject of cultivated conversation in Socrates' and the Sophists' day.

It is perhaps unfortunate and, in some ways, misleading that the first extant serious treatment which we have from the Greeks on the place of the arts in society should be mainly – entirely as far as the dramatic arts are concerned – of a negative and censorious nature. As we shall see, some explanation for this treatment in Plato's *Republic* can be found in the particular contexts in which the discussions arise and, negative though it is, Plato's treatment is of considerable importance. In the first place, it raises, in admittedly extreme form, issues about the social and moral effect of the arts (and particularly of the dramatic arts) which have exercised society up to the present day. In the second place, Book 10 of the *Republic* introduces, perhaps for the first time, the concept of art, and particularly of poetry, as in some sense an imitation of life and of the world around us. Plato's use of the word *mimesis* (imitation) in connection with the arts varies considerably, as we shall see, with the dialectical context of his argument, and his most celebrated exploitation of this "connection" in the *Republic*, Book 10 is one which was possible only within his own metaphysical system. Nevertheless the germ of the long-lived concept of art as imitation of life goes back to one of the passages from Plato's *Republic* printed below.

Plato's shifting use of such words as *mimesis* serves to highlight a feature of this philosopher's dialogues to which readers unfamiliar with them should be alerted. Words which we are inclined to view as terms denoting fixed and clearly defined concepts had, for the most part, not achieved that status at the time when Plato was writing. (Aristotle's usage, in this respect, is quite different.) Plato himself tends to exacerbate this shifting, chameleon-like quality in language by the uniquely dialectical (i.e., basically conversational and argumentative) quality of his discourse. ("Wherever the *logos* leads us, there shall we follow it," as he makes

Socrates say.) Thus words tend not so much to change their basic meaning as to have those meanings undergo various different applications (and even valuations) according to the ever-changing context of the dialectical progression.

The discussion of the arts (*mousike* – which includes the dramatic arts) in the *Republic* arises first in connection with the education of the guardians (who are eventually described as "the philosopher kings") of the ideal state which "Socrates" has been envisaging in order to discover the nature of Justice. Thus it is important to remember that all statements about the arts in Books 2 and 3 of this dialogue are determined by their function of helping to produce the best guardians of the *polis* or state. It has already been decided that each citizen will concentrate on the one task or duty, and that task only, which the state has assigned to him, and this principle of specialization has an important bearing on the treatment of the arts in the guardians' education. Considering solely the moral effect that poets' stories may have on future guardians, Plato's Socrates insists on rigorous censorship of these tales. He goes on, in the passage from Book 3 printed below, to consider the different styles (*lexeis*) of poetic composition and he applies the same criterion (moral effect) with equal rigor. The style described as "imitative" refers here to the dramatic style and it is rejected lest the diversity of imitations involved should distract the guardian from his single and specialized function.

In the second excerpt, which comes from the *Republic*, Book 10, poetry is discussed in rather different terms. In the intervening argument certain conclusions have been reached (about the nature of truth and about the nature of man's soul) which make it possible to question more fundamentally the place of honor which the poet has traditionally held in the state. True being has been shown (in Book 5) to reside in the realm of Ideas, of the single ideal forms ("Beauty," "Honor," "Justice," and so on) which lie behind the many particulars of the world around us; this latter world of appearances, of *phenomena*, then, is merely the reflection of the ideal realm. In their "imitations," the artist and the poet take one step further from truth and reality than the phenomenal world. Secondly, man's soul has been shown (in Book 4) to consist of three parts, the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive: it is now discovered that poetry as a whole and dramatic poetry in particular appeal to the irrational part of the soul and so threaten the dominance, necessary for the soul's just and proper functioning, of its rational element. A clue to the rigorous and categorical nature of Plato's exclusion of poetry from the ideal state in the *Republic*, Book 10, and to the terms (both epistemological and psychological) selected for that exclusion, appears toward the end of the discussion: there, when "Socrates" is made to refer to "the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy," Plato reveals, perhaps, the fundamental reason for the exclusion of poets from the ideal state: that the Greeks looked on the poet as a teacher. Plato, it appears, would brook no rival to the philosopher in this capacity. That is why he so categorically demonstrates, in the *Republic*, Book 10, that, in terms of its relation to truth and of its psychological effect, poetry cannot compete with philosophy as a guide to truth and right behavior.

Two other dialogues, the *Ion* and the *Phaedrus*, also reflect the view that the poet has no share in rationally acquired knowledge. Both these dialogues do, however, accord a certain kind of visionary inspiration to the poet: the *Phaedrus* briefly, where "possession by the Muses" is spoken of as one of the useful forms of madness; the *Ion* more playfully but at greater length. In this latter dialogue, the operation of the Muse's inspiration is likened to a magnet from which are suspended a series of rings, first the poet, second the rhapsode or professional reciter (who is also equated

with the *hypocrites* or actor), and third the audience or spectator. Neither the poet nor the rhapsode operates by knowledge, or even by technical skill, but by divine dispensation (*theia moira*) or divine power (*theia dunamis*).

These passages referring to the poet's divine inspiration do suggest Plato's recognition that the poet did in fact have his own irrational access to truth, which the philosopher reaches by reason. Even in the *Republic* (at least in the earlier part of the discussion) the poet who accepts the philosopher's restrictions, and embodies "the semblance [or "image," *eikon*] of the good character" in his poems, is found acceptable and useful as preparing the way for the philosopher. It seems unlikely, however, that the *dramatic* poet could ever (for reasons which appear in the passages below) have achieved even this measure of approval from drama's severest ancient critic.

For further reading

Greene 1918; McKeon 1952; Nettleship 1891.

From the *Republic*¹

BOOK 3

392 "... Is not everything that is said by fabulists or poets a narration of past, present, or future things?"

"What else could it be?" he said.

"Do not they proceed either by pure narration or by a narrative that is effected through imitation,² or by both?"

"This too," he said, "I still need to have made plainer."

"I seem to be a ridiculous and obscure teacher," I said; "so like men who are unable to express themselves I won't try to speak in wholes and universals but will separate off a particular part and by the example of that try to show you my meaning. Tell me. Do you know the first lines of the *Iliad* in which the poet says that Chryses implored Agamemnon to release his daughter, and that the king was angry and that Chryses, failing of his request, imprecated curses on the Achaeans in his prayers to the God?"

393 "I do."

"You know then that as far as these verses,

And prayed unto all the Achaeans,

Chiefly to Atreus' sons, twin leaders who marshalled the people,

¹ The following passages (very slightly modified) are from Plato/Shorey 1937. Shorey's translation is based principally on the Teubner edition (Plato/Hermann 1855). The numbers in the margins are conventionally used references derived from the pagination of the "Stephanus" edition.

² "Imitation" (*mimesis*): Earlier (at 373b) "Socrates" has used the word "imitators" to include poets and painters as well as actors and others connected with the performing arts. In the present passage, the word "imitation" refers only to "impersonation." Later, in the different dialectical context of Book 10, "imitation" will be given a much broader application. See the introductory note on the dialectical use of this word.

the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking. But what follows he delivers as if he were himself Chryses and tries as far as may be to make us feel that Homer is not the speaker, but the priest, an old man. And in this manner he has carried on nearly all the rest of his narration about affairs in Ilium, all that happened in Ithaca, and the entire *Odyssey*."

"Quite so," he said.

"Now, it is narration, is it not, both when he presents the several speeches and the matter between the speeches?"

"Of course."

"But when he delivers a speech as if he were someone else, shall we not say that he then assimilates thereby his own diction as far as possible to that of the person whom he announces as about to speak?"

"We shall obviously."

"And is not likening one's self to another in speech or bodily bearing an imitation of him to whom one likens one's self?"

"Surely."

"In such case then, it appears, he and the other poets effect their narration through imitation."

"Certainly."

"But if the poet should conceal himself nowhere, then his entire fiction and narration would have been accomplished without imitation. And lest you may say again that you don't understand, I will explain to you how this would be done. If Homer, after telling us that Chryses came with the ransom of his daughter and as a suppliant of the Achaeans but chiefly of the kings, had gone on speaking not as if made or being Chryses but still as Homer, you are aware that it would not be imitation but narration, pure and simple. . . ."

394 "I understand," he said.

"Understand then," said I, "that the opposite of this arises when one removes the words of the poet between and leaves the alternation of speeches."

"This too I understand," he said, "— it is what happens in tragedy."

"You have conceived me most rightly," I said, "and now I think I can make plain to you what I was unable to before, that there is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation, as you remarked, tragedy and comedy; and another which employs the recital of the poet himself, best exemplified, I presume, in the dithyramb (Ar/40);³ and there is again that which employs both, in epic poetry and in many other places, if you apprehend me."

"I understand now," he said, "what you then meant."

³ The dithyramb was a form of choral lyric containing a large element of narrative. Aristotle tells us that tragedy originated from improvisations by the leaders of the dithyramb sung in honor of the god Dionysus.

"Recall then also the preceding statement that we were done with the 'what' of the speech and still had to consider the 'how.'"

"I remember."

"What I meant then was just this, that we must reach a decision whether we are to allow our poets to narrate as imitators or in part as imitators and in part not, and what sort of things in each case, or not allow them to imitate at all."

"I suppose," he said, "that you are considering whether we shall admit tragedy and comedy into our city or not."

"Perhaps," said I, "and perhaps even more than that. For I certainly do not yet know myself, but wherever the wind, as it were, of the argument blows, there lies our course."

"Well said," he replied.

"This then, Adeimantus, is the point we must keep in view, do we wish our guardians to be good mimics or not?⁴ Or is this also a consequence of what we said before, that each one could practice well only one pursuit and not many, but if he attempted the latter, dabbling in many things, he would be mediocre in all?"

"Of course it is."

"And does not the same rule hold for imitation, that the same man is not able to imitate many things as well as he can one?"

"No, he is not."

395 "Still less, then, will he be able to combine the practice of any worthy pursuit with the imitation of many things and the quality of a mimic; since, unless I mistake, the same men cannot practice well at once even the two forms of imitation that appear most nearly akin, as the writing of tragedy and comedy? Did you not just call these two imitations?"

"I did, and you are right in saying that the same men are not able to succeed in both, nor yet to be at once good rhapsodes and actors."

"True. But neither can the same men be actors for tragedies and comedies – and all these are imitations, are they not?"

"Yes, imitations."

"And to still smaller coinage than this, in my opinion, Adeimantus, proceeds the fractioning of human faculty, so as to be incapable of imitating many things or of doing the things themselves of which the imitations are likenesses."

"Most true," he replied.

⁴ In discussing whether indiscriminately imitative poetry (i.e., drama) is to be admitted as part of the guardians' education, "Socrates" seems to slip into considering whether the guardians *themselves* should be such indiscriminate imitators. This is, however, merely a telescoping of a continuous argument: the basis of accepting or rejecting such imitative poetry is the consideration of its potential effect on the guardians, who, it is implied, will imitate what is imitated in the theatre. Adeimantus is one of the two young friends of "Socrates" who initially challenge him to consider the nature of justice. He and Glaucon (who appears later in this extract) are two of "Socrates'" five interlocutors in the *Republic*.

"If, then, we are to maintain our original principle, that our guardians, released from all other crafts, are to be expert craftsmen of civic liberty, and pursue nothing else that does not conduce to this, it would not be fitting for these to do nor yet to imitate anything else. But if they imitate they should from childhood up imitate what is appropriate to them – men, that is, who are brave, sober, pious, free and all things of that kind; but things unbecoming the free man they should neither do nor be clever at imitating, nor yet any other shameful thing, lest from the imitation they imbibe the reality. Or have you not observed that imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and (second) nature in the body, the speech, and the thought?"

"Yes, indeed," said he.

"We will not then allow our charges, whom we expect to prove good men, being men, to play the parts of women and imitate a woman young or old wrangling with her husband, defying heaven, loudly boasting, fortunate in her own conceit, or involved in misfortune and possessed by grief and lamentation – still less a woman that is sick, in love, or in labor."

"Most certainly not," he replied.

"Nor may they imitate slaves, female and male, doing the offices of slaves."

"No, not that either."

396 "Nor yet, as it seems, bad men who are cowards and who do the opposite of the things we just now spoke of, reviling and lampooning one another, speaking foul words in their cups or when sober and in other ways sinning against themselves and others in word and deed after the fashion of such men. And I take it they must not form the habit of likening themselves to madmen either in words nor yet in deeds. For while knowledge they must have both of mad and bad men and women, they must do and imitate nothing of this kind."

"Most true," he said.

"What of this?" I said, "– are they to imitate smiths and other craftsmen or the rowers of triremes and those who call the time to them or other things connected therewith?"

"How could they," he said, "since it will be forbidden them even to pay any attention to such things?"

"Well, then, neighing horses and lowing bulls, and the noise of rivers and the roar of the sea and the thunder and everything of that kind – will they imitate these?"

"No, they have been forbidden," he said, "to be mad or liken themselves to madmen."

"If, then, I understand your meaning," said I, "there is a form of diction and narrative in which the really good and true man would narrate anything that he had to say, and another form unlike this to which the

man of the opposite birth and breeding would cleave and in which he would tell his story."⁵

"What are these forms?" he said.

"A man of the right sort, I think, when he comes in the course of his narrative to some word or act of a good man will be willing to impersonate the other in reporting it, and will feel no shame at that kind of mimicry, by preference imitating the good man when he acts steadfastly and sensibly, and less and more reluctantly when he is upset by sickness or love or drunkenness or any other mishap. But when he comes to someone unworthy of himself, he will not wish to liken himself in earnest to one who is inferior, except in the few cases where he is doing something good, but will be embarrassed both because he is unpracticed in the mimicry of such characters, and also because he shrinks in distaste from moulding and fitting himself to the types of baser things. His mind disdains them, unless it be for jest."

"Naturally," he said.

"Then the narrative that he will employ will be of the kind that we just now illustrated by the verses of Homer, and his diction will be one that partakes of both, of imitation and simple narration, but there will be a small portion of imitation in a long discourse – or is there nothing in what I say?"

397 "Yes, indeed," he said, "that is the type and pattern of such a speaker, the more debased he is the less will he shrink from imitating anything and everything. He will think nothing unworthy of himself, so that he will attempt, seriously and in the presence of many, to imitate all things, including those we just now mentioned – claps of thunder, and the noise of wind and hail and axles and pulleys, and the notes of trumpets and flutes and pan-pipes, and the sounds of all instruments, and the cries of dogs, sheep, and birds; and so his style will depend wholly on imitation in voice and gesture, or will contain but a little of pure narration."

"That too follows of necessity," he said. . . .

"And do all poets and speakers hit upon one type or the other of diction or some blend which they combine of both?"

"They must," he said.

"What, then," said I, "are we to do? Shall we admit all of these into the city, or one of the unmixed types, or the mixed type?"

"If my vote prevails," he said, "the unmixed imitator of the good."

"No, but the mixed type also is pleasing, Adeimantus, and far most

⁵ "Socrates" has already spoken of all poetry as narration (*diegesis*) of some kind, and has then introduced the distinctions of "pure narration," "narrative by imitation" (drama), and "narrative involving a mixture of the two." He is now distinguishing two kinds within this *third* (or "mixed") type. Of these, the one which involves imitations other than that of the good man is to be excluded from the state. Thus even some Homeric epic poetry will, like drama, be eliminated.

pleasing to boys and their tutors and the great mob is the opposite of your choice."

"It is the most pleasing."

"But perhaps," said I, "you would affirm it to be ill-suited to our polity, because there is no twofold or manifold man among us, since every man does one thing."⁶

"It is not suited."

"And is this not the reason why such a city is the only one in which we shall find the cobbler a cobbler and not a pilot in addition to his cobbling, and the farmer a farmer and not a judge added to his farming, and the soldier a soldier and not a money-maker in addition to his soldiery, and so of all the rest?"

"True," he said.

398 "If a man, then, it seems, who was capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool, but we ourselves, for our souls' good, should continue to employ the more austere and less delightful poet and tale-teller, who would imitate the diction of the good man. . . ."

BOOK 10

595 "And truly," I said, "many other considerations assure me that we were entirely right in our organization of the state, and especially, I think, in the matter of poetry."

"What about it?" he said.

"In refusing to admit at all so much of it as is imitative; for that it is certainly not to be received is, I think, still more plainly apparent now that we have distinguished the several parts of the soul."⁷

"What do you mean?"

"Why, between ourselves – for you will not betray me to the tragic poets and all other imitators – that kind of art seems to be a corruption of the mind of all listeners who do not possess as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature."

"What is your idea in saying this?" he said.

⁶ We are here reminded that the basic "political" reason for rejecting indiscriminate poetic imitation is that it offends against the principle of specialization which, as has been established, is fundamental to the organization, the proper functioning, and, indirectly, to the justice of Plato's ideal state.

⁷ In Book 4, where the tripartite nature of the soul – with, ideally, the rational element in charge – has been described.

"I must speak out," I said, "though a certain love and reverence for Homer that has possessed me from a boy would stay me from speaking. For he appears to have been the first teacher and beginner of all these beauties of tragedy. Yet all the same we must not honor a man above truth, but, as I say, speak our minds."

"By all means," he said.

"Listen, then, or rather, answer my question."

"Ask it," he said.

"Could you tell me in general what imitation is?⁸ For neither do I myself quite apprehend what it would be at."

"It is likely, then," he said, "that I should apprehend!"

596 "It would be nothing strange," said I, "since it often happens that the dimmer vision sees things in advance of the keener."

"That is so," he said; "but in your presence I could not even be eager to try to state anything that appears to me, but do you yourself consider it."

"Shall we, then, start the inquiry at this point by our customary procedure? We are in the habit, I take it, of positing a single idea or form in the case of the various multiplicities to which we give the same name. Do you not understand?"

"I do."

"In the present case, then, let us take any multiplicity you please; for example, there are many couches and tables."

"Of course."

"But these utensils imply, I suppose, only two ideas or forms, one of a couch and one of a table."

"Yes."

"And are we not also in the habit of saying that the craftsman who produces either of them fixes his eyes on the idea or form, and so makes in one case the couches and in the other the tables that we use, and similarly of other things? For surely no craftsman makes the idea itself. How could he?"

"By no means."

"But now consider what name you would give to this craftsman."

"What one?"

"Him who makes all the things that all craftsmen severally produce."

"A truly clever and wondrous man you tell of."

"Ah, but wait, and you will say so indeed, for this same craftsman is not

⁸ Here Plato seems to be warning us that he is about to talk about "imitation" (*mimesis*) in a way somewhat different from that of his earlier discussion. In the new context, the arts, and especially poetry, are to be considered in relation to truth or "reality," as it has been defined in Book 5 (see introductory note): considered in these terms, we may find that far more than those parts of poetry which involve impersonation may now turn out to be "imitation" and to be unacceptable for somewhat different reasons from those previously advanced – hence the hint, a sentence or so earlier, that Homer, too, may now be subject to rejection.

only able to make all implements, but he produces all plants and animals, including himself, and thereto earth and heaven and the gods and all things in heaven and in Hades under the earth."

"A most marvelous sophist," he said.

"Are you incredulous?" said I. "Tell me, do you deny altogether the possibility of such a craftsman, or do you admit that in a sense there could be such a creator of all these things, and in another sense not? Or do you not perceive that you yourself would be able to make all these things in a way?"

"And in what way, I ask you," he said.

"There is no difficulty," said I, "but it is something that the craftsman can make everywhere and quickly. You could do it most quickly if you should choose to take a mirror and carry it about everywhere. You will speedily produce the sun and all the things in the sky, and speedily the earth and yourself and the other animals and implements and plants and all the objects of which we just now spoke."

"Yes," he said, "the appearance of them, but not the reality and the truth."

"Excellent," said I, "and you come to the aid of the argument opportunely. For I take it that the painter too belongs to this class of producers, does he not?"

"Of course."

"But you will say, I suppose, that his creations are not real and true. And yet, after a fashion, the painter too makes a couch, does he not?"

"Yes," he said, "the appearance of one, he too."

597 "What of the cabinet-maker? Were you not just now saying that he does not make the idea or form which we say is the real couch, the couch itself, but only some particular couch?"

"Yes, I was."

"Then if he does not make that which really is, he could not be said to make real being but something that resembles real being but is not that. But if anyone should say that being in the complete sense belongs to the work of the cabinet-maker or to that of other craftsman, it seems that he would say what is not true."

"That would be the view," he said, "of those who are versed in this kind of reasoning."

"We must not be surprised, then, if this too is only a dim adumbration in comparison with reality."

"No, we must not."

"Shall we, then, use these very examples in our quest for the true nature of this imitator?"

"If you please," he said.

"We get, then, these three couches, one, that in nature, which, I take it, we would say that God produces, or who else?"

"No one, I think."

"And then there was one which the carpenter made."

"Yes," he said.

"And one which the painter made. Is not that so?"

"So be it."

"The painter, then, the cabinet-maker, and God, there are these three presiding over three kinds of couches."

"Yes, three."

"Now God, whether because he so willed or because some compulsion was laid upon him not to make more than one couch in nature, so wrought and created one only, the couch which really and in itself is. But two or more such were never created by God and never will come into being."

"How so?" he said.

"Because," said I, "if he should make only two, there would again appear one of which they both would possess the form or idea, and that would be the couch that really is in and of itself, and not the other two."

"Right," he said.

"God, then, I take it, knowing this and wishing to be the real creator of the couch that has real being, and not a particular cabinet-maker of some particular couch, produced it in nature unique."

"So it seems."

"Shall we, then, call him its true and natural begetter, or something of the kind?"

"That would certainly be right," he said, "since it is by and in nature that he has made this and all other things."

"And what of the carpenter? Shall we not call him the creator of a couch?"

"Yes."

"Shall we also say that the painter is the creator and maker of that sort of thing?"

"By no means."

"What will you say he is in relation to the couch?"

"This," said he, "seems to me the most reasonable designation for him, that he is the imitator of the thing which those others produce."

"Very good," said I; "the producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator?"

"By all means," he said.

"This, then, will apply to the maker of tragedies also, if he is an imitator and is in his nature three removes from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators." ...

598 "Then the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and this, it seems, is the reason why it can produce everything, because it touches or lays hold of only a small part of the object and that a phantom; as, for example, a

painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter."

"Why not?"

"But for all that, my friend, this, I take it, is what we ought to bear in mind in all such cases: when anyone reports to us of someone, that he has met a man who knows all the crafts and everything else that men severally know, and that there is nothing that he does not know more exactly than anybody else, our tacit rejoinder must be that he is a simple fellow, who apparently has met some magician or sleight-of-hand man and imitator and has been deceived by him into the belief that he is all-wise, because of his own inability to put to the proof and distinguish knowledge, ignorance and imitation."

"Most true," he said.

"Then," said I, "have we not next to scrutinize tragedy and its leader Homer,⁹ since some people tell us that these poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine? For the good poet, if he is to poetize things rightly, must, they argue, create with knowledge or else be unable to create. So we must consider whether these
599 critics have not fallen in with such imitators and been deceived by them, so that looking upon their works they cannot perceive that these are three removes from reality, and easy to produce without knowledge of the truth. For it is phantoms, not realities, that they produce. Or is there something in their claim, and do good poets really know the things about which the multitude fancy they speak well? ..."

601 ... "Now do not the excellence, the beauty, the rightness of every implement, living thing, and action refer solely to the use for which each is made or by nature adapted?"

"That is so."

"It quite necessarily follows, then, that the user of anything is the one who knows most of it by experience, and that he reports to the maker the good or bad effects in use of the thing he uses. As, for example, the flute-player reports to the flute-maker which flutes respond and serve rightly in flute-playing, and will order the kind that must be made, and the other will obey and serve him."

"Of course."

"The one, then, possessing knowledge, reports about the goodness or the badness of the flutes, and the other, believing, will make them."

"Yes."

⁹ In *Republic*, Book 10 Plato is particularly concerned to assail the traditional status of the poet as teacher and moral authority in the community. Homer stands at the head of that tradition.