

peculiar to tragedy. Consequently anyone who understands what is good and bad in tragedy also understands about epic, since anything that epic poetry has is also present in tragedy, but what is present in tragedy is not all in epic poetry.

4. TRAGEDY: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Definition*

- 6 We shall discuss the art of imitation in hexameter verse and comedy later;²² as for tragedy, let us resume the discussion by stating the definition of its essence on the basis of what has already been said.

Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts; performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification²³ of such emotions.

(By 'language made pleasurable' I mean that which possesses rhythm and melody, i.e. song. By the separation of its species I mean that some parts are composed in verse alone; others by contrast make use of song.)

4.2 *Component parts*

Since the imitation is performed by actors, it follows first of all that the management of the *spectacle* must be a component part of tragedy. Then there is *lyric poetry* and *diction*, since these are the medium in which the actors perform the imitation. (By 'diction' I mean the

actual composition of the verse; what is meant by 'lyric poetry' is self-evident.)

Now, tragedy is an imitation of an action, and the action is performed by certain agents. These must be people of a certain kind with respect to their character and reasoning. (It is on the basis of people's character and reasoning that we say that their actions are of a certain kind, and in respect of their actions that people enjoy success or failure.) So *plot* is the imitation of the action (by 'plot' here I mean the organization of events); *character* is that in respect of which we say that the agent is of a certain kind; and *reasoning* is the speech which the agents use to argue a case or put forward an opinion.

So tragedy as a whole necessarily has six component parts, which determine the tragedy's quality: i.e. plot, character, diction, reasoning, spectacle and lyric poetry. The medium of imitation comprises two parts, the mode one, and the object three; and there is nothing apart from these.

4.3 *The primacy of plot*

Virtually all tragedians, one might say, use these formal elements; for in fact every drama alike has spectacle, character, plot, diction, song and reasoning.²⁴ But the most important of them is the structure of the events:

- (i) Tragedy is not an imitation of persons, but of actions and of life. Well-being and ill-being reside in action, and the goal of life is an activity, not a quality; people possess certain qualities in accordance with their character, but they achieve well-being or its opposite on the basis of how they fare. So the imitation of character is not the purpose of what the agents do; character is included along with and on account of the actions. So the events, i.e. the plot, are what tragedy is there for, and that is the most important thing of all.

common to all tragedies, while songs from the stage and dirges are found only in some.

The *prologue* is the whole part of a tragedy before the entry-song of the chorus; an *episode* is a whole part of a tragedy between whole choral songs; the *finale* is the whole part of a tragedy after which there is no choral song. Of the choral part, the *entry-song* is the first whole utterance of a chorus; an *ode* is a choral song without anapaests or trochaics; a *dirge* is a lament shared by the chorus and from the stage.

We have already mentioned the component parts of tragedy which should be regarded as its formal elements. In quantitative terms, the separate parts into which it is divided are these.⁴⁰

7. THE BEST KINDS OF TRAGIC PLOT

7.1 *First introduction*

- 13 What, then, should one aim at and what should one avoid in constructing plots? What is the source of the effect at which tragedy aims? These are the topics which would naturally follow on from what has just been said.

7.2 *First deduction*

The construction of the best tragedy should be complex rather than simple; and it should also be an imitation of events that evoke fear and pity, since that is the distinctive feature of this kind of imitation. So it is clear first of all that decent men should not be seen undergoing a change from good fortune to bad fortune – this does not evoke fear or pity, but disgust. Nor should depraved people be seen

undergoing a change from bad fortune to good fortune – this is the least tragic of all: it has none of the right effects, since it is neither agreeable, nor does it evoke pity or fear. Nor again should a very wicked person fall from good fortune to bad fortune – that kind of structure would be agreeable, but would not excite pity or fear, since the one has to do with someone who is suffering undeservedly, the other with someone who is like ourselves (I mean, pity has to do with the undeserving sufferer, fear with the person like us); so what happens will evoke neither pity nor fear.

We are left, therefore, with the person intermediate between these. This is the sort of person who is not outstanding in moral excellence or justice; on the other hand, the change to bad fortune which he undergoes is not due to any moral defect or depravity, but to an error⁴¹ of some kind. He is one of those people who are held in great esteem and enjoy great good fortune, like Oedipus, Thyestes, and distinguished men from that kind of family.

It follows that a well-formed plot will be simple⁴² rather than (as some people say) double, and that it must involve a change not to good fortune from bad fortune, but (on the contrary) from good fortune to bad fortune – and this must be due not to depravity but to a serious error on the part of someone of the kind specified (or better than that, rather than worse). There is evidence of this in practice. At first poets used to pick out stories at random; but nowadays the best tragedies are constructed around a few households, e.g. about Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus and any others whose lot it has been to experience something terrible – or to perform some terrible action.⁴³

So the best tragedy, in artistic terms, is based on this structure. This is why those who criticize Euripides for doing this in his tragedies, most of which end in bad fortune, are making the same mistake;⁴⁴ for this is, as has been stated, correct. There is very powerful evidence for this. On stage and in performance people recognize that plays of this kind (provided that they are successfully executed) are the most tragic, and Euripides, even if his technique is