

Julius Caesar Scaliger

1484-1558

A GOOD ILLUSTRATION of the fate of certain classical ideas at the hands of later writers is provided by Scaliger's *Poetics*. Scaliger was influenced by Aristotle and Horace, but perhaps more so by the rhetorical principles of Cicero and Quintilian. Indeed, the attitude of the rhetorician dominates his approach, and he runs the danger of reducing poetry to oratory. He adopts Horace's maxim that poetry should delight and teach, but emphasizes persuasion. Eventually he considers the poet's moral purpose paramount.

A philosopher, Scaliger often echoes Aristotle, but he vulgarizes him in a number of ways. This can be seen in his additions to Aristotle's definition of tragedy and in his own treatment of comedy. He plunges into the ongoing dialogues, begun by Aristotle, concerning the differences between poetry and history, quarreling with him over Empedocles. Scaliger tends to equate poetry with verse and generally muddles an issue that was already difficult enough. Part of this lack of coherence is a result of his confusing or at least leaping back and forth between several points of view. On one occasion he tries to make his distinction purely in terms of the medium and on another he seeks to do so in terms of subject matter. In the process he makes statements that are reminiscent of a distinction made by Plato in the *Sophist* between icastic and fantastic imitation: "the poet depicts quite another sort of nature, and a variety of fortunes; in fact, by so doing, he transforms himself almost into a second deity." This idea was later taken up and somewhat elaborated by Sidney. It has interesting implications for a theory of creative imagination like that of the Romantic period—the identification of the poet as maker of his world with God as the maker of his—but neither Scaliger nor Sidney follows it up, and it is wrong to attribute to them an epistemological position that did not develop until two centuries later.

Scaliger carries Aristotle's procedure of classification to an extreme and seems to regard it almost as an end in itself. Scaliger is imprisoned by his own procedures. His classifications are not in themselves illuminating.

The only translation of *Poetics* is that by F. M. Padelford, *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics* (1905). See also Vernon Hall, Jr., *Life of Julius Caesar Scaliger, 1484-1558* (1950).

FROM

POETICS

Everything that pertains to mankind may be classed as necessary, useful, or pleasure-giving, and by an inherent characteristic of all these classes the power of speech was implanted in man from the very beginning, or, as time went on, was acquired. Since man's development depended upon learning, he could not do without that agency which was destined to make him the partaker of wisdom. Our speech is, as it were, the postman of the mind, through the services of whom civil gatherings are announced, the arts are cultivated, and the claims of wisdom intercede with men for man. It is of course necessary to secure from others those things which we need, to give orders to have things done, to prohibit, to propose, to dispose, to establish, and to abolish. Such were the functions of early speech.

Then the usefulness and effectiveness of language were increased by rules governing construction, dimensions, as it were, being given to a rude and formless body. Thus arose the established laws of speech. Later, language was adorned and embellished as with raiments, and then it appeared illustrious both in form and in spirit. As to an undefined body the metric science appoints breadth, angles, and length—the masters of harmony also add proportion, the *ῥυθμοί* of the Greeks—so to an unordered language law first gave the so-called rules. Next, more careful cultivation added knowledge of windings, of valleys and hills, of retreats, of light and shade. To speak figuratively, such cultivation afforded the soldier his necessary armor, the senator his useful toga, or the more elegant citizen his richer pleasure robe. Not unlike these were the ends which language served, since necessity demanded language in the search of the philosophers after truth, utility dictated its cultivation in statesmanship, and pleasure drew it to the theater. The language of the philosophers, confined to exact, logical reasoning, was necessarily concise and adapted to the subject matter. On the other hand, in the forum and the camp less precise expression was permissible,

governed by the subject, the place, the time, and the audience, and such speaking was called oratory. The third class contains two species, not very unlike, which in common employ narration, and use much embellishment. They differ, however, in that one professes to record the fixed truth, and employs a simple style of composition, while the other either adds a fictitious element to the truth, or imitates the truth by fiction, of course with more elaboration. While, as we have said, they are both equally narrative in character, the name *history* came to be applied to the former alone, since, I suppose, it was satisfied merely with that field of writing adapted to setting forth actual events. On the other hand, the latter was called *poetry*, or *making*, because it narrated not only actual events, but also fictitious events as if they were actual, and represented them as they might be or ought to be. Wherefore the basis of all poetry is imitation.

Imitation, however, is not the end of poetry, but is intermediate to the end. The end is the giving of instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry teaches, and does not simply amuse, as some used to think.¹ Whenever language is used, the purpose, of course, is to acquaint the hearer with a fact or with the thought of the speaker, but because the primitive poetry was sung, its design seemed merely to please; yet underlying the music was that for the sake of which music was provided only as a sauce. In time this rude and pristine invention was enriched by philosophy, which made poetry the medium of its teaching. Let it be further said that when poetry describes military counsels, at one time open and frank, at another crafty—the *στρατήγημα* of the Greeks—when it tells of tempests, of wars, of routs, of various artifices, all is for one purpose: it imitates that it may teach. So in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes, to the one who asked him, "What merit in a poet can arouse the greatest admiration for him?" Euripides made a good answer when he replied, "The ability to impress adroitly upon citizens the need of being better men." Plato was less happy in the *Ion* in saying that a rhapsodist cannot satisfactorily represent military or nautical doings, because such arts are foreign to him.² For the rhapsodist will say nothing worse about such things than the poet has written of them, since, as is

POETICS. *Poetika* was published first in 1561. The text is from F. M. Padelford, tr., *Select Translations from Scaliger's Poetics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1905).

¹ Scaliger adopts the Horatian position here, particularly against those early churchmen who would disparage poetry as trivial entertainment. See Horace, *Art of Poetry*, above, p. 73.

² See *Ion*, above, p. 18.

very well remarked in the same passage, while the poet is the imitator of things, the rhapsodist is he who acts out the imitation, and according as the poet represents, the rhapsodist can reproduce.

Now is there not one end, and one only, in philosophical exposition, in oratory, and in the drama? Assuredly such is the case. All have one and the same end—persuasion; for, you see, just as we were saying above, whenever language is used it either expresses a fact or the opinion of the speaker. The end of learning is knowledge, that is, knowledge, of course, interpreted in no narrow sense. An accurate and simple definition of knowledge is as follows: Belief based either upon conclusive evidence, or upon a loose notion. Thus we say, "I know that Dido committed suicide because Aeneas departed." Now we do not know any such thing, but this is popularly accepted as the truth. Persuasion, again, means that the hearer accepts the words of the speaker. The soul of persuasion is truth, truth either fixed and absolute, or susceptible of question. Its end is to convince, or to secure the doing of something. Truth, in turn, is agreement between that which is said about a thing and the thing itself.

By no means are we to accept the popular idea that eloquent speaking, rather than persuasion, is the end of oratory, for the arguments of the grammarians on this point are not valid. Clearly, if a man does not persuade, this is due to no fault of the art, but either to the issue, which it is beyond the power of the orator to control, wherefore he does not cease to be an orator, or to some defect of his own, which may either reside in his speaking or in the bad cause which he espouses. In this last case he is either no orator, or else he is a knave.

Eloquent speaking certainly cannot be the end, for obviously it is the means to an end, or a mode of the means. An end is not that which serves another end, but that which all serves, and so one uses eloquence that he may persuade. Moreover, you are not the arbiter of your eloquence, but the judge is, and if he does not think you eloquent, not only is your eloquence fruitless, but it is not eloquence at all. Therefore you may go away frustrated in your purpose, even though you have spoken eloquently. Further, it is not possible that both the defendant and the plaintiff should be equally eloquent; in fact it is necessary that one or the other should lose his cause, or should merit losing it. Therefore he will not be your orator whom you have picked out as eloquent.

Finally, in that treatise entitled *Εἰσαγωγικός*, attributed to Galen, and in that other work on the science of medicine, the *Σύστασις*, which is more confidently attributed to him, two kinds of arts are recognized.³ If Quintilian, by the way, had run across this idea in Plato, from whom Galen borrowed it, he would have changed his theory about the end of oratory. Two kinds there are, then. Arts of the one kind can attain their ends in and of themselves, such as shoemaking, carpentry, and the like; the others are not thus able, as oratory, medicine, and navigation. The latter arts the Greek denominate *στοχαστικά* ("conjectural"), because, as is stated in the *Philebus*,⁴ they proceed, so to speak, by conjecture, not by fixed principle. Now, for my part, I take a different view. Medicine always cures curable diseases, but the physician does not always do so, because he is embarrassed by many obstacles; wherefore in that case he fails to be a doctor. In fact the physician does not accept an incurable case unless he be careless, or stupid, greedy for fees, or rash. Further, accidents are wont to befall the sick, either through their own instrumentality, or that of their servants, or through some chance happening, as of the atmosphere, the sun, dampness, anger, grief, fear, and the like. Here belong what Hippocrates and other physicians call external agencies—*τὰ ἔξωθεν*. Indeed, not even nature herself is a perfectly reliable workman, for occasionally she is embarrassed and fails of her end, as when she produces a monstrosity, or brings forth defective bodies.

The orator, then, speaks in the forum that good may be meted to good men, and punishment to evil men; in assemblies and councils that public affairs may be well administered; and in eulogies that we may be won from evil by good example, and may pursue and practice that which is set forth as honest. In this class, the epideictic, certain invectives are to be included. Other kinds of invectives, however, belong to judicial bodies, such as those uttered in the presence of witnesses; still others to deliberative bodies, as the speeches against Antony and Catiline,⁵ and the addresses on consular provinces.

All of these different kinds of speaking have a

³ The two works mentioned by this Greek physician of the second century A.D. are probably *Introductio sive Medicus* and *On the Nature of Medicine*, respectively.

⁴ A dialogue of Plato's later years, primarily concerned with ethical questions.

⁵ Delivered by Cicero.

common end. To be sure, there are those who contend that in judicial proceedings the end is justice; in deliberative proceedings, utility; and in eulogies, honesty; but such are properly rebuked by Quintilian. The ground of the rebuke should be noted rather carefully, for not only do these men reason superficially, but they even contradict themselves. In fact, in another passage they confound utility with honesty. But all that aside, be it observed that utility is the end of all the virtues, wherefore also of justice. And since justice is the righteous payment to a man of that which is his own or its equivalent, justice is the end of deliberative counsels. Justice is even the end of war, for the councils of war—they are very many—are held for the sake of justice. Finally, if the end of man is virtue, honesty is either a state of mind induced by virtue, or it is the soul of virtue. Of every human office, of every act and thought, honesty will be the end.

We must consider even more carefully than did Quintilian the basis for the classification of the different kinds of speaking. That he might simplify the threefold division, he classified as follows: cases either are subject for judicial investigation, or are outside of it. The latter relate either to the past or to the future. Those relating to the past are epideictic; those of the future, deliberative. But now who does not appreciate that in judicial proceedings the past is involved? Wherefore it is not possible for the latter to form a subspecies of the judicial. So I would have altered the statement as follows: a case is either in the past or in the future; the latter alone prescribes deliberation; the former divides into the forensic, or judicial, and the epideictic. Although that discerning man, the disciple of the first philosopher, classed them as forensic, deliberative, and epideictic, an accused man is never tried or defended without praise or censure either of a person, an event, an act, a word, or a policy, and in like manner never without deliberation. Indeed, it is deliberated whether to convict or to acquit the defendant. So you see that there cannot be species or genera of cases, because no species of one is able to be part of another species.

Finally, it is improper, as some do, to call speeches of a deliberative nature hortatory, for persuasion is the end of all speaking. What else does an orator do than create confidence, and this, to persuade? Quintilian makes an equally bad mistake when he interprets the word *ἐπιδεικτικός* to mean ostentatious speaking, on the ground that the word usually had this

meaning among the Greeks. So far is this from the truth, that the philosophers used it to define the most simple and exact exposition.

Let it be observed, while we are on the subject, that in deliberative and judicial speaking the orator depends upon his audience. Indeed, the accomplishment of that purpose in behalf of which he essays to speak hinges upon the favor of his hearers. Let it be further noted, that in epideictic speaking the case is the opposite of this, inasmuch as the mind of the hearer is surrendered to the speaker. It is, indeed, as if he who adjudges praise were himself relieved from judgment. These points in which we differ from the recognized opinions of the rhetoricians must, from the very nature of my undertaking, be dwelt upon, just as we have dealt more accurately with various other matters. Thus we might say that the translative state could be subsumed under the conjectural,⁶ since in both, the fact being conceded, it is a question who is responsible for it. All kinds of speeches have this in common. The orator in the forum debates concerning life, vices, virtues, examining them in the state of quality, and in that in which inquiry is made concerning what is, just as in councils the question is what is to be preferred. But the philosopher and the poet deal with all such matters in the very same spirit, each in his own person or in that of another. As an illustration of the latter mode, Socrates introduces Diotima or Aspasia, and Plato brings forward Socrates; and the orator in like manner interjects personifications. If he would eulogize a man, he must needs touch upon the story of his life, his family, his nation; and this allies him with the historian. The historian, on his part, frequently adds a characterization, such as we read of Camillus, Scipio, Hannibal, Jugurtha, and Cicero; and, as it were, intersperses his decrees. But it is only poetry which includes everything of this kind, excelling those other arts in this, that while they, as we have said above, represent things just as they are, in some sense like a speaking picture,⁷ the poet depicts quite another sort of nature, and a variety of fortunes; in fact, by so doing, he transforms himself almost into a second deity.⁸ Of those things which the Maker of all framed, the other sciences are, as it were, overseers;

⁶ [Padelford] For these technical terms see Quintilian [*On the Training of an Orator*], III. vi. especially 45 ff.

⁷ See Horace, *Art of Poetry*, above, p. 73.

⁸ See Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, below, p. 157.

but since poetry fashions images of those things which are not, as well as images more beautiful than life of those things which are, it seems unlike other literary forms, such as history, which confine themselves to actual events, and rather to be another god, and to create. In view of this fact, its common title was furnished it, not by the agreement of men, but by the provident wisdom of nature. I must express my surprise that when the learned Greeks had most happily defined the poet as the *maker*, our ancestors should be so unfair to themselves as to limit the term to candle-makers, for though usage has sanctioned this practice, etymologically it is absurd.

We may make a threefold classification of poets, according to poetical inspiration, age, and subjects.⁹ Plato first, and then Aristotle, said that there are diversities of inspiration, for some men are born inspired, while others, born ignorant and rude, and even averse to the art, are seized on by the divine madness, and wrested from their lowliness. It is the work of the gods, who, though divine, use even these as their servants. Thus Plato himself, in the *Ion*, calls such men the interpreters and expounders of the gods. Wherefore the dictum expressed in the *Republic*, which some crude and insensible men would construe to the exclusion of poets from the republic, should be taken less seriously, for though he condemns certain scurrilous passages in the poets, we are not on that account to ignore those other passages which Plato cites times out of mind in support of his own theories. Plato should remark how many impertinent and low stories he himself employs, what filthy thoughts this Greek rogue often forces upon us. Surely the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and other such monstrous productions, are not worth reading.

The poets invoke the Muses, that the divine madness may imbue them to do their work. Of these divinely possessed ones, two classes are to be recognized. The one class are those to whom the divine power comes from above, with no mental effort on their part except the simple invocation. Hesiod classed

himself in this category, and Homer is placed there by universal consent. The other class is aroused by the fumes of unmixed wine, which draws out the instruments of the mind, the spirits themselves, from the material parts of the body. Horace said that Ennius was such a poet, and such we consider Horace himself. Tradition says the same of Alcaeus and Aristophanes. Alcman did not escape such censure, and Sophocles applied it to Aeschylus: "Wine," he said, "not Aeschylus, was the author of his tragedies."

Again, poets may be divided into three classes, according to the age in which they wrote. First, there was that pristine, crude, and uncultivated age, of which only a vague impression remains. No name survives, unless it be that of Apollo, as the originator of poetry. Then there is the second and venerable period, when religion and the mysteries are first sung. Among the poets of this period are numbered Orpheus, Musaeus, and Linus; Plato includes Olympus also. Of the third period Homer is the founder and parent, and it includes Hesiod and other such writers. If it were not for historical records, one could fancy that Musaeus was later than Homer, for he is more polished and refined. Aelian states that Oroeantius of Troezen, and Dares the Phrygian, flourished before Homer, and that in Homer's time the *Iliad* of Dares was held in esteem. The same author has it that Syager the poet even antedated Musaeus and Orpheus, and that he was the first to write of the Trojan war.

The third classification is according to subject matter. This the Greeks call *ὑποκειμένον*; our uncultivated philosophers, most correctly, subject; and the Latin philosophers, somewhat inappositely, argument. Of this class of poets there are as many kinds as there are styles of subjects treated. Yet for the sake of treatment, the poets may be classed under three principal heads. The first is that of the religious poets. Such are Orpheus and Amphion, whose art was so divine that they are believed to have given a soul to inanimate things. The second is that of the philosophical poets, and these again are of two sorts—natural, as Empedocles, Nicander, Aratus, and Lucretius; and moral, including the political, as Solon and Tyrtaeus; the economical, as Hesiod; and the general, as Phocylides, Theognis, and Pythagoras.

Now all that we have been saying may be equally well applied to women authors. They too merit praise. Such authors are Sappho; Corinna, the mistress of Pindar; Hedyle, the mother of the Samian or

⁹ Scaliger includes in his threefold classification a number of legendary Greek poets: in the classification according to age, those who antedate Homer, and in the classification according to subject matter, Orpheus, Amphion, and the Sibyls. The identity of Martius is unknown. The other Greek poets Scaliger mentions are known to have written between the seventh and first centuries B.C.

Athenian poet Hedylus, who excelled in iambic poetry; Megalostrata, whom Alcman loved, and others.

I leave it to the judgment of each one to determine whether or no the poetry of Martius and of the Sibyls should be referred to such categories as the above. My preference is not to do so, for they do not narrate past events, but predict future ones. This part of theology is not simply learning about the gods, but actual utterance of the things disclosed by the gods.

As for our poetry,¹⁰ Gellius is authority for the statement that it was born during the Second Punic War. Let me give his own choice words: "In the Second Punic War, with winged step the Muse bore herself to the warlike, rugged race of Romulus."¹¹ On the other hand, it is commonly received that Livius Andronicus wrote his dramas before Naevius, who gave his to the public in the year 519 (A. U. C.).¹²

Now that the poets are enumerated and classified, certain questions may receive attention. Why does Horace question whether or not comedy is poetry? Forsooth, because it is humble, must it be denied the title of poetry? Surely an unfortunate ruling! So far from comedy not being poetry, I would almost consider it the first and truest of all poetry, for comedy employs every kind of invention, and seeks for all kinds of material.

Another question: Was Lucan a poet? Surely he was. As usual, the grammarians deny this, and object that he wrote history. Well now! Produce a pure history. Lucan must differ from Livy, and the difference is verse. Verse is the property of the poet. Then who will deny that all epic poets go to history for their subjects? History, sometimes delineated only in semblance, sometimes idealized, and always with changed aspect, is made the basis of poetry. Is not this the practice of Homer? Do we not do this in the tragedies themselves? Such is the practice of Lucan. Instance the image of the country offering itself to Caesar, the spirit called forth from Hades, and other such episodes. Wherefore, indeed, it seems to me that it would be better to give the title of poet to Livy than to deny it to Lucan. For as the tragic poets base their plays upon true events, but adapt the actions and speeches to the characters, so Livy and

Thucydides insert orations which were never recognized by those to whom they were attributed. Moreover, although Aristotle exercised this censure so severely that he would refuse the name of poet to versifiers, yet in practice he speaks differently, and says: "As Empedocles poetically wrote (*ἐποίησεν*)"; so he even calls Empedocles, who feigned not at all, a poet.¹³

. . .

Tragedy and comedy are of the same genus, and share in common the name drama. Clearly this is not far from the thought that Plato touched upon, but did not elaborate, in the *Symposium*.

The grammarians did some more false teaching about comedy when they said that it was poetry based upon imitation, and consisted in gesticulation and delivery, for surely a comedy is no less a comedy if it be read in silence. Then gesture is confined to recitation, and not all who read, recite. Moreover, we hear too much about imitation being the end of poetry in general. So our definition would be: Comedy is a dramatic poem, which is filled with intrigue, full of action, happy in its outcome, and written in a popular style.

An inaccurate definition of the Latin comedy described it as "a plot free from the suggestion of danger, dealing with the life and affairs of the private citizen." In the first place, this definition covers other, nondramatic stories, which can be presented in simple narration. In the second place, there is always the suggestion of danger in comedy, although the outcome is invariably tame. What else is danger than the approach or the visitation of imminent danger? Further, there is not only danger in comedy, but violence at the hands of panderers, rivals, lovers, servants, or masters. Thus in the *Asinaria* and *The Ghost* even the masters themselves are ill treated. Once more, this definition would not admit the official class, wearers of the toga, for they are not private citizens. Finally, the definition would embrace mimes and dramatic satires.

Crates of Athens was the first to write comedy free from the shackles of meter.

Now since comedy and tragedy are of the same genus, it is important to know the extent of the similarity. We will first treat of tragedy in general,

¹⁰ Roman poetry.

¹¹ *Attican Nights*, XVII. xxi. 45.

¹² The Roman year 519 is 235 B.C.

¹³ Aristotle does not refuse the name of poet to versifiers but asserts that to versify does not mean one has written a poem. See *Poetics*, I. 8-9, above, pp. 48-49.

and then later we will discuss the characters and actions in comedy and tragedy respectively.

The definition of tragedy given by Aristotle is as follows: "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is illustrious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in embellished language, the different kinds of embellishments being variously employed in the different parts, and not in the form of narration, but through pity and fear effecting the purgation of such like passions."¹⁴ I do not wish to attack this definition other than by adding my own: A tragedy is the imitation of the adversity of a distinguished man; it employs the form of action, presents a disastrous dénouement, and is expressed in impressive metrical language. Though Aristotle adds harmony and song, they are not, as the philosophers say, of the essence of tragedy; its one and only essential is acting. Then the phrase of *a certain magnitude* is put in to differentiate the tragedy from the epic, which is sometimes prolix. It is not always so, however, as the work of Musaeus illustrates. Further, the mention of "purgation" is too restrictive, for not every subject produces this effect. *A certain magnitude*, to return to the phrase, means not too long and not too short, for a few verses would not satisfy the expectant public, who are prepared to atone for the disgusting prosiness of many a day by the enjoyment of a few hours. Prolixity, however, is just as bad, when you must say with Plautus: "My legs ache with sitting, and my eyes with looking."

The early orators had only one end in view, to persuade and move their hearers, and their language was correspondingly rude; the poets sought only to please, and they whiled away their leisure simply with alluring songs. In due time, however, orator and poet secured from each other that which they lacked respectively. Isocrates is credited with having first given graceful movement to a hitherto rude diction, though deeper students of the literary monuments award this distinction to Thrasymachus, and add that his diligent efforts were furthered by Gorgias, while the work of Isocrates was to add the finishing touch. As to poetry, on the other hand, it was rendered more thoughtful by being transferred from the country to the town, where plots were added to furnish warning examples, and sentiments to furnish precepts.

Horace most aptly said, "He carries every vote who mingles the useful with the pleasing,"¹⁵ for poetry bends all its energies to these two ends, to teach and to please. Now to realize these ends one's work must conform to certain principles. In the first place his poem must be deeply conceived, and be unvaryingly self-consistent. Then he must take pains to temper all with variety (*varietas*), for there is no worse mistake than to glut your hearer before you are done with him. What then are the dishes which would create distaste rather than pleasure? The third poetic quality is found in but few writers, and is what I would term vividness (*efficacia*); there is also a Greek name for it which will be given in the proper place. By *vividness* I mean a certain potency and force in thought and language which compels one to be a willing listener. The fourth is winsomeness (*suavitas*), which tempers the ardency of this last quality, of itself inclined to be harsh. Insight and foresight (*prudencia*), variety, vividness, and winsomeness, these, then, are the supreme poetic qualities.

Of well-governed conduct there is, as it were, a definite form, which the philosophers call right reason. Is there any form of evil conduct? No, there is not. But in the absence of such form we are either bad or else indifferent. What then does the poet teach? Does he teach actions, which arise from mental states or dispositions, the *διαθέσεις* of the Greeks? Or does he teach us how to become such men that the faculty of doing good is potent, and the principle of avoiding evil conduct is implanted?

Aristotle ruled that since poetry is comparable to that civic institution which leads us to happiness, happiness being nothing other than perfect action, the poet does not lead us to imitate character, but action. Surely he is right; we agree perfectly. But what he adds offers a little more difficulty. He says that there cannot be a tragedy without action, though there may be one without disposition. Under the circumstances, I would here translate *ἦθος* by "character," for he says that the tragic poets of his day usually constructed plots that lacked delineation of character. Thus Zeuxis the painter gave no expression of character in his work, and Polygnotus excelled in character-drawing. But if now *ἦθος* means "an inclination to a certain course of action," and this

¹⁴ *Poetics*, VI. 2, above, p. 51.

¹⁵ *Art of Poetry*, above, p. 73.

is excluded from tragedy, the action will be altogether fortuitous, and wholly dependent on chance. To illustrate: Orestes once committed murder by slaying his mother. Yet here there is no question of character, for it was not a characteristic action. On the other hand, Aegisthus was a murderer in character, and so were Polymnestor, Pylades, Euclio, Pseudolus, Ballio, and Davus. So our inquiry is not as to whether the poet teaches character or action, but as to whether he teaches a mental disposition, or the outward expression of it. Though many things are done contrary to character, they are not done without our being disposed to do them. The result of the inquiry is, then, that the poet teaches mental disposition through action, so that we embrace the good and imitate it

in our conduct, and reject the evil and abstain from that. Action, therefore, is a mode of teaching; disposition, that which we are taught. Wherefore action is, as it were, the pattern or medium in a plot, disposition its end. But in civil life action is the end, and disposition its *form*.

If anyone thinks that our distinctions are more subtle than the subject warrants, he need not take it to heart; he will find it very easy to leave the whole matter alone.

Aristotle was also illogical in attributing to tragedy alone that which was the common property of poetry, just as when he formulated metrical laws from words and the parts of words, and afterwards ignored those very laws themselves.