

is the plot, for this is what I mean by plot, namely, the arrangement of the incidents. Character, on the other hand, is that which leads us to attribute certain qualities to the persons who act. Thought is present in all they say to prove a point or to express an opinion. Every tragedy, therefore, has these six necessary elements which make it what it is: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and music. Two of these elements are the means of imitation, one is the manner, three belong to the objects imitated,³ and besides these there are no others. We may say that most poets use these elements; every tragedy, in much the same manner, has spectacle, character, plot, diction, music, and thought.⁴

Plot and Character

The most important of these is the arrangement of incidents, for tragedy is an imitation, not of men but of action and life, of happiness and misfortune. These are to be found in action, and the goal of life is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Men are what they are because of their characters, but it is in action that they find happiness or the reverse. The purpose of action on the stage is not to imitate character, but

³ Clearly, music and diction (language) are the means of imitation; the three elements which belong to the model are the plot, character, and thought. This leaves spectacle as belonging to the manner of imitation. This is different from the manner of imitation as defined in the first chapter, where the manner lies in its being either narrative or dramatic presentation (see ch. 4, note 2). The contradiction is, however, more verbal than real, for the dramatic presentation involves, indeed in a sense is, the spectacle, and the close connection between the two has just been emphasized.

⁴ I follow Bywater in keeping the MS reading *οὐκ ὅλίοι αὐτῶν* which Butcher and others delete and replace by *πάντες* in order to avoid the contradiction: Aristotle first says that most (lit., "not a few") poets make use of all six elements, and then adds that every play contains them. But the contradiction is only verbal. Every play contains all the elements of tragedy to some extent, but for the poet to make real use of them is a different thing. It is in this sense that we are told immediately afterward that a tragedy without character is possible.

character is a by-product of the action) It follows that the incidents and the plot are the end which tragedy has in view, and the end is in all things the most important. Without action there could be no tragedy, whereas a tragedy without characterization is possible.

The tragedies of most of our recent poets have no characterization and, generally speaking, there are many such poets. This is the difference, among painters, between Zeuxis and Polygnotus, for Polygnotus expresses character very well, while Zeuxis does not express it at all. Moreover, a series of speeches expressing character, well written and well thought-out though they might be, would not fulfill the essential function of a tragedy; this would be better achieved by a play which had a plot and structure of incidents, even though deficient in respect to character. Besides, the most important means by which a tragedy stirs the emotions reside in the plot, namely Reversals and Recognitions. Another argument is that those who begin to write poetry attain mastery in diction and characterization before they attain it in plot structure. Nearly all our early poets are examples of this.

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The plot is the first essential and the soul of a tragedy; character comes second. Pretty much the same is true of painting: the most beautiful colors, laid on at random, give less pleasure than a black-and-white drawing.⁵ It is the action which is the object of the imitation; the individual characters are subsidiary to it.

Thought and Character

Thought is the third element in tragedy. It is the capacity to express what is involved in, or suitable to, a situation. In prose this is the function of statesmanship and rhetoric. Earlier writers made their characters speak like statesmen; our contemporaries make them speak like rhetoricians. A person's character makes clear what course of action he will choose or

⁵ Aristotle means that it is the pattern of colors which makes the picture, and so the pattern or structure of incidents, which is the plot, makes the tragedy.