

author of the Cypria and of the Little Iliad. For this reason the Iliad and the Odyssey each furnish the subject of one tragedy, or, at most, of two; while the Cypria supplies materials for many, and the Little Iliad for eight—the Award of the Arms, the Philoctetes, the Neoptolemus, the Eurypylos, the Mendicant Odysseus, the Laconian Women, the Fall of Ilium, the Departure of the Fleet.

XXIV Again, Epic poetry must have as many kinds as Tragedy: it must be simple, or complex, or 'ethical,' or 'pathetic.' The parts also, with the exception of song and spectacle, are the same; for it requires Reversals of the Situation, Recognitions, and Scenes of Suffering. Moreover, the thoughts and the diction must be artistic. In all these respects Homer is our earliest and sufficient model. Indeed each of his poems has a twofold character. The Iliad is at once simple and 'pathetic,' and the Odyssey complex (for Recognition scenes run through it), and at the same time 'ethical.' Moreover, in diction and thought they are supreme.

Epic poetry differs from Tragedy in the scale on which it is constructed, and in its metre. As regards scale or length, we have already laid down an adequate limit:—the beginning and the end must be capable of being brought within a single view. This condition will be satisfied by poems on a smaller scale than the old epics, and answering in length to the group of tragedies presented at a single sitting.

Epic poetry has, however, a great—a special—capacity for enlarging its dimensions, and we can see the reason. In Tragedy we cannot imitate several lines of

actions carried on at one and the same time; we must confine ourselves to the action on the stage and the part taken by the players. But in Epic poetry, owing to the narrative form, many events simultaneously transacted can be presented; and these, if relevant to the subject, add mass and dignity to the poem. The Epic has here an advantage, and one that conduces to grandeur of effect, to diverting the mind of the hearer, and relieving the story with varying episodes. For sameness of incident soon produces satiety, and makes tragedies fail on the stage.

As for the metre, the heroic measure has proved its <sup>5</sup> fitness by the test of experience. If a narrative poem in any other metre or in many metres were now composed, it would be found incongruous. For of all measures the heroic is the stateliest and the most massive; and hence it most readily admits rare words and metaphors, which is another point in which the narrative form of imitation stands alone. On the other <sup>1460 a</sup> hand, the iambic and the trochaic tetrameter are stirring measures, the latter being akin to dancing, the former expressive of action. Still more absurd would it be to <sup>6</sup> mix together different metres, as was done by Chaeremon. Hence no one has ever composed a poem on a great scale in any other than heroic verse. Nature herself, as we have said, teaches the choice of the proper measure.

Homer, admirable in all respects, has the special merit <sup>7</sup> of being the only poet who rightly appreciates the part he should take himself. The poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator. Other poets appear themselves upon

the scene throughout, and imitate but little and rarely. Homer, after a few prefatory words, at once brings in a man, or woman, or other personage; none of them wanting in characteristic qualities, but each with a character of his own.

~~The element of the wonderful is required in Tragedy. 8~~  
~~The irrational, on which the wonderful depends for its~~  
~~chief effects, has wider scope in Epic poetry, because there~~  
~~the person acting is not seen.~~ Thus, the pursuit of Hector would be ludicrous if placed upon the stage—the Greeks standing still and not joining in the pursuit, and Achilles waving them back. But in the Epic poem the absurdity passes unnoticed. Now the wonderful is pleasing: as may be inferred from the fact that every one tells a story with some addition of his own, knowing that his hearers like it. It is Homer who has chiefly taught other poets the art of telling lies skilfully. The secret of it lies in a fallacy. For, assuming that if one thing is or becomes, a second is or becomes, men imagine that, if the second is, the first likewise is or becomes. But this is a false inference. Hence, where the first thing is untrue, it is quite unnecessary, provided the second be true, to add that the first is or has become. For the mind, knowing the second to be true, falsely infers the truth of the first. There is an example of this in the Bath Scene of the Odyssey.

Accordingly, the poet should prefer probable im- 10  
possibilities to improbable possibilities. The tragic plot must not be composed of irrational parts. Everything

irrational should, if possible, be excluded; or, at all events, it should lie outside the action of the play (as, in the Oedipus, the hero's ignorance as to the manner of Laius' death); not within the drama,—as in the Electra, the messenger's account of the Pythian games; or, as in the Mysians, the man who has come from Tegea to Mysia and is still speechless. The plea that otherwise the plot would have been ruined, is ridiculous; such a plot should not in the first instance be constructed. But once the irrational has been introduced and an air of likelihood imparted to it, we must accept it in spite of the absurdity. Take even the irrational incidents in the Odyssey, where Odysseus is left upon the shore of Ithaca. How intolerable even these might have been would be apparent if an inferior poet were to treat the subject. 1460 b As it is, the absurdity is veiled by the poetic charm with which the poet invests it.

The diction should be elaborated in the pauses of the action, where there is no expression of character or thought. For, conversely, character and thought are merely obscured by a diction that is over brilliant.

XV With respect to critical difficulties and their solutions, the number and nature of the sources from which they may be drawn may be thus exhibited.

The poet being an imitator, like a painter or any other artist, must of necessity imitate one of three objects,—things as they were or are, things as they are said or thought to be, or things as they ought to be. The vehicle of expression is language,—either current terms or, it may be, rare words or metaphors. There are also many modifications of language, which we

concede to the poets. Add to this, that the standard of 3  
 correctness is not the same in poetry and politics, any  
 more than in poetry and any other art. Within the art  
of poetry itself there are two kinds of faults,—those  
which touch its essence, and those which are accidental.  
 If a poet has chosen to imitate something, <but has 4  
 imitated it incorrectly> through want of capacity, the  
 error is inherent in the poetry. But if the failure is  
 due to a wrong choice—if he has represented a horse  
 as throwing out both his off legs at once, or introduced  
 technical inaccuracies in medicine, for example, or in  
 any other art—the error is not essential to the poetry.  
 These are the points of view from which we should  
 consider and answer the objections raised by the  
 critics.

First as to matters which concern the poet's own 5  
art. If he describes the impossible, he is guilty of  
an error; but the error may be justified, if the end  
 of the art be thereby attained (the end being that  
 already mentioned),—if, that is, the effect of this or  
 any other part of the poem is thus rendered more  
 striking. A case in point is the pursuit of Hector.  
 If, however, the end might have been as well, or better,  
 attained without violating the special rules of the poetic  
 art, the error is not justified: for every kind of error  
 should, if possible, be avoided.

Again, does the error touch the essentials of the  
 poetic art, or some accident of it? For example,—not  
 to know that a hind has no horns, is a less serious matter  
 than to paint it inartistically.

Further, if it be objected that the description is not 6

true to fact, the poet may perhaps reply,—‘But the objects are as they ought to be’: just as Sophocles said that he drew men as they ought to be; Euripides, as they are. In this way the objection may be met. If, however, the representation be of neither kind, the poet may answer,—‘This is how men say the thing is.’ This applies to tales about the gods. It may well be that these stories are not higher than fact nor yet true to fact: they are, very possibly, what Xenophanes says of them. But anyhow, ‘this is what is said.’ Again, a description may be no better than the fact: ‘still, it was the fact’; as in the passage about the arms: ‘Upright upon their butt-ends stood the spears.’ This was the custom then, as it now is among the Illyrians.

Again, in examining whether what has been said or done by some one is poetically right or not, we must not look merely to the particular act or saying, and ask whether it is poetically good or bad. We must also consider by whom it is said or done, to whom, when, by what means, or for what end; whether, for instance, it be to secure a greater good, or avert a greater evil.

Other difficulties may be resolved by due regard to the usage of language. We may note a rare word, as in *οὐρήας μὲν πρῶτον*, where the poet perhaps employs *οὐρήας* not in the sense of mules, but of sentinels. So, again, of Dolon: ‘ill-favoured indeed he was to look upon.’ It is not meant that his body was ill-shaped, but that his face was ugly; for the Cretans use the word *εὐειδές*, ‘well-favoured,’ to denote a fair face. Again, *ζωρότερον δὲ κέραιε*, ‘mix the drink livelier,’ does not mean ‘mix it stronger’ as for hard drinkers, but ‘mix it quicker.’

Sometimes an expression is metaphorical, as 'Now all 10 gods and men were sleeping through the night,'—while at the same time the poet says: 'Often indeed as he turned his gaze to the Trojan plain, he marvelled at the sound of flutes and pipes.' 'All' is here used metaphorically for 'many,' all being a species of many. So in the verse,—'alone she hath no part . . .', οἴη, 'alone,' is metaphorical; for the best known may be called the only one.

Again, the solution may depend upon accent or 11 breathing. Thus Hippias of Thasos solved the difficulties in the lines,—*δίδομεν (διδόμεν) δέ οἱ*, and *τὸ μὲν οὖ (οὐ) καταπύθεται ὄμβρω*.

Or again, the question may be solved by punctuation, 12 as in Empedocles,—'Of a sudden things became mortal that before had learnt to be immortal, and things unmixed before mixed.'

Or again, by ambiguity of meaning,—as *παρ- 13 φήηκεν δὲ πλέω νύξ*, where the word *πλέω* is ambiguous.

Or by the usage of language. Thus any mixed 14 drink is called *οἶνος*, 'wine.' Hence Ganymede is said

'to pour the wine to Zeus,' though the gods do not drink wine. So too workers in iron are called *χαλκείας*, or workers in bronze. This, however, may also be taken as a metaphor.

Again, when a word seems to involve some incon-  
 sistency of meaning, we should consider how many  
 senses it may bear in the particular passage. For  
 example: 'there was stayed the spear of bronze'—we  
 should ask in how many ways we may take 'being  
 checked there.' The true mode of interpretation is the  
 1461 b precise opposite of what Glaucon mentions. Critics, he  
 says, jump at certain groundless conclusions; they pass  
 adverse judgment and then proceed to reason on it; and,  
 assuming that the poet has said whatever they happen  
 to think, find fault if a thing is inconsistent with their  
 own fancy. The question about Icarus has been treated  
 in this fashion. The critics imagine he was a Lacedae-  
 monian. They think it strange, therefore, that Tele-  
 machus should not have met him when he went to  
 Lacedaemon. But the Cephallenian story may perhaps  
 be the true one. They allege that Odysseus took a wife  
 from among themselves, and that her father was Icadus  
 not Icarus. It is merely a mistake, then, that gives  
 plausibility to the objection.

In general, the impossible must be justified by 17  
 reference to artistic requirements, or to the higher



reality, or to received opinion. With respect to the requirements of art, a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible. Again, it may be impossible that there should be men such as Zeuxis painted. 'Yes,' we say, 'but the impossible is the higher thing; for the ideal type must surpass the reality.' To justify the irrational, we appeal to what is commonly said to be. In addition to which, we urge that the irrational sometimes does not violate reason; just as 'it is probable that a thing may happen contrary to probability.'

Things that sound contradictory should be examined <sup>18</sup> by the same rules as in dialectical refutation—whether the same thing is meant, in the same relation, and in the same sense. We should therefore solve the question by reference to what the poet says himself, or to what is tacitly assumed by a person of intelligence.

The element of the irrational, and, similarly, depravity <sup>19</sup> of character, are justly censured when there is no inner necessity for introducing them. Such is the irrational element in the introduction of Aegeus by Euripides and the badness of Menelaus in the Orestes.

Thus, there are five sources from which critical <sup>20</sup> objections are drawn. Things are censured either as impossible, or irrational, or morally hurtful, or contradictory, or contrary to artistic correctness. The answers should be sought under the twelve heads above mentioned.

XVI The question may be raised whether the Epic or Tragic mode of imitation is the higher. If the more refined art is the higher, and the more refined in every case is that which appeals to the better sort of audience,