

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Banishment and Restoration of the Poet: A Reading in the Platonian and Aristotelian Aesthetics*

Plato's mistrust in the poet takes its root in Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Socrates.

Socrates : And you actually believe that war occurred among the gods, and there were dreadful hatreds, battles, and all sorts of fearful things like that? Such things as the poets tell of, and good artists represent in sacred places; yes, and at the great Panathenaic festival the robe that is carried up to the Acropolis is all inwrought with such embellishments? What is our position, Euthyphro? Do we say that these things are true?  
(*Euthyphro* 6-c)

The Greek tyrants were not insensible to the importance of awakening in their cause a Pseudo-Hellenic feeling. They plumed themselves on their laurels at the Olympic games but were never devoid of the love for literature and art. Although Plato may have been thinking about the Greek Poets who had graced the courts of Dionysias or Archelaus, he could not be blind to the tyranny under which the Tragic Muse functioned. His prophetic eye could see through the sycophancy and falsity of the instructors, being as they were, the creatures of the government. Contraposing the vile meddlesome activities of the contemporaries with the idea of the perfect society, Plato looks beyond the immediate topicality to allude to the evils and errors of mankind. His predominant emphasis is on producing good citizens, the guardians of the ideal state. Plato wanted his republic to be a stable and orderly society where the guardians are guardians, the soldiers soldiers and the workers workers. He wanted subjects to be identifiable in terms of their socialisation, and he wanted to be able to place and define subjects in terms of determinate, psychological, sociological, biological and anthropological attributes. This is why, having failed to banish mimesis with the poet, Plato tried to prevent mimetic

mirrors (which , for Lacoue-Labarthe represent the mimetician) from being turned on everything and anything improperly and unstably, by fixing his own mirror to the wall of the cave, where it can no longer turn, but only reflect, however obscurely, stable, static and unchanging truths.(Bannet 1993: 56) Obviously, the poet falls under scrutiny when the Platonian thought is so assertive as this,

Socrates: And that these two, true opinion and knowledge, are the only two things which direct us aright and the possession of which makes a man a true guide. We may except chance, because what turns out right by chance is not due to human direction, and say that when human control leads to right ends, these two principles are directive, true opinion and knowledge.  
(*Meno*,99)

The *Republic* lays down a standard for human life. The state can find its right order, when there lies established a standard of truth which is beyond the fangs of change and the souls of men are raised to behold the universal light. Plato's physical object (*phainomenon*) is thus Heraclitus's flux or Parmenides's *becoming*. Plato's truth or *eidos* is Parmenides's Being and the relation between *phainomenon* and *eidos* is one of *eidolon* (image) and the archetype. Such a state perhaps defies reality for, his mimetic art is vouchsafed to represent man of opposite disposition and thus to contradict himself; he cannot even tell whether there is more truth in one thing that he has said than in another.(*Laws*,iv,719) However, the poet should be a man with true opinion and knowledge and a sense of justice as well. However, 'just as the painter, furthermore, only imitates what he sees and does not know how to make or to use what he sees ( he could paint a bed, but not make one) so the poet imitates reality without necessarily understanding it. Not only, therefore, are the arts imitations of imitations and thus thrice removed from truth: they are also the products of a futile ignorance. The man who imitates or describes or represents without really knowing what he is imitating is demonstrating both his lack of useful purpose and his lack of knowledge. (Daiches 1998:21) This distinguishes Plato's poet from the modern theories of 'creation', 'expression', or interpretation which evince a faith in the poet's knowledge of reality.

The imitative artist, for Plato, is hamstrung by his limitation and subjective vision. Mimesis cannot be attested as an act of servile copying for, it comes to be associated with fine art as contrasted with productive act. [It may be noted in this context that a complex relation exists among *methexis* (participation), *homoiosis* (likeness) and *paraplesia* (likeness)] The poet, then, is not the real artist for in that case he would have been interested in realities and not in imitations. And of the three arts – one which *uses*, *makes*, and *imitates* – Plato makes sure that the philosopher takes precedence over the poet for the poet can neither use nor make. The philosopher imitates the Form; the poet, as Plato points out in *Laws* (IV, 719) imitates the events of the sensible world through language. Among the three techniques – use, manufacture and representation – use (*khreia*) tops over the rest. Knowledge (*episteme*), true belief (*pistis*) and correct opinion (*doxa*) are the three coordinates that bear cognitive relationship to the object that the poet chooses to represent. But what can bring Plato under fire is the argument that the poet is precluded from ‘correct opinion’ or knowledge when the poet can grow an access to the ‘user’ to have a ‘direct experience’. But the question bristles on the degree of ‘correctness’ and ‘directness’ of experience as the principle of non-contrariety in Plato contradicts the poet’s embrace of reason and perceptual illusion in one breath. Havelock quite rightly questions, “Why demand that the poet ‘know’, in the sense that the carpenter knows about a bed? Surely this is to degrade the standards of poetic creation by submitting them to criteria which are unworthy or at least improper or irrelevant. Need the poet be an expert in the matter he sings of? Such a presupposition does not make sense.” (Sesonske 1966:132) This alleged lack of actual knowledge or perception (*gignoskein*) of the things represented makes the poet like the painter who practises ‘superficial likeness’ - a ‘poetic colouring’ that can evoke alluring enchantment. Annas argues that the painter’s lack of knowledge does not carry over to the poet. Plato has made a few points against the poet’s claim to have knowledge but has done nothing to show that he imitates the way that a trompe-l’oeil painter does, or that his works are mere images and at third removed from real nature. He has not established that the poet imitates in the pejorative sense established for the painter. (1981:338) Also Goodrich points out that the painter succeeds in his deception at a distance. Three distances may possibly be intended here: that between representation

and the viewer; that between 'the object as it actually is'(Republic, X.598b) and the viewer; or between 'the thing-in-itself' (X.598a) and the representation.(1982:131) We can safely agree with Goodrich that Plato implicitly connoted all the three distances throughout and we believe, for the poet, the reference to the third distance would be irrefutably apt.

The poet is said to correspond to the lowest part of the soul that is egotistic, irrational and deluded. It is the *eikasia*, a state of vague image-ridden illusion (the lowest rung in the phases of knowledge with *pistis*, *dianoia* and *noesis* existing in the ascending order); 'in terms of the Cave myth this is the condition of the prisoners who face the black wall and see only shadows cast by the fire. Plato does not actually say that the artist is in a state of *eikasia*, but he clearly implies it, and indeed his whole criticism of art extends and illuminates the conception of the shadow-bound consciousness.' (Murdoch 1977:5) With the fitful and passionate in him the poet waters the passions instead of drying them up. He is a pantomimic creature divorced from the knowledge of Truth and Reality which belongs to the realm of the *a priori* – the true paradigm, the Form General. However much the poet possesses *techne* yet the inspiration (*furor poeticus*) comes under suspicion for there could be no invention in him until he is out of his senses and has decimated reason.

So I soon made up my mind about the poets too. I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. It seemed clear to me that the poets were in much the same case, and I also observed that the very fact that they were poets made them think that they had a perfect understanding of all other subjects, of which they were totally ignorant. (*Apology*, 22c)

Interestingly, Plato in the *Phaedrus* underscores positively the madness of the Muses. 'If any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the Muses, persuaded that skill alone will make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with

him be brought to nought by the poetry of madness, and behold, their place is nowhere to be found.' (245a-c) This madness is interpreted as power divine (*theia dunamis*) that should prevail with the wise and not merely with the learned, allowing them to treat the subject finely. It is hypnotism, 'a kind of incantation', beneficial 'mania' in *Phaedrus*. (Ion : '... Socrates, your words in some way touch my very soul, and it does seem to me that by dispensation from above good poets convey to us these utterances of the gods.' 535a) But the poet cannot be just 'possessed' for he needs 'art and understanding'. As a matter of fact, there is the emphasis on the poetic process where Beauty, keeping its rational and moral function untainted, qualifies to cherish an association with the artistic process. And there is no denying God as simple and true in deed and word; divine and divinity are free from falsehood. As a significant contrast to this stands the poet who ensconced on the Muses' tripod, loses his senses and resembles a fountain that gives free course to upward rush of water (*Laws*,719c) which inferentially attests 'individualism' in the creative aesthetics. It may be noted that the poet in his incontrovertible role to interpret the divine afflatus concedes a contribution to any aesthetic contradiction. The contradiction to which he is an inevitable party, crystallises his diminutive denomination in his contrasted status as maker with the Muse. However, the glitches in Platonian aesthetic stares in the face in the proposition that the gods sometimes cull the weakest of the poets as the medium for the most exquisite poems. (*Ion* 534e) This tilt in the balance of contradiction towards the divine cushions off largely the poet's disability. Platonian aesthetics does not allow any emotional self-indulgence and heralds a rational harmony under the direction of reason and goodness – art and knowledge (*techne kai episteme*) This is dialectical reasoning as distinguished from mathematical reason. For Plato, 'excess' impairs proportion that makes for lowbrow art and bad ethics. The unbridled poetic innovations have given rise to a *confusion de genres* which merely acknowledges the function of 'pleasure' – a Platonian anathema. He evinces a concern for training and an allegiance for the rational and the good. The poet, working through his medium, exposes himself to the temptations and vulnerabilities of the world of sense. So Socrates voices his concern in the *Gorgias*:

Do the orators seem to you always to speak with an eye to what is best, their sole aim being to render the citizens as perfect as possible by their speeches, or is their impulse also to gratify the citizens, and do they neglect the common good for their personal interest and treat the people like children, attempting only to please them, with no concern whatever whether such conduct makes them better or worse? (502e)

His hostility to art is primarily directed to the 'unintelligent' art for he would not admit the superiority of the claims of imagination over intellect. The glaring chink is in the proposition that poetic imagination stands unassisted by the calculating or the reasoning element in the soul. It is imagination which orders out a new world of aesthetic contemplation, orienting and reorienting the spasmodic fits of emotion, paroxysmic seizures and frenzied trances. An imagination or 'heightened' inspiration cannot have the divisiveness or contradiction that Plato pontificates; rather an emphatic sense of unity derived from the author's central purpose elicits a multi-dimensionality and artistic complexity. However, unfettered imagination and formless institutionalism are decidedly faltering. The poet needs to be the artist who is gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful, bearing allegiance to 'intelligent' art. The 'parable of metals' (*Republic*, 415a-c) with its normative import points to Plato's belief that 'hired poets could devise what would properly be called "noble lies" to exhibit paradigm behavior or behavior of paradigm figures, and hence supply the populace with a set of directives or instructions for living their lives.' (Battin 1977:169) The noble lie is factually false but is normatively true. However, the pitfalls of taking any poetic description as normative would place us in an area where paradigmatic feature is confused with the non paradigmatic ones. Despite the inevitability of colourlessness that purely paradigmatic poetry would grow into, Plato's world still roots for it and roots out the 'anti paradigms'. Plato in the *Timaeus* maintains that God is the Demiurgos, the craftsman, and the world is his product. God is the artist who works towards his end which He understands. This underscores the necessity of 'understanding' in the poet who stands to disclose the real nature of the world. His moral duty is to encourage mental concord and stability without 'the very miracle of his craft'.

Later on when they send the children to school, their instructions to the masters lay much more emphasis on good behaviour than on letters or music. The teachers take good care of this, and when boys have learned their letters and are ready to understand the written word as formerly the spoken, they set the works of good poets before them on their desks to read and make them learn them by heart, poems containing much admonition and many stories, eulogies, and panegyrics of the good men of old, so that the child may be inspired to imitate them and long to be like them. (*Protagoras*, 326a)

So the poets need to be good as fathers and guides in matters of wisdom. (*Lysis*, 213e) Morals, for Plato, are an assimilation to the *stable* and the *equable*. Representation calls for assimilation to a model and the one true model is God. Platonian aesthetics disclaims such assimilation for artistic representation cannot work on such lines (Plato's epistemological objection is too well known). The poets were the educators of Greece and they looked upon themselves (including the comic poets) as instructors. Art, arguably, existed with the overriding concern for the sake of religion, decoration or in whatever context the piece was produced. So Plato's dismissal of the aesthetic aspect and the declaration of the boundaries of the poet may not be qualified as being too cavalier for art existed under the contemporary artistic climate that favoured it as the vehicle for transporting the 'message'.

Socrates points out in the *Republic* that there must be a pattern laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it. However, it does not make any difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. A poet is expected to order his being in accordance with such laws. He cannot ignore the quantitative and qualitative principles (*Phaedrus*, 261). But the point remains that if he does, poetry that would survive would be portraits of good people (*Republic* 395c / 397d) and hymns to gods (*ibid*, X, 607a), which is a truncated view of poetry and poetic abilities. Battin, in listing down six types of poetry, perceptively refers to the ideal Platonian domain of ~~the~~ 'the normative and the factually true'. Here the normatively and the factually false are excluded. However, the instance of the myth of metals and Plato's attitude to Homeric and Hesoidic tales

underscore poetry that is normatively true and factually false, obviating the normatively false and the factually true. Also Plato would prefer the normatively neutral and the factually <sup>true</sup> false and antagonise the normatively neutral and the factually false. (1977:172) Mere benefit to humanity (pleasure has the typical Platonian doubt about it) could not be the sole vocation of the poet. Murdoch appositely points out that Plato, even when it seems that he is clearly concerned with what is aesthetic ('contemplative') as opposed to what is grossly didactic ('practical'), the moral tone is never eclipsed as the preponderating interest is to provide therapy of the soul'. (1977:12) The point that Ferrari makes is too impressively pertinent to ignore. What preoccupies Plato about poetry is not 'fictionality' but 'theatricality' which means 'that capacity for imaginative identification which inspired poets and performers and satisfied audiences alike employ. Fictionality belongs to the artistic product; theatricality belongs to the soul. And by thinking of poetry in terms of theatricality rather than fictionality, Plato makes poetry through and through an ethical, not an aesthetic affair'. (Kennedy 1989: 98) The normatively false stands to be stubbed out as it poses a genuine danger to the state. Art cannot be self-sufficient; it has the power to enter the soul and cast an impact on the life of a culture.

Athenian: Well, to begin with, must it not hold good of all things which have an attendant charm that their chief value lies either in this mere charm itself, in their rightness in some sense, or finally, in their utility? To give an example, I mean that meat and drink, and articles of nutriment generally, are attended by a charm which we may call flavour; as to rightness and utility, it is precisely what we call the wholesomeness of the various viands which is also their true rightness.

Clinias: Exactly

Athenian: Against the art of learning is attended by a charm, a gusto, but it is the truth of what is learned which gives it its rightness and utility, its goodness and nobility. (*Laws*, II, 667 c-d)

Also, Beauty of art, for Plato, is synonymous with moral beauty (Plato uses the word *kalos* in the sense of both 'beautiful' and 'good'). There is the admittance of grace



(‘flavour’, ‘charm’); but beauty and virtue are connected with measure and proportion (*metriotes kai summetria*). Artistic imitation, thus, should be concerned with beauty and aesthetic experience justifies itself beyond the formal degrees of similitude between the original and its imitation. Though he manifests a passion for beauty (III, *Republic*, 403c), the puritanical Plato anticipates Tolstoy who insists that beauty has no objective worth and should never be placed above the demands of morality. For him, aesthetic properties have value only as a means to an end where the immediate artistic end is the transmission of feeling from the artist to the audience and the ultimate objective is the feelings, engendered by a strong moral note, that unite us. There is the emphasis on the qualitative and quantitative likeness and the formal attractiveness. Annas convincingly argues that Plato holds two inconsistent views about poetry. First ‘it is important and dangerous, and so either be censored and tamed in the service of a truly moral life (Bk.3) or expelled from the truly moral life altogether as being hopelessly untrustworthy (Bk 10). Second, it is a trivial and fatuous thing, too pathetic even to be immoral.’ It is first of these views which Plato holds most consistently and which makes most sense of the development of the *Republic*. Plato is bound to be worried about the influence of poetry when he gives such weight to the education of people’s desires and characters, and it is only realistic for him to bear in mind the important role of poetry in the popular education of his own day.... By contrast, he has to try and prove that poetry is trivial. This he attempts in the first two arguments of Book 10; arguments that do not work, because they rely on a forced and an unconvincing assimilation of poetry to a wholly distinct art form .... It is therefore a mistake to take these two arguments as being the essence of Plato’s ‘theory of art’, as is often done. In the course of trying to prove a conclusion, the triviality of poetry, which he elsewhere implicitly rejects, Plato puts forward a view of both poetry and painting which he endorses nowhere else.’ (1981:342) This inconsistency invariably influences the concept of the poet. What largely goes unanalysed is the ‘genius’ (*ingenium*) of the poet under the calumnious cover of ‘madness’. The poet may rebel against any attempt to set limits to his fancy; he may argue truly that mere moralising in verse does not make a poet. Art is the only instrument that enables us to approximate absolute reality or the invisible world of Forms. Plato has not been very enunciative about what dialectical

reasoning is like. Plato just assumes that he can talk of poetry as being 'mere image', and at third remove from real nature without the requisite awareness that his propositions can only make sense within the metaphysical picture of Form. Ironically enough, Plato snipes heartlessly at those qualities we applaud in the poet – the range, catholicity, the command of the human emotional register, intensity, and the 'power to say things that only he can say and reveal things in ourselves that only he can reveal'. (Sesonske1966:118) The poet produces something that is 'less than the reality it purports to represent. In the process of semblance-making, he neither duplicates nor replicates. But 'he puts an idea into it. He puts his perception into it. He gives us his intuition of certain distinctive and essential qualities. He is not further from the ideal, but has attempted to impress upon the material he uses the clearer impress of a Form, or Idea, and in so doing has given to some little bit of the world – which in Plato's language, is changing, manifold, and disordered – a permanence, a unity, an order...' (Scott-James 1963: 41-2) Dwelling on the commonly attributed power of the poet as excelling Nature, one can say that he does not wholly envision the ideal but makes a selective use of models. Despite the evidence of a persistent attraction for poetry ('And I suppose we'd also allow people who champion poetry because they like it, even though they can't compose it, to speak on its behalf in prose, and to try to prove that there's more to poetry than mere pleasure – that it also has a beneficial effect on society and on human life in general. And we won't listen in a hostile frame of mind, because we'll be winners if poetry turns out to be beneficial as well as enjoyable.' - *Republic*, X, 607e), the Platonian poet is conceptualised within the canons of his ideal republic which does not exonerate him from the charge of putting forth a fragmented view of the poet which is stimulating, idiosyncratic and outrageous. However, it is indirectly true that the attempt to underline that the poet is not really creative, corroborates Plato's awareness of the nature of the poet's creativity. Poetry, one should understand, is not so much non-functional as anti-functional. A literary artist himself, his concept of creativity cannot be doubted, for as tradition makes us believe, Plato was a poet before encountering Socrates.

Aristotle, with authority and conviction, sets to restore poetry and in the process precludes further disservice to the Poet. Without the philosopher's and historian's direct

commitment to truth, the poet's art offers 'images' of 'possible' human life. This gives us the idea that even if poetic materials cannot be described in terms of 'truth', it can be argued to make a contribution to the understanding of human realities. Here poetic fictionality, as Halliwell puts it, "coordinates the logically 'non committal' standing of poetry (its exemption from the Platonic requirement of veracity) with the ideally enactive or dramatic mode of presentation. Both these factors are present in the judgement on Empedocles, whose verse writings are classified as 'natural philosophy', not poetry, because they offer categorical claims about the world (including the larger sphere of nature, which Aristotle excludes in *a priori* fashion from poetry's distinctively human subject-matter), and because they are consequently not concerned with the hypothetical or fictional dramatisation of action".(Kennedy1989:154) For Aristotle, poetry is more philosophical and truer than history. The concept of the poet shapes up with the dual principle of poetry having a moral view and imitation having an aesthetic side to it. Aristotle is not here to ignore the moral role of the poet. However, at the same time, he does not consider morality to be the sole criterion for it would then turn the poet into a moral teacher. Fine art, for him is a free and independent activity of the mind outside the domain of both religion and of politics, having an end not wholly subservient to education or moral improvement. This leads him to a view of art that is not overwhelmingly didactic and prescriptive. Aristotle, in his assumptions on poetry, clearly emphasises the extraordinary ability of the 'man' who in his art of 'making' underlines axiomatically that some are poets, all are not. The poet's creation is a mimetic art meant to give pleasure and inculcate learning and understanding. Art was either directed to the necessities of life or to its 'recreation' where the inventors of the latter were naturally always regarded as wiser than the inventors of the former because their branches of knowledge did not aim at utility. To Plato's charge that poets purvey falsehoods about reality, Aristotle's rejoinder is not polemical but sensible. Many aspects of reality lie beyond the premises of poetry proper and when the 'poet does deal with his legitimate object (human action) he is not to be understood as making truth bearing statements or claims, but as offering plausible yet fictional structures of possible (rather than actual) events. The poet is a dramatiser, not an interpreter, of human life. And where interpretation or judgement takes from mimetic representation,

Aristotle does not consider the result as 'poetry' but as some other kind of discourse, needing to be assessed by a different set of criteria.' (Halliwell 1987:74) Importantly, the Aristotelean poet does not have the *enthusiasmos* that is impervious to reason and hence closed to order and utility. He manipulates his materials and renders a proper and prudent form; he is not the man who is gifted with 'genius' that acts under the rules from within, rather has a marvellous sense of construction and the unrivalled competence to lend 'form' to his thoughts. He marshals his materials from the 'chaos' before him with a keen sense of arrangement that infuses an orderliness, continuity and moderation to the *form*. He is the man who avoids extremes and follows the golden mean. The act of mimesis is more creative and less interpretive where it is inherently fictive; it represents and dramatises human life 'in its essential aspect of purposive, ethically qualified action'.(76) His power of organisation leads to generalisation the touch of universality.

Art addresses itself not to abstract reason but to the sensibility and image-making faculty; it is concerned with outward appearances and employs illusions for its world is not that which is revealed by pure thought; it sees truth, but in its concrete manifestations and not as an abstract idea. The poet renders beauty and universality to his stories with the extraordinary sense of form that is partly original and partly derivative. His art is distinguished from the discourse which makes direct claims about reality. He is not endowed with a grace that is beyond the reach of art. Aristotle is very sceptical to admit that there is predominantly an unpremeditated, involuntary, impulsive streak in the poet that brooks no interference. The poet's activity does not soar by a sudden and creative exaltation for, the importance of poetry lies in how it organises its materials. Poetry, no doubt, is the imitation of life; but it also transforms what it copies, guided as it is, by 'necessity'. The freedom of fictional invention of the Aristotelian poet is constrained by a requirement to conform to the standards of 'probability' or 'necessity'. This places him in a 'poised position', as Halliwell underlines, 'between the popular Greek conception of poetry as a vehicle of truth (moral, historical and otherwise), and the outright Platonic condemnation of poetry as falsehood and deception'.(73)

So poetry is both 'doing' and 'making'. And the poet is not a mere weaver of words in verse – not primarily a maker of verses or of dialogues, though these are constituents of poetry – but a maker of 'stories'. The poet sometimes 'invents' and sometimes 'borrows' stories and gives them a proper shape. In his invention he makes sure that the derivation is wrapped in a fictive and illusive belief. What is imitation to Pythagoras is *participation* to Plato. For Aristotle, imitation or representation (*mimesis*) is instinctive.

The instinct for imitation is inherent in man from his earliest days; he differs from other animals in that he is the most imitative of creatures, and he learns his earliest lessons by imitation. Also inborn in all of us is the instinct to enjoy works of imitation. (Dorsch1965:35)

Here is the source of art (*Poetics*) and the explanation of why we take pleasure in creating and contemplating works of art. Unlike Plato, Aristotle accepts all these mimetic activities as 'arts' in the full Greek sense of *techne*. This can be described as productive skill or activity which follow the controlled and intrinsically rational principles, and which do so in order to impose upon their particular materials a *form* which is consciously conceived by the mind of the maker (see *Metaphysics* 7.7). Plato did not see poetry as conforming to the criteria of knowledge attached to the notion of 'art'. But *techne* for Aristotle is the rational and knowledgeable means to the achievement of predetermined end. Thus we have here a significant departure from Plato. It is because of its orderly and purposeful (teleological) character that *all* 'art' - *techne* (including, for instance, medicine and carpentry), is said by Aristotle to 'imitate nature' (for instance, *Physics* 2.2, 2.8). However, imitation of nature need not be confused with the idea of *mimesis* itself. All disciplined arts follow procedures which Aristotle takes to be analogous to the workings of nature. It is only the mimetic arts that have the activity of producing representations or fictional renderings of the world as their specific purpose. The idea of resemblance is modified. Poetic imitation, to Aristotle, initially meant *verisimilitude* but he cogently attested a mere resemblance to the *original* as 'inferiority'. The poet cannot afford to imitate in such an inferior way for, bare repetition or mere replication would not do justice to his ability. Aristotelean

aesthetics, thus, hinges on the means of imitation. The carpenter or the sculptor can produce closer copies of visible appearance of things but the poet triumphs over them in manifesting the moral qualities, the imperceptible rhythm and melody that deliver pleasure. It may be pointed out here that mimesis of action or character can reflect different levels or areas of possible reality that can range from the base to the outstanding. Aristotle looked on art as art and freed it from the rivalry of other human activities. He traced the genesis of art to the natural human instinct for imitation and to the pleasure born out of it. He argued that imitation is not a mere carbon copy but is a re-creative and an idealising process. It is neither mimicry nor counterfeiting. Imitation could be representation but differs from the strict Platonian standards of veracity. 'Imitation, then, is a special kind of representation: it is a matter of representing a so-and-so rather than representing the so-and-so. It is sometimes true that you represent a so-and-so without there being any so-and-so which you represent. Gibbon represented a degenerate Empire – and there was degenerate Empire which he represented. Manet represented a lunch, but there was no lunch which he represented. To imitate, let us say, is to represent not in the Gibbon fashion, but in the Manet manner.' (Barnes 1995: 275)

What art seeks to reproduce is primarily an inward process which as a psychical energy works on the outward manifestations in deeds, incidents, events, situations. The inward will elicits some activity of thought or feeling. (This is not to be confused again with the idea of character which is not intrinsically a matter of psychology but has a specific foundation in the sphere of ethical dispositions and choices.) It is here that one has to realise the transformation in the meaning of *mimesis* that Aristotle has wrought. The poet delights in rhythm and imitation. This rhythm contains a familiar and ordered number of movements in a regular manner. (*Problemata* 920b) He plays the crucial role of imposing order; art takes the form which is in the soul of the artist. (*Metaphysics*, 1032a) What he makes, like a carpenter or a painter is something new, a *concretum* or *synolon*. A poet apprehends the pattern which is universal and general underlying human actions, and then imposes this pattern which is governed by its own internal logic, the rules of necessity and probability. In case of a tragedy, more specifically, a poet is the maker of a plot, which is in that particular case, the body of the imitation. In Aristotle's view plot is the full body, the concrete body, of action (*praxis*) which in

itself is only a concept, an indwelling form toward which human experience tends. It is action, the dynamic principle which is the soul of tragedy. But when Aristotle describes plot as the first principle (*arche*) and the soul (*psyche*) of tragedy, he means that it is in the plot that action exists, even though theoretically, it is something different. When a poet makes a plot, he gives action a form. This form is not taken from real life but is perceived by the poet as a pattern at once general and universal. It is ruled by the rules of necessity and probability which provide an inner logic in a literary form. 'Rationality' in art is a the result of the poet's conscious selection and design of his materials. The sense of artistry and mimesis complement each other. Art is born not from the fountains of creation within; the poet is subordinated to his art and the true locus lies in the teleological relation between them. However, there is no room for 'imagination' in his art of *mimesis* (the word does not feature once in Aristotle's *Poetics*). It is the fidelity to truth that forbids the poet from being bestowed with imagination for imagination might lead him to embrace falsehood and the impossible. (*De Anima*, 428a-433a) The poet is the maker but with a strong allegiance to reality; his role is conceptualised within the recognition rendered to reality and truth as he is not expected to portray something that is incomprehensible and unrecognisable. However, a historian, while in course of describing a king, might render his ruthless bigotry and delicate love of beauty without any necessary or probable connection between the two. The poet is adept in establishing the connection which strictly speaking, may be qualified as a distortion of truth. But the poet is concerned with a higher, a generalisable truth, not with a blatant factual reporting of a thing. He is the poet because of his ability to impose a pattern of universality and inevitability on the incoherent, chaotic actions and incidents. What is of great critical interest is the observation that Aristotle makes regarding the art of poetry. It is instructive to see that Aristotle looks at poetry as an art that demands a *special* gift in him.

Aristotle is making a bow to the Platonic concept of poetry being the result of divine frenzy. This seems to upset the applecart of neat antinomies like Romanticism and Classicism. Not surprisingly, while inspirationalists have gloated over this passing emphasis of Aristotle, formalists have, equally unsurprisingly, been uneasy about it. Horace, for instance, ridiculed the idea that genius (*ingenium*) is an adequate substitute

for training, craft, and experience. However, the reading of the *Poetics* that makes Aristotle reinforce the Platonic concept was favoured through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, culminating, as it were, in Milton's great invocation in the *Paradise Lost*. As a matter of fact, the original Greek word that Aristotle uses for the frenzied poet is 'manikos' which is obviously related to mania.. A 'maniac' poet, then, being frozen into his emotional configuration cannot make his soul bend and conform to that of an imagined character unless the character happens to be a photo copy of his own self. On the grounds of sheer elementary logic, therefore, the conventional translation – gifted or mad – does not make any sense. Poetry has its source in men who are gifted rather than ones who are mad. Here Castlevetro cannot go unsupported when he observes that the poet makes his art plausible only by being well endowed, rather than being overtaken by what we know as the *furor poeticus*. Castlevetro's observation makes for a better and clearer reading of the passage. The fact that Aristotle nowhere else in the *Poetics* makes a suggestion that a poet is in a state of madness and that he does not make the poetic process a matter *either* of inspiration or of perspiration makes it almost self-evident that the idea of 'frenzy' cuts at the very *raison d'etre* of the *Poetics* which is essentially about the *techne* of poetry.

Poetry infuses a universal appeal into what history records; the pictures of poetry are not mere reproductions of facts but truths embedded in those facts that apply to all places and times (*philosophoteron kai spoudaioteron*). Here Aristotle never meant that poetry is abstract for he knows that good poetry will contain vividly imagined particulars. What he appears to mean is that works of poetic art (and probably of other arts too) can possess a richness of significance which invites and rewards interpretation in terms of the larger conceptions which structure human experience and understanding. By combining aesthetic pleasure with civic ends the poet's art can render the 'calm of mind, all passion spent' without the Platonian scepticism, as the emotional appeal of poetry becomes health-giving and artistically satisfying. It is, however, important to note that aestheticism, in any of its strong senses, does not find favour with Aristotle for *mimesis* is concerned with the presentation and exploration of some idea of a 'possible' world. With the knowledge that correctness in poetry is not identical with correctness in politics, the poet gives us knowledge of the universals, transforming the singulars in the



process and partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish. (*Physics*, 199a; *Politics* IV, [VII],17)

So, freeing his art from the elements of unreason which mangle our comprehension of reality, the poet focuses on the world of the possible which is intelligible. In fashioning his materials he may transcend nature, but cannot afford to flippantly contravene the laws of rationality. Giving wide berth to the 'fantastic', he can recreate the actual that is rooted to the habits and principle of nature. What we find in *On the Parts of Animals* (IV,10) and *On the Generation of Animals* (I,4) – nature makes the best of the materials it has at her disposal and works with a thrust toward the ideal – come to attain a better thing or higher reality (*beltion*) at the hand of the artist. Arts may 'on the basis of Nature, carry things further than Nature can'. (Wicksteed, Cornford:1957:173) Aided by reason and the poetic imagination that does not abjure sensible appearances, the artist can grasp the nature of each thing as *it is* in itself. It is a new imaginal existence that is different from shadow, illusions and reflexions; it is endowed with truth and reality of the artist's imagination. Without the attitude to associate with the 'fantastic' and his *manikos* state, he can draw objects as they 'ought to be' (*hoia einai dei*). The poet recreates human life and nature in images which do not, as Plato thought, delude us with mere shadows of things, but enhance our understanding and appropriation of life. A Maker (*poietes*) of a new world, logical and organic, he bestows Form (*eidos*) on the Flux. Poetry is more philosophical than history and the poet is the moral teacher who knows the art of 'making' and 'creating'.