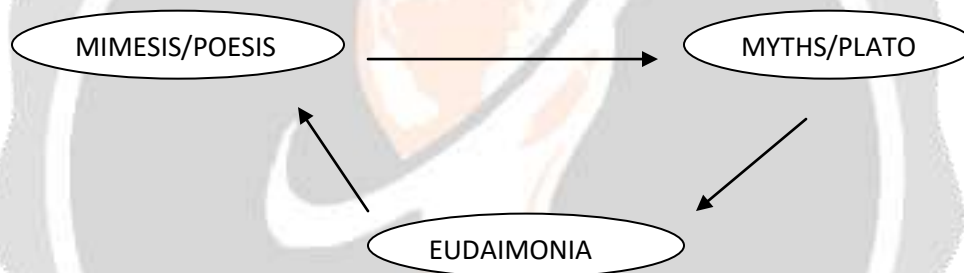


ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF PLOT: A BRIEF REVIEW

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Profound insight cast in dense pronouncement entails a multitude of future commentaries. And such is the case of Aristotle's **Poetics**. Aristotle does not decelerate into elaboration. And such is the case of Aristotle's **Poetics**. Aristotle does not decelerate into elaboration, and thus inspired multitudinous metanarratives. The greatness of **Poetics** lies in this factor: it is an everlasting text that not only inaugurated a discipline (literary criticism), but also continues to garner interest acting as a framework to literary ramifications. Aristotle's profound inaugural insight has evolved into the everlasting preoccupations of Western literary criticism



Aristotle's literary theory, like his moral philosophy, centre around action. In **Aristotle: On the Art of Poetry**, a translation by Ingram Bywater, the author rightly observes the importance of action in a tragedy: "...a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character" (37: 1977). In Aristotle's ethics, human action must be relentlessly involved in training the distinctively human and the active exercise of human qualities. His focus on action explains why plot is of such, vital importance to tragedy/ comedy. 'Plot' in Greek is called 'mythosclorelegend.' It refers to an artistic arrangement of events. "... the plot is imitation of action;- for by plot I mean the arrangement of the incidents" (2, S. H. Butcher. **Aristotle: Theory of Poetry Fine Art**, 1894). The essence of the theory is that plot is what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. Plot is a "probable" and or necessary arrangement of incidents. "Plot, then is the first principle, and ... the soul of tragedy" (3-4, S. H. Butcher. **Aristotle: Theory of Poetry and Fine Art**, 1894). Plot is made of several key properties:

- unity: one action/ probablilty
- wholeness (sec: vii)
- completeness
- magnitude (sec: vii)

Plot is the essence of Poesis. Tragedy/Plot is a form of action that remarks life and thereby reveals the true nature of life. So it is clear that action need not necessarily be different from other life. Plot revolves around one action which revolves around 'probability' and 'coherence' that is found lacking in actual action. According to Tainne, a French historian, Literature is the consequence of the race, the moment and the milieu. Literature is the mirror of the world. Though literature is often understood as something isometric with life, Aristotle maintains that life and literature are different. Plot pertains to not the 'possible' but the 'impossible' and the impossible is the best thing. "...but

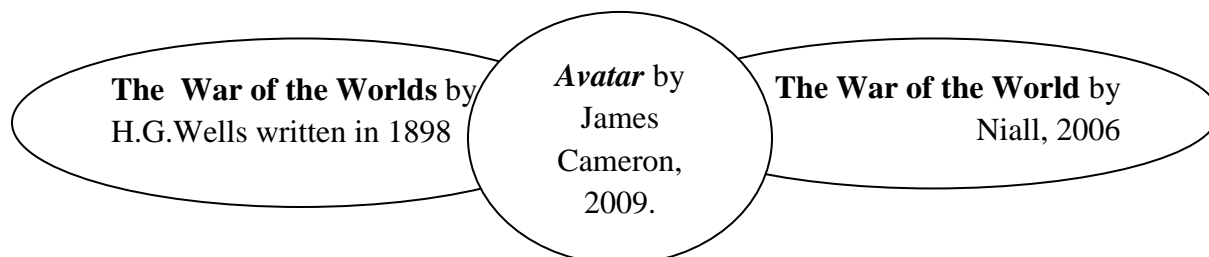
the impossible is the higher thing (*belition*); for the ideal type must surpass the reality” (qtd. in pg 27, **Literary Criticism: A Short History**, William. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks: 1957). Plot in tragedy is a refining portal which refines actual/ probable mould. Actual life is amorphous or shapeless. The metonymic movement of life lacks method and hence exists in amoebic shapelessness. People are all encompassed under the umbrella of amorphous-metonymy. Plot gives shape to the incident and this is because of ‘unity’ in plot. The poet achieves entirety of one action out of amorphous actions. Plot is based on a rationale of a single focused action where if one action were removed, the whole structure is tumbled and jeopardized. ‘Metaphor’ is the meaning of life is and not ‘metonymy’. In our consciousness, we have an urge to find the one action and tragedy reflects this urge for the ‘quest’.

The laws of plot are driven by artistic artifice. Aristotle’s theory establishes the teleological value of artifice in plot. The role of structure in art is crucial to the establishment of the agency of truth. Real life is filled with redundant, inartistic, non- imaginative, unnecessary action. Hence it is only natural that art would not exercise fidelity to amorphous metonymy. The probable impossible is amenable to refinement for art. Non- actual actions and fantastic events are also allowed as long as they adhere to the laws of plot: as long as the impossible has been made the probable then the action is viable for art. Art is action as it ought to be. In his representation of tragedy and narrative Aristotle maintains that these entities become an ideal that surpasses the real and becomes an ideal. And so life needs art to cut through and reach the diamond within.

Aristotle recommends simple causality for dramatic showing. The symbolic infinite of a narrative telling allows for a complex achronological, causal representation. But dramatic representation does not have this liberty. This is why Aristotle emphasizes that a play should have a beginning and it should not leave the audience with a prequelish feeling. Same goes for an ending: it should not leave the audience with a sequelish expectation.

...Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole, and of a certain magnitude; for there may be a whole that is wanting in magnitude. A whole that is which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by its causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity or by rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles. (S. H. Butcher)

Causality becomes important in this sense. One action leads to another gathering to an absolute ending. Any event is a consequence of a cause. Something cannot happen out of the blue. It can always be traced back. All causes continue in spectral immortality, everything is a continuation of something. A consequence is the evolutionary growth, the ‘parinamam’ of the cause. This incorporates the theory of causality in time. We live a ‘palimpsestic’ life. This idea of causality has given rise to a theory of the text. It contends that no text is immaculate. Every text of the present is another face of previous text of the past. And this is the invariably unalterable ontology of literature. Any text of the present is an attempt to immortalize a previous text either by way of structure or aesthetic value to attain a creative meaning. This intertextuality may be overtly visible as in **Travels with Herodotus** by Ryszard Kapuscinski or may also be hidden. Another example is of “**The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West**” written by Niall Ferguson in 2006 is based on the **War of the Worlds** written by H.G.Wells in 1898.



Niall Ferguson in an interview for the “Carnegie Council - The voice for Ethics in International Affairs,” explores into the intertextuality between the two works:

Why is it called **The War of the World**? Did I go and see Tommy Cruise in a Steven Spielberg film? No. It was inspired by the original novel H.G. Wells wrote in 1898, **The War of the Worlds**, which, if you remember, describes the destruction of London, rather than New York, in an alien invasion. As I was reading Wells's extraordinary work of science fiction, it struck me how prophetic it was, because, time and again, the scenes that Wells describes—of a city thrown into turmoil by invaders using powerful technology to destroy buildings and people alike—that vision came true.... The irony is that it didn't need Martians to wreak havoc in so many cities in the world. There was no need for Wells' alien invaders. We did it to ourselves. It was human beings who, time and again, destroyed the cities inhabited by other human beings.

The *Avatar* by James Cameron falls in line with the works of H. G. Wells and Niall Ferguson and he portrays human beings as ruthless creatures attacking the aliens in the Utopian planet called ‘Pandora’. In H.G.Wells’ fiction aliens attack the Earth and destroy the city London and New York. Niall’s **The War of the World**

is an attempt to explain why the twentieth century was so astonishingly violent, not only in absolute terms—after all, the world is more populous than ever—but also in relative terms. If you work out how many people died violently in the course of the twentieth century, it was of the order of 180 million. One estimate puts it at one in every twenty-two deaths; that is to say, one in every twenty-two human deaths in the twentieth century was totally violent and not natural.

James Cameron goes a step further to highlight the power hunger and territorial greed of human beings by juxtaposing them with aliens of an imaginary planet, portraying the planet abundant of virtues that human beings lack.

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