

Mythos as mode of the presence of form in literature

Some considerations on the concept of mythos in Aristotle's Poetics

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sophia de kleptei paragoisa mythois (Pind. N. 7. 22)

»L'art nous trompe en seduisant par des fables«¹

The discussion on the Aristotelian concept of mimesis should not conceal the fact that, according to Aristotelian theory, the essence of poetry is mythos and not mimesis. We shall try to show how mythos in literature functions as presentation of universal truths, as presentation of form, unity and general patterns. Aristotle's theory of poetry can not be sufficiently understood through his concept of mimesis, if this concept is explained in terms of analogy with the art of painting.

Therefore, we shall raise the question of the essence of poetry along with consideration of literary works of art, i.e., epic poetry, tragedy and comedy. In our analysis, we shall leave open the fact that in ancient Greek culture, tragedy, comedy and epics were not only literary works of art, but also musical works. We will likewise put in brackets the fact that classical Greek has no exact expression for language although it has a whole series of expressions for linguistic phenomena: glotta, phone, logos, dialektos, hermeneia, pHEME, mythos, phasis, phatis, leksis, epos, rhema, rhesis, idioma, onoma, gramma, ainos, ainigma, phrasis; and still more: aude, akoe, boe, prosegoria, kategoria, euangelia, kerygma, tonos, gerys, phthongos, psophos.²

Let us start from the chapter 4 of Poetics, where the human being is determined as »the most imitative of living creatures« (transl. Butcher), *mimetikotaton* (Po. 4, 1448b 7)³. Perhaps we should say that the human being is the most able to express himself and to represent his feelings and emotions. The human expressive and representational faculty manifests itself not only in movement and gesture (dance) and song, but also and foremost in speech. This surprising statement is found in Aristotle's »Rhetorics»: *he phone panton mimetikotaton ton morion hemin ...* »voice ... which of all our organs can best represent other things« (W. Rhys-Roberts) (Rh. III 1, 1404a 21- 22).

1. Cit. after H. Fournier, Les verbes »dire« en grec ancien (Paris 1946), p. 216.

2. Cf. also H. Fournier (1946), 4^{ème} partie: »Noms de la parole«, pp. 211-227.

3. This characterization of human being belongs to the idiographic ones, such as the qualification that man is a »living being that laughs«, etc., whereas the accurate ontological definition of man is, that human being is zoion logon echon (animal rationale) or zoion politikon (animal sociale).

In order to see the role of language in Aristotle's theory of poetry, we must expose some aspects of his theory of tragedy, especially those that will enable us to notice the formal components of literary works of art. In Aristotelian view, the form, which is present in the work of art, is not the dialectically established transcendent form, because artistic activity and arts are considered and examined according to their autonomous process of the production of a form. Instead of a theory of ideas (Plato), we get a theory of literary genres or kinds. Aristotle's definition of tragedy is generally known and has remained a basic concept of literary theory: »Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude;...« »*Estin oun tragoidia mimesis praxeos spoudaias kai teleias megethos echouses...*« (c. 6, 1449b 24-5). In this definition of tragedy, which is not cited in whole, mythos is not mentioned, because it is presupposed and implicitly defined. Enumerating the six parts or elements of tragedy, Aristotle once again says that tragedy is »praxeos mimesis«, »an imitation of an action«, representation of certain activity (c. 6. 1449b 36).⁴ When he then explains the notorious six individual »parts« or components of tragedy, he defines mythos as »the representation of the action«, *estin de men praxeos ho mythos he mimesis* (ib. 11450a 3-4). The only difference between the definition of tragedy and the definition of mythos is in the fact that the words mythos and mimesis are used with an article, which means that mythos is always a story about a concrete and determined action, a presentation of a determined course of events – mythos is an example of a concrete path through life. From the aspect of mythos, the definition of tragedy could be read in such a manner: tragedy is a mythos, which is serious and complete and which has a certain magnitude ... From this fundamental definition are then deduced the basic, »necessary,« parts of tragedy: mythos or plot, character, diction or speech or »libretto«⁵, thought, music or musical composition or melody⁶ and scenic presentation or mise en scene (*ho tes opseos kosmos oz. opsis*, 49b 32-33)⁷ (c. 6, 1450a 8-10). These elements of tragedy are from one side established according to the criterium that is required by the concept of mimesis, from another side according to the essence of poetry. Following the classification of mimetic products in chapter 1 to 3 of Poetics, Aristotle makes the following distribution of this elements:

4. In this translation we follow the interpretation of A. Neschke-Hentschke (1979), p. 86f., which speaks about »Aufführung einer Handlung«, »Darstellung einer Handlung«.
5. H. Fournier (1946), p. 227.
6. Aristotle uses three expressions for music in the art of poetry: *harmonia* (stringing, scale, intonation, harmony, concord), *melos* (song, tune, tone, lyric song, melody) and *melopoiia* (making of lyric poems or music for them). In Poetics, the word *melo(i)dia* (singing, chanting, lullaby) is not used, so that it is interesting that in all modern languages the Aristotelian words for music are translated as »melody»; cf. Lucas (1990), pp. 57-58.
7. R. Dupont-Roc and R. Lallou (1980) translate as »l'organisation du spectacle»; the translation »spectacle« I would consider inappropriate, because spectacle is a peculiarity of the Roman valuation of theatre. For Aristotle, the opsis aims at the mise en scene as a component of the tragic representation.

- a) two parts, which are »means« or better media of representation (*hois oz. en hois*, 50a 18-20); diction and composition of music;
- b) one element, which means the manner (*hos*) of representation: theatrical performance;
- c) three parts concerning the object or the »objects« of representation (*ha*): plot, characters and thought.⁸ This reiteration of the well-known classification of the parts of tragedy can be of good use as evidence, that in these determinations we cannot use the term »imitation« if we are not ready to »gulp down« (Aristotle's word) the following absurdity: tragedy imitates an action (1), the object, which is imitated in tragedy, is plot (2), plot is the imitation of action (3). If we do not accept the statement that tragedy is a plot as word expression of action, we come to the thesis that tragedy is an imitation of an object, which is again an imitation of another object. In other words, this nonsense is resolved as soon as we assume the interpretation of mimesis as representation.

We have stated that mythos is defined with the same characteristics as tragedy. But this is not the only equivocality in the definition of tragedy. Mythos is determined also as »synthesis ton pragmaton«, »the combination of the incidents« (c. 6, 50a 4-5) or as systasis ton pragmaton, »the structure of the incidents« (c. 7, 50b 24 in 1450a 32).⁹ Aristotle speaks also of systasis tou mythou, »structure of the plot« (c. 10, 1452a 19).¹⁰ There occurs a peculiar parallelism between story or plot and incidents or action, a parallelism where interpretation must avoid the interference of levels. In the sight of the art of poetry, the tragic representation of a complete practice appears as the capacity of composing stories, which will be convincing, etc. Mythos is a narrative about action¹¹ and a systematic arrangement of facts. This homology between the terms of mythos and the terms of praxis has an ethical dimension.

Because the tragic mythos represents the human praxis, tragedy seizes the very focus of human ethical problematics, so that theatre is not accidentally in the foreground of discourse on »moral« and ethical problems of the belles-lettres.

8. On these parts cf. also R. Ingarden (1978), p. 36 and B. Kante (1980), p. 44. The structure of tragedy is very well summarized in R. Dupont-Roc and R. Lallot (1980), p. 200:

<i>Critères</i>	OBJETS (<i>ha</i>)	MOYENS (<i>en hois</i>)	MODE (<i>hōs</i>)
<i>Parties</i>	histoire caractères pensée	expression composition du chant	spectacle

9. Bywater: »combination of incidents«; »le système des faits« (Dupont-Roc – Lallot).

10. For these cases cf. H. Bonitz, Index Aristotelicus, s. v. mythos, col. 475b 47 do 476a 28;

11. Dupont-Roc – Lallot (1980), p. 219: mythos is »la mise en texte de l'action«.

Human praxis should be accepted in a strict anthropological sense: praxis is a human specificity, because a human being is the only living creature that can be a principle or a source of certain actions (*arche praxeon tinon*) (*Ethica Eudemia B 6, 1222b 18-22*)¹², whereas for children and animals we cannot say, according to Aristotle, that they act (*prattein*) (*Ibid.*, *B(II) 7, 1224a 28-9*).

Without engaging in an extraordinary decisive discussion on human action and practice, let us take brief notice of the difference in the optics of ethics and poetics, when human action is at stake. The difference between the theoretical, »realistic« and aesthetical or »artistic« approach to the question of practice is created by the the intervention of the medium of mimesis. Ethics invests human beings with certain characters and virtues, which perform actions of one kind or another. Poetic mimesis is primarily concerned with representation of events and actions, whereas characters, virtues and thoughts appear, so to speak, secondarily. Ethical theory is by its nature »moralising«, whereas poetics must precisely not be »moralising«. The parallelism between ethics and poetics is inverse: the proportion between ethic and poetics concerning human practice is such as the relation between analysis and synthesis, where ethics is not necessarily representing analysis and poetics synthesis. Without trying to display all the consequences of this matter at issue, let us merely mention that in the Aristotelian view, poetics receives the status of a kind of anthropology or at least the status of humanism.¹³ Therefore, it is understandable why the primary concern of Aristotle's poetics is in the theory of plot, which is in the theory of poetic narration. Mythos is the essence of

12. Eudemian Ethics, transl. J. Solomon: »But in addition to this, man alone of animals is also the source of certain actions; for no other animal would be said to act.«
13. In contemporary thought the question of human being is raised in biology as well as in belletristics. About this compare the discussion of O. Marquard, *Apologie des Zufaelligen* (Stuttgart: Reclam 1986), p. 66. The parallelism between ethics and poetics is shown by following diagram in Dupont-Roc and Lallot' s discussion (1980) o. c. p. 199:

ordre de la »réalité«

étudiée par l'éthique

(1) des GENS doués de CARACTÈRE
et PENSÉE

(2) accomplissent une ACTION

M

I

M

È

S

I

S

ordre poétique

manifestant nécessairement
CARACTÈRE et PENSÉE

par des PERSONAGES AGISSANTS (2)

une HISTOIRE est mise en oeuvre (1)

tragedy, because tragedy is representation »not of persons, but of an action and of life« (*ouk anthropon alla praxeos kai biou*) (c. 6, 1450a 17-8). However, what is at stake here is not a practice whatsoever, but an action, which succeeds or does not succeed, an activity and action, »passing from bad fortune to good, or from good to bad« (c. 7, 1451a 12-15). Tragic mythos is representation of human peripeties, more exactly, mythos is representation of traversing, passing through (*metabasis, metabole*) such a turn of events. As activity, an action is the end, *telos*, of human existence (ib. 50a 18), so tragic story or mythos is the end and purpose (*telos*) of tragedy (ib. 50a 22). According to the famous Aristotelian words, mythos is the first and the most important element of tragedy (c. 7, 1450b 23), it is »the first principle and, so to speak, the life and soul of a tragedy (c. 6, 1450a 38). The characters (*ethe*), which are the primary concern of ethics, come in second place: *ethos* has a secondary meaning in poetics. The relationship between mythos and character is illustrated with an example from painting: »The most beautiful colours (*pharmakoi*), laid on [a picture] confusedly (*chyden*), will not give as much pleasure as the chalk outline of a portrait« (*leukographesas eikona*) (c. 6, 1450b 1-2) (Butcher's transl.).

Without raising the very interesting question of Aristotle's valuation of Polygnotus' and Zeuxis' painting¹⁴, let us mention only the accurate homology between the artistic elements of pictorial image and the parts of a tragedy – *ut pictura poesis*. Human characters are as colours and the characters are in such relationship to the mythos as are colours to image. The image and mythos are the result of a »synthesis«, which surmounts dispersion and disorder.¹⁵ The parallelism between mythos and soul, between mythos and painting, can elucidate some other problems. In Aristotle's theory of substance, the soul has the status of form; soul is the form of a living being. Therefore the mythos signifies the form of a poetic work of art, called tragedy, and the tragic mimesis is a representation of form in a mythos. The soul represents an animating principle for a living being, so that without the soul an animal is »only homonymously« a living being (*De Partibus Animalium*, A 1, 640b 22 to 641a 21). The soul is a regulating principle of a living organism: The mythos as the »soul« of the work of art is in an analogous way an organic, formal principle, which organizes the other five parts of tragedy – not only characters – in a unity and a totality. The metaphorical expression about mythos as the soul of tragedy also has a specific ethical dimension. As the essence of tragedy consists of human actions, so through the tragic mythos become manifest the decisive and essential possibilities of human existence. And what is the essence of the human being in Aristotelian optics? His soul. And what is the soul? Nothing but the series of vital functions. The human nature and essence as

14. Cf. a very exhaustive and documented discussion in M. Kuzmić (1912), pp. 106-9 and 141-3.

15. Cf. on this matter E. Martineau (1976), p. 446.

form (morphe) cannot be judged from the external shape and colour, since in respect to external form the dead do not differ from a living human beings. Therefore, Aristotle contradicts Democritus' thesis that human being is that which we all know (*anthropos estin ho pantes idmen*) (fr. 165), for a human being without soul is so called only equivocally¹⁶: a living being without soul is like the petrified Niobe.

We will return later to the analogy between the work of art and the living creature. But we can now say that the work of art is not a concrete whole, a *synolon* like living being, although it is a kind of whole, *holon*.

Before further examination of the Aristotelian theory of mythos through optics of the nature of poetry, we would like to add a short terminological notice on the word *mythos*. According to Chantraine, this word has no etymology. Chantraine explains: »Apres Fick, Curtius, Walde-Pokorny ... Frisk pense que mythos est un terme populaire et expressif tire de l'onomatopée *mū* avec un suffixe *-thos* qui ne surprendrait pas ... Mais le sens du mot, des les plus anciens textes, n'est pa en faveur de cette hypothese«. ¹⁷ F. Bezljaj mentions the word *mythos* in his explanation of the etymology of the Slovene word »*misel*« (thought), which is cognate with the Lithuanian verb *mausti* »*želeiti*« (wish), gothic *maudjan* (remember) etc.). ¹⁸ The Liddell-Scott-Jones, Greek-English Lexicon, includes the following significations: »I.1. word,

16. In the above considerations we were paraphrasing some Aristotle's ideas from the Book One of his work »On the Parts of Animals»: »Does, then, configuration and colour constitute the essence of various animals and of their several parts? For if so, what Democritus says will be correct. For such appears to have been his notion. At any rate he says that it is evident to every one what form it is that makes the man (*hoion ti ten morphen estin anthropos*), seeing that he is recognizable by his shape and colour. And yet a dead body has exactly the same configuration as a living one; but for all that is not a man. So also no hand of bronze or wood or constituted in any but the appropriate way can possibly be a hand in more than name...

If now the form of the living being is the soul, or part of the soul, or something that without which the soul cannot exist; as would seem to be the case, seeing that when the soul departs what is left is no longer an animal, and that none of the parts remain what they were before, excepting in mere configuration, like the animals that in the fable turn into stone (*ta mytheuomena lithousthai*) ... then it will come within the province of the natural scientist to inform himself concerning the soul.« (PA, A 1, 640a 30 do 41a2 in 641a 18-21) (transl. W. Ogle).

17. P. Chantraine, Dictionnaire etymol. ... (1968), str. 719a.

18. Fr. Bezljaj, Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika II (Ljubljana 1982), s. v. *misel*. Also according to the M. Vasmer's Etimologičeskij slovar russkogo jazyka (1971), III, p. 25, are the Slavonic word *miseliti* and *misel* cognate with the Greek *mythos* and *mytheomai*. When we accept the etymological hypothesis of onomatopoeia »to say my (mu)«, »to make mm (my)«, then the word *mythos* would have an expressive power in the meaning of Koller's mimesis as Ausdruck. Therefore, the etymology, discussed in Hj. Frisk, Griechisches etymologisches Woerterbuch (Heidelberg 1973), s. v. *mythos*, s. v. *myzo*, can be maintained on the level of meaning, although such explanations concern also the question of glottogenesis.

speech; 2. public speech, plea; 3. conversation, 4. thing said, fact, matter, threat, command, counsel, advice, 5. thing thought, unspoken word, purpose, design; 6. saying, 7. talk, ru-mour, report, message, II. 1. tale, story, narrative (without distinction of true or false), 2. fiction, 3. legend, myth, 4. professed work of fiction, children's story, fable, 5. plot.«

In difference from *epos*, which signifies a word in its abstract and material aspect, *mythos* signifies speech in its indefinite aspect as a thought, which must be expressed, as an »internal speech«. ¹⁹ In Aristotle's *Poetics*, *mythos* has the following four main meanings: *story*, *plot*, *intrigue*, *narrative*.

If we have stated in our analysis of mimesis that artistic representation means an illustration of form, a presentation of a pattern, paradigm, which is something uniform and universal, then this aspect of art is still more manifest and noticeable in literary works of art.

Because tragedy, respectively *mythos*, is a representation of human activity, the subject of poetics partly coincides with the subject matter of ethics, politics and rhetoric. But human actions, acts and deeds are also objects of historiography. So Aristotle in two chapters of »*Poetics*« raises the question of the relation between literature or poetry (*poiesis*) and history (*historia*) (c. 9 init. in c. 23. init.). We cannot here display the rather complex question of the Aristotelian theory of history. ²⁰ However, we must mention that Aristotle's thematisation of history in »*Poetics*« is not something secondary, since it is motivated with the fact that *praxis* is the common object of both discourses. The thesis of Aristotle's discussion is that poetry describes and represents universal »human« values (*ta katholou*), ²¹ whereas historiography, e.g., »chronicle«, represents the incidents and events that affect the human being as an individuum (*ta kath'hekaston*), ²² e.g. what Alcibiades did or suffered (c. 9, 1451b 7-11). Therefore, in comparison with history, poetry is not only something more philosophic or theoretically more important (*philosophoterion*), but also something ethically more serious (*spoudaioterion*) (ib. 51b 5-6). The authentic value of poetry is its universality. So in his treatise on *mythos*, Aristotle develops his far-reaching thesis about universality in art. Poetry approaches the philosophic discourse because it puts out, exposes, presents artistic universals or »poetic universals«. ²³

19. Cf. H. Fournier, *Les verbes »dire«...* (1946), pp. 211-5.

20. Compare the articles K. v. Fritz (1962) and R. Weil (1965); cf. also V. Kalan (1974) *Tukididovo zgodovinsko mišljenje* (1974), str. 182-189 (diss., typescript).

21. Liddell-Scott-Jones, s. v.: »universal truths«.

22. It would be possible to discuss the difference between *ta kath'hekaston* and *ta kath'hekasta* – the latter expression is translated by E. de Strycker as »les choses prises une a une«, in: Aristotle on Dialectics, *The Topics*, ed. G. E. L. Owen, (Oxford 1968) p. 150f.

23. I take over this expression from N. Gulley (1979), p. 171: »literary universals«: cf. also Bardsley, *History of Aesthetics* (1969), p. 21.

In what way is Aristotle defining poetic universals? A universal or general truth in poetry is the circumstance, that to a human being of such and such a kind (*poios*) happens that he is speaking or doing things of such and such a kind (*poia atta*) in accordance with probability or necessity (*estin de katholou men toi poioi ta poia atta symbainei legein e prattein kata to eikos e to anankaion*) (c. 9. 1451b 8-9).²⁴ For poetry, therefore, is decisive, a qualitative and an essential characterization of events, since the category of quality (to *poion*) belongs to the level of substance and form. This aspect of poetry accounts for a new dimension of Aristotle's apology of artistic activity: the arts are concerned with the essential questions of human being and human existence, the arts make visible the »formal« determinateness of human life. The categories of necessity or probability confer to the poetic products a status, which otherwise appertains to scientific statements: *eikos*, the probable, is what happens for the most part (*hos pei to poly*) (APo. B 27, 70a 5sl.), whereas the necessary, *anankaion*, is what cannot happen otherwise, what always happens in the same way (GC B 11, 337a 35) and what is explained in accordance with necessity, which is characteristic for scientific demonstration (Metaph. Delta (V) 5).²⁵ But distinct from scientific or »philosophic« universality, the literary universals do not presuppose the status of real existence, since the »real« range of the universals is somehow neutralized or suspended in poetry through the fact that in poetry the »interpellational« function of the work of art, its persuasiveness for the recipient – reader, listener, spectator is decisive, or, as Aristotle says: »That is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen, – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity« (c.9, 1450a 36-38) (transl. Butcher). Therefore, a poet is an artist as »creator« of his myths (*poietes ton mython*, c. 9, 1451b 27). Such understanding of artistic activity paves the way for the theory of literature as »fiction«.²⁶ Even when a poet is working on (*poiein*) past events, his representation will reach the level of art only on the condition that the artist will describe these events in accordance to the »law« of probability (c. 9, 11451b 30-32).²⁷

Aristotle's concept of *mythos* is the quintessence of his theory of literature. The translation of Aristotle's *mythos* with »fabula« is detractive, since *mythos* must be understood above all as a significational unity of human action and of the course of the presented events.²⁸ If the essence of poetry consists of its

24. Butcher's translation: »By the universal I mean how a person of given character will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity...«, cit. after C. Nahm (1975), str. 153.

25. Cf. H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus*, s. v. *anankaion*, on the passages about necessity as *concludendi necessitas*.

26. On this aspect of poetry cf. especially R. Ingarden (1978), pp. 41f. and N. Gulley (1979), p. 169.

27. *ta genomena poiein* is a kind of oxymoron: cf. also R. Ingarden, (1978), *ibid.*, p. 41 and 46.

28. Cf. E. Grassi (1962), p. 135f.

universals, what, then, are the literary universals in the highest poetic genre, i.e., in tragedy; what, then, is the universality of a tragic mythos? As the general or the universal is always a unity (hen), so the universality of mythos will manifest itself through the unity of mythos: as every unity is a whole, so the universality of mythos will appear through the qualification of mythos as a complete whole and an organic unity, »wholeness being in fact a sort of oneness (*henotes = holotes*) (Metaph. Delta (V) 26, 1023b 36).

Poetry reaches the level of literary universals with the composition of such a sort of mythos, which represents necessary or probable relations between events and between characters. Human action represented in tragedy is not »a shadow of a shadow«, but on the contrary is a pattern, a form or a style of human activity. At first sight, it is surprising that this dimension of universality is attained sooner in comedy than in tragedy: the comic poet Crates was to »frame stories and plots of a general nature« (transl. Bywater) (*katholou poiein ... mythous*) (c. 5, 1449b 7-8). What is usually denoted with the commonplace of the »universal and human« character of comedy is an effect, produced by such a representation of human actions and doings, in which the comic poet does not give names to his »personages« and so he does not individualize or identify them. Nevertheless, the poet prevents the dispersion of an identificational mechanism, although the comic characters have no personal names. In a word, for Aristotle the comedy is a more distinguished example for the literary universal than tragedy. (Po. c. 9, 51b 12sl.).²⁹

The second moment of the universal in poetry is thought (*dianoia*), which comprises proving of a point and enunciating of moral sentences or gnomes (Po., c. 6, 1450a 6-7). According to the analysis in »Rhetorics«, a gnome is a general maxim on human action and conduct. It is a statement, which occupies in moral theory or practical thinking a place comparable to the status that is reserved for a conclusion in syllogistics or for first principles in axiomatical theory. In other words, a gnome or maxim is »a statement ... of a general kind ... about questions of practical conduct« (transl. W. Rhys Roberts« (*apophansis ... katholou ...peri hoson hai praxeis ...*) (Rh. B (II) 21, 1394a 21-25).³⁰

Poetic thought manifests itself in speech (logos), which in its pragmatic aspect always means a demonstration that something is so or not so. Therefore, poetic speech is expression of a general insight or general knowledge (*katholou ti*) (c. 6, 1450b 12-14). Such literary universals can be separately treated in the arts of politics and rhetorics (ib. 50b 6). Speech as diction (lexis, c. 6. 1450b 13-14) is an expression of meaning in words. As the thought in all these aspects, as maxim, as object of political and rhetorical theory and so as a sort of universal

29. This is surprisingly well-remarked and described in M. Kuzmič (1912), p. 125f. and 149. D. W. Lucas has noted that, for Aristotle, comedy is also a better illustration for the cathartic effect of literature than tragedy; D. W. Lucas (1990), p.288-9.

30. Cf. V. Kalan, Tukididovo zgodovinsko mišljenje (1974), pp. 184-5 (diss., typescript).

appears in speech, so is »the universal« present in the process of speaking, in the activity of speakers. Moreover, the function of speech is to make ideas, universals, clear, noticeable and understandable. So Aristotle says: »For what were the need of a speaker, if the proper impression <form, V. K.> were at once conveyed, quite apart from what he says« (transl. Butcher) (*ei phainoito hei deoi /he idea/kai me dia tou logou*) (c. 19, 56b 7-8).³¹ In poetic language, the theoretical element is present in the principle figure of speech, namely metaphor.

Poetry in the whole is an exhibition and establishment of the universals. When composing or constructing his poetic mythos, the poet must first epound or set forth a universal form, a general idea (*ektithesthai katholou*, c. 17, 1455b 1). The poetic creation of myth is in this sense the formation of universal notions. Formalistically considered, universality in poetry is the »general outline« (Butcher) of a story³², which obtains the developed literary form when it is amplified with episodes, whereas the primary universal form is substantially the idea, by which a concrete work of art is distinguished. Artistic production in such a way becomes a kind of comprehension, knowledge and representation, *theoreisthai to katholou* (c. 17, 1455b 1). Literary universality is, for instance, the subject of the myth on Oedipus, the contents of the myths on Prometheus, on Iphigenia, etc.

So, in Aristotle's view, mythos becomes the primary vehicle, the signifier of a literary universality. We have already seen that mythos is a representation of human activity in its passing, changing, turning (*metaballein*) »from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad« (transl. Butcher) (c. 7, 51a 12-5). Without such passing, the turn between the opposite states of luck and misfortune we cannot speak about a tragic myth or story (cf. also 1450a 2-3). Because happiness luck and disaster misfortune, are utmost limits of human practical or moral existence, so mythos in Aristotle can never be a neutral, unaffected description of events. On the contrary, a poetic mythos is always a life story *kat'exochen*, which necessarily comprises the following three well known components: *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* are *pathos* (c. 11).

Prior to the consideration of the polymorph structure of the myth and also of human nature, which is represented through the myth, let us take a look at Aristotle's theory of the unity and wholeness of the tragic narrative (Po., c. 7-9), which is also a thesis on the unity of action and the unity of mythos. But already this very designation of the problematics is not without a certain equivocation, since we pass without advertisement from the domain of

31. Cf. especially Dupont-Roc-Lallot (1980), p. 305-11, who have noticed in speech (lexis) and thought (dianoia) two aspects, two modes, a formal and a substantial one, of a single logos. Butcher's translation does not reproduce the conjecture of Maggi (*Madius*) *he idea for hedeia*, which is later accepted by Gudeman.

32. »le schéma générale«, Dupont-Roc - Lallot (1980), p. 286.

»reality« (action, events) to the domain of artistic creativity, of fiction, of mythos. Is this not a unique paralogism? We will discuss this in the article on Aristotle's apology of the poetic truth.

We have noted in the terminological remark on mythos that mythos properly means an »indefinite« word. As tragedy is defined as a representation of an action, which is complete (*teleias*) (c. 6, 49b 25 in c. 7, 50b 24) and of a proper magnitude (*megethos*), an action, which is whole (1450b 24), is now required, so that mythos is composed according to such standards of the action itself. Poetic mythos must exhibit the following qualifications: completeness, wholeness, proper magnitude, unity (c. 8). What is the principal meaning of these characterizations (*ideai*, 1450b 33) in the scope of Aristotle's philosophy?³³

Let us illustrate the concept of unity with the following definition from »Metaphysics»: »In general, those things, the thought of whose essence is indivisible and cannot separate them either in time or in place or in formula, are most of all one, and of these especially those which are substances« (transl. W. D. Ross) (Metaph. Delta (V) 6, 1016b 2--3). A whole (*holon*) is anything, if it has one form (*eidōs hen*) (ibid., 1016b 13). Unity and wholeness of the literary mythos are compared by Aristotle to the wholeness of a beautiful living creature (*kalōn zo(i)on*, c. 7, 1450b 38). In this comparison, the *zoion* is taken almost in its equivocal connotation, i.e. »picture«. ³⁴ Such a living being must have a certain magnitude (*megethos*), must have certain quantitative measures. Magnitude is precisely such »measurable quantity« (Metaph. Delta (V) 13, 1020a 9-10).

The aesthetical question now is, what should be a characterisation of the magnitude of mythos, that could have the status of definition adequate to the actual nature of the thing (*kat'autēn ten physin tou pragmatos*, c. 7, 1451a 9-10)? Aristotle finds this measure in our own faculty of perceiving and representing. The decisive passage reads: »Beauty is matter of size and order and therefore impossible either in a very minute creature, since our perception becomes indistinct as it approaches instantaneity (Butcher: an almost imperceptible moment of time); or in a creature of vast size – one, say, 1,000 miles long – as in that case, instead of the object being seen all at once, the unity and wholeness of it is lost to the beholder (Butcher: spectator)« (transl.

33. For an elementary but systematic elucidation, we can refer to the key-words of the philosophical dictionary of »Metaphysics»: on the completeness (*teleion*) in c. 16, on whole (*holon*) in c. 26, on unity (*hen*) in c. 6 and on magnitude (*megethos*) – the category of a quantity in c. 13. These categories must be explained in every monograph about Aristotle's philosophy. The unity in decisive and primary sense signifies a unitary or unique substance (*ousia mia*) (Metaph. Delta (V) 6, 1016b 9).

34. But cf. the note of D. W. Lucas (1990), p. 112-3, where a the notion of organic unity is illustrated with a parallel term *somatocoides* (Rh. Al., c. 29, 1436a 29), which is a technical term for »structurally coherent«.

Bywater) (Po. c. 7, 1450b 36 – 1451a 21). (dio oute pammikron an ti genoito kalon zoion, syncheitai gar he theoria engys tou anaisthetou chronou <chronoi – dat. Gudeman) ginomene, oute pammegethes, ou gar hama he theoria ginetai all' oichetai tois theorousi to hen kai to holon ek tes theorias). As a living being or a picture must be of an appropriate magnitude in order to be »easily taken in at a glance« (Liddell-Scott-Jones), eu-syn-opton (ib. 51a 4), mythos must have an appropriate length in order to be easily embraced by memory (eumnemoneuton, ib. 51a 5-6). The sufficient magnitude must be of such a kind that it is possible to represent through it the development and change, the passing and turning (metaballein) of human situation.

The question of the wholeness of mythos is thus immediately connected with the question of unity. Before interpreting the above passage, let us consider the Aristotelian view on the unity of mythos (c. 8 in 9). The eighth chapter of »Poetics« begins with the homonymity of the notion »one« and »unity« (*heis*), which can signify (1) one thing as an individual being in contrast to plurality or to »many« and (2) one as a unity, established by one form. In our case of human activity, that means an action, where the inner cohesion of the constituent parts is present. A mythos is not yet one, if it speaks about one person, one hero, for example, about Heracles. A mythos is unitary, when it is representing a unitary activity, an action which is one (*mia praxis*, c. 1451a 31-32). Such an action must have the characteristics of an ordered whole (to holon). This wholeness of mythos will be qualified as universality (*katholou*) in the ninth chapter. Through its universal value the composition of mythos is distinguished from the historiographical representation of human practice.

The question of the unity and wholeness of the poetic narrative has thus attained the level of literary universals. On the other side, it was made possible for Aristotle to establish the difference between simple and complex plots (c. 10). This distinction concerns the way of presenting the shifting or passing over (*metabasis*)³⁵ of events and their change or turnover (*metabole*) (c. 11).

The far-reaching recidivism of Aristotle's theory on the magnitude, wholeness and unity of story in the classicist aesthetics and poetics is generally known.³⁶ Aristotle's position is important, that unity and wholeness of the story are achieved through the poetical procedure, which consists in representing events or incidences in such succession and order, that takes in account the rules of probability or necessity (c. 7, 1451a 12-14 in c. 9). But such a composition of events is not easy to achieve, since the world of human action, which is the subject of practical philosophy, i.e., ethical and political theory, is the world of contingency, which does not permit the same degree of precision or exactness in knowledge as, for instance, mathematics. Moreover, the human or social world exhibits such great »variety and fluctuation« (*plane kai diaphora*) that

35. The translation of M. Kuzmić has »razvoj« (Croatian: development).

36. Compare M. Fuhrmann (1973), pp. 185f.

there is even not an agreement if »fine and just actions« (kala kai dikaiia) exist by mere convention or also by nature (transl. W. D. Ross) (EN A (I) 1, 1094b 14-19).³⁷ So, poets cannot achieve the appropriate necessity or probability in the composition of incidents, i.e., story or mythos, whereas the philosopher has, so to say, insurmountable difficulties in describing the structure of human action. Furthermore, poets are not successful in fashioning a story according to the immanent rules of poetry, but take refuge in the intervention of gods, when they unravel the mythos (denouement) with the assistance of a machine deus ex machina (theos apo mechanēs, prim. c. 15, 1454b 1-3). Aristotle is somehow indulgent of such compositional devices, arguing that human beings cannot know everything, »for to the gods we ascribe the power of seeing all things« (transl. Butcher) (*hapanta gar apodidomen tois theois horan*) (ibid., 54b 5-6).³⁸ Therefore the question of literary composition becomes the question of knowledge and poetic becomes, or moreover remains, a sort of truth and wisdom, »sophia«. Insofar as a human being cannot have a divine, universal and total view, an absolute knowledge, so it occurs that a poet must resolve the complication of the mythos, the intrigue (mechane) of human practice with an artificial device, introducing a god into the course of events or into the play.³⁹ The theoretical ideal of a myth, which has »an organic unity of a living creature« (hosper zoion hen holon, c. 23, 1459a 20),⁴⁰ is something that exceeds human capacities or, at least, signifies the extreme terms of human knowing. But within the art of poetry there must be established such rules for the composition of plots that a mythos could receive its unity and wholeness and so attain its desired »beauty«. The question of the composition of myths remains the central subject of Aristotle's poetic, so that Aristotle's theory of poetry is foremost a philosophy of composition in the sense of E.A. Poe. It is not by chance that in the first sentence of Poetics Aristotle announces an inquiry »into the structure of the plot as requisite to a good <beautiful, V. K.> poem« (transl. Butcher) (c. 1, 1447a 19-10).

Thus Aristotle's mythos becomes a polymorph matter – as the Greek myths in general are – since it is a representation of human nature and »essence«, which is to say, a narrative of human activity. The final solution of the

37. On this also N. Gulley (1979), p. 168.

38. The use of theos apo mechanēs is indicated also in the chapter 9, where Aristotle speaks about events, which are more surprising as the incidents happening spontaneously (apo tou automatou) or by chance (apo tyches) (c. 9, 1452a 4-6).

39. This Aristotelian theory of poetical composition was assumed by Porphyry in his criticism of Homer, when he discussed the departure of Achaic fleet in the second book of Iliad (Il. 2, 73): »L'art poétique interdit (apoieton) de dénouer l'intrigue (to mechanema Iyein) autrement que par l'histoire elle-même (ex autou tou mythou); Aristote dit bien que ce qui est poétique (poietikon), c'est de représenter (mimeisthai) ce qui arrive habituellement...«, cit. after Dupont-Roc – Lallot (1980), pp. 264-5.

40. Bywater: »a single and coherent picture of a living being»; Dupont-Roc – Lallot: »semblable a un être vivant un et qui forme un tout«.

question concerning the composition of tragic myths would mean a resolution, a deciphering of the question about human existence: tragedy is a mode of answering such questions. However fragmentary a theory of poetic plot remains, it must follow the question of the structure of human practice and human destiny or fortune. Each tragic mythos is a »drama«, is »dramatic«, because in its form and growth must be deposited the shifting and passing (metabasis, c. 10, 1452a 16) of activity and its changing and turnover (metabole, c. 11, 1452a 23). A myth or a story must represent a passage through the sequence of events from good fortune to bad and vice versa. According to Aristotle, a tragic mythos is marked by three elements:

- 1) reversal (peripeteia, c. 11, 52a 22);
- 2) recognition or discovery (anagnorisis or anagnorismos, 52a 15 and 52a 29-30);
- 3) disastrous occurrence (pathos, 52b10).

A reversal of fortune is »a change by which a train of action produces the opposite of the effect intended« (transl. Butcher) (52a 22-23), recognition is »a change from ignorance to knowledge« in the sphere of personal identity or in the sphere of intersubjective relations; recognition is knowledge that one person is bound to another person on the basis of love or hate. Finally, the tragic incident (Butcher), *pathos*,⁴¹ is »an action of a destructive or painful nature« (transl. Bywater) (52b 10). These three constituent parts of a myth are impressed on every tragic story and should not be understood as supplements to mythic narrative. So the tragic reversal should not be conceived of only as a change in the dramatic process, but especially as a turnover in the course of incidents, that occurs »unexpectedly« (Bywater) (para ten doxan, c. 9, 52a 4) and so produces an effect of surprise and astonishment, since the entire story is composed according to the »law« of probability or of necessity: a peripety is something that happens »contrary to probability« (transl. Butcher) (para to eikos, c. 18, 56a 25). R. Dupont-Roc and R. Lalot therefore translate peripeteia as »le coup de theatre«, which produces a »choc de la surprise«.⁴² Anagnorisis and peripeteia transfer to the persuasive structure of mythos an inner dynamics necessary for a story to function as a representation of human action. A tragic story without a peripety would be like a drama »without event«, as a tragedy without »soul«.

The reversal and recognition express a certain ignorance of tragic heroes on an important matter: presupposition of a recognition is, for example, ignorance about personal identity, whereas peripety implies an activity or suffering in ignorance of the result.⁴³ But the change in the sequence of events from good

41. R. Dupont-Roc and R. Lalot translate as »l'effet violent«.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-2.

43. Cf. the article of D. W. Lucasa »Simple and complex tragedy«, in Aristotle: Poetics (1990), Appendix III, pp. 291f.

fortune to misfortune has its specific cause, which is called *hamartia*, »mistake« (c. 13, 1453a 10 and 16). Unwillingly, we shall not start with a discourse on this exceedingly important issue of the Aristotelian theory of tragedy. Nevertheless, we must mention that in the optics of Aristotle's theory *hamartia* is primarily a matter of the tragic story⁴⁴ and not a property of tragic character. The mistake in a tragedy, *hamartia*, signifies an »ignorance combined with the absence of wicked intent« or »the defective knowledge of one who thinks he knows«. ⁴⁵ Considering the sequence of events, composed according to the rules of necessity or probability, it is precisely a wrong decision, made in ignorance or in lack of knowledge, by some fault, i.e., by *hamartia*, producing disastrous effects or a peripety.⁴⁶ On the other side, however, the very possibility for a mistake, a greater or smaller one, is given through the contingent, even »casual«, *tychikos* character of the world in general and especially of human existence, what is remarkably discussed in the second book of Aristotle's *Physics* (Ph. II, esp. c. 5-8). Human existence as contingent is also subject to ignorance and mistake: Aristotle would say that a human being is – *sit venia verbo* – not only *tychic*, but also *hamartetic*, »prone to err« (Liddell-Scott-Jones), *hamartetikos* (EN, II 2, 1104b 33).

The manner of establishing reversal, recognition and mistake in a tragic story is the process of composing and resolving (*desis in lysis*, c. 18) the riddle, the problem or the conflict.⁴⁷ The dramatic story or *mythos* may therefore be called plot or intrigue. Aristotle's theory of *mythos* is a proof more for the thesis of O. Marquard, that as Aristotle's ethical theory concerns particularly human activity in its average prosperity, so the poetic or dramatic *mythos* represents human action in its conflicting dimension or aspect.⁴⁸ It is important to notice that Aristotle accurately distinguishes the levels of ethical and poetical analysis, what many translations, which render *mythos* with »action«, rather obliterate.

Regarding the inner structure of the tragic *mythos*, Aristotle has an entire series of terms for it:

1) *synthesis* (c. 23, 1459a 22) and *systasis* (c. 24, 1459b 21) signify *mythos* as composition, combination, structure

44. Compare D. W. Lucas, *Poetics* (1990), pp. 143-4.

45. These are the exemplary definitions by D. W. Lucas, o.c.p. 302 and 149.

46. Cf. D.W. Lucas, o.c.p. 303 and his article on *hamartia* in Appendix IV, pp. 299-307.

47. D. W. Lucas has noted that Aristotle has no single word for the tragic conflict any more than he has for the tragic hero, o.c.p. 129.

48. Cf. O. Marquard, »Ueber-Wir, Bemerkungen zur Diskursethik«, in: *Poetik und Hermeneutik XIX, Das Gespraech*, hg. K. Stierle, R. Warning (Muenchen 1984), str. 312: »... waehrend Aristoteles ... die Konflikte den Traguediendichtern ueberliess, von denen nicht die Ethik handelt, sondern die Poetik«.

2) *drâma* (c. 15, 54b 3) is a mythos as tragic myth and as play, as story performed on the stage⁴⁹; Aristotle says that the *deus ex machina* may be used only for events »outside the play« (Bywater), »external to the drama« (Butcher) (*exo tou dramatos*), which means that it is not permitted to introduce the stage-artifice into the play or into the composition of the mythos.

3) tragic mythos as narrative: *logos*, *mythos*, *mytheuma*⁵⁰ (c. 24, 1460a 27-33):

a): of *logos* we have already spoken (cf. above p. 9-10). *Logos* is the argument of tragic mythos, its subject, the general outline of a sequence of events. Such kind of *logos* is the *hypothesis* of Alexandrian scholars. It will become a mythos only through its concretisation with episodes, names of characters, etc.⁵¹

b) *mythos*: this is a story in all its variety, even absurdity (*atopon*, c. 24, 1460b 2), and sometimes unreasonableness or irrationality.

c) *mytheuma* (c. 24, 1460a 29): this is a narrative in its developed or finished form and so to say the narrative presentation of the whole story.⁵²

When a tragic poet succeeds in composing a tragic mythos in such a way, that he realizes all different formal (*logos*, *mytheuma*, *desis* and *lysis*) and substantial (*peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *pathos*) constituent parts, when further he represents an action according to the rules of probability or necessity – not excluding paradoxality – then his poem will be a unit and a whole, it will be like a beautiful creature or picture arousing astonishment, attaining its *telos* and achieving its *ergon*. The poetical mimesis is then the art of producing such quasi-real or – to employ an expression of R. Ingarden – »automatic world«⁵³, which is the world of artistic illusion. In summing up, we can say that Aristotle's theory of poetry became a theory of mythos, but theory of mythos itself became theory of poetical composition, »philosophy of composition« (E.A. Poe). So the theory of poetry becomes a theory of poetical fiction, of artistical illusion, which is the mode of existence of poetic truth. It is immanent for Aristotle's philosophy of art to be an apology of the so-called poetical truth or truth in the arts, which shall be the explicit subject matter in the chapter 24 and 25 of his *Poetics*.

49. According to R. Dupont-Roc – R. Lallot (1980), »*drâma*« signifies »mettre en acte sur la scène« (p. 266) or »la réalisation sur la scène« (p. 385).

50. Butcher translates *mytheuma* as »the action of the day«, whereas Liddel-Scott-Jones has »the plot of a play«.

51. Cf. M. Kuzmić (1912), pp. 179-80.

52. Dupont-Roc – Lallot (1980), p. 383-4.

53. R. Ingarden (1978), p. 47.

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