

Aristotle's *Poetics* in Margaret Doody's *Aristotle and poetic justice*

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Canadian-born academic Margaret Doody has written several detective novels in which the philosopher Aristotle makes use of his investigative powers to solve murder mysteries. In *Aristotle and poetic justice*, Stephanos, a friend of Aristotle, narrates how Aristotle solved a double murder which had taken place on the road to Delphi. Doody's novel provides a convenient framework for a view on the Greek world of 330 BC and, incidentally, a new look at Aristotle's perception of Greek genres. This article focuses on both these topics, the latter through the lens of Aristotle's *Poetics*. In the body of the article, allusions to the *Poetics* introduced by Doody are examined and evaluated, using a modified version of Genette's scheme as criterion.

Aristoteles se *Poëtika* in Margaret Doody se *Aristotle and poetic justice*

Margaret Doody, 'n Kanadees-gebore akademikus, het reeds vyfspeurromans geskryf waarin die filosoof Aristoteles van sy speurvernuif gebruik maak om moordraaisels op te los. In *Aristotle and poetic justice* vertel Stephanos, 'n vriend van Aristoteles, hoe Aristoteles 'n dubbele moord opgelos het wat op pad na Delphi gepleeg is. Doody se roman bied 'n gerieflike raamwerk vir 'n blik op die Griekse wêreld van 330 vC en boonop op Aristoteles se siening van Griekse genres. Die artikel fokus op beide hierdie onderwerpe, laasgenoemde deur die lens van Aristoteles se *Poëtika*. In die kern van die artikel word verwysings in Doody se roman na die *Poëtika* ondersoek en geëvalueer aan die hand van 'n aangepaste weergawe van Genette se skema.

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This article aims to examine the function of allusions to Aristotle's *Poetics* in Margaret Doody's novel *Aristotle and poetic justice*. The novel is approached as a work of fiction, reflecting a literary and historical hypotext, rather than as a detective mystery. First, the author and her genre are introduced, narrative strategies are examined, the personae of the novel introduced, and a plot summary provided. After a theoretical section on hypertext, its application is tested on two levels. First, Doody's use of faction are examined in which historical and fictional characters and events are conflated. The bulk of the article is devoted to an exploration of the *Poetics* as a tool whereby Aristotle attempts to apply the paradigm of literary genres to the experiences of the characters. The penultimate section evaluates the ways in which Doody employs her Aristotelian hypotext, using a modified version of Genette's scheme as criterion. In conclusion, it is argued that novels such as Doody's contribute to popularising the classics.

1. The author and her genre

Margaret Doody, professor in English Literature at Notre Dame University, specialises in restoration and eighteenth-century British literature and the novel, on which she has published extensively.¹ She has also managed to write five novels featuring Aristotle as detective.

Historical novels about Graeco-Roman antiquity have proliferated to such an extent that they have almost come to represent a discrete genre which esteemed authors such as Rosemary Sutcliff, Mary Renault and Colleen McCullough have made their own. In fact, "ancient detective fiction" can already be identified as a separate subgenre, with Lindsey Davis' *M. Didius Falco* (Mench 1993: 54) and Steven Saylor's *Gordianus the finder* (Mench 1993: 49) taking pride of place as Roman private investigators. Compared to Roman detective fiction, however, ancient Greek detective fiction appears to be very limited.

1 Cf <<http://www.nd.edu/~mdoody/>>

2. Narrative strategies, personae and plot

The Athenian Stephanos, a former student of the Macedonian philosopher Aristotle at the *Lyceum* in Athens, is used throughout as first-person narrator. One of his functions is to act as sounding board for the amateur detective Aristotle to test his hypotheses as he makes progress with his investigation. In fact, Stephanos plays Watson to Aristotle's Holmes, thus unwittingly acting as intermediary for Aristotle's thought processes and obviating the need for too many *ex cathedra* pronouncements by the Stageiran. As the most empirically minded of all Greek philosophers, Aristotle is ideally cast in his role as amateur detective. His knowledge of human psychology and logic stands him in good stead in the novel. As is implicit in the title, his poetics also come into play.

The length of the novel – 399 pages – can partly be accounted for by Doody's fondness for complicating the plot, but also by digressions on a Herodotean scale. Dorothy Sayers has written a tongue-in-cheek article in which she applies the "rules" of the *Poetics* to detective fiction. Doody would do well to heed her advice:

A man *might* write a detective story of the length of [Joyce's] *Ulysses*, but, if he did, the reader would not be able to bear all the scattered clues in mind from the first chapter to the last, and the effect of the final discovery would be lost (Sayers 1988: 27-8).

Apart from Aristotle and Stephanos, the most important members of the large cast of characters are centred around an Athenian family of "Silver Men". The Athenians Lysippos and Timotheos are brothers, the former a rich silver merchant, the latter an unworldly Platonist. Their brother Pherekrates has recently died. As daughter of Pherekrates, Anthia (nearly sixteen) has now become an heiress and is temporarily under the care of Lysippos. The beautiful Kallirrhoe of Ephesos is Anthia's slave. Lysippos has three children: Straton, Gorgias and Myrrhine. Gorgias has been missing in action after the Battle of Issos. Other characters include Glaukon, a silversmith and a shrewd dealer, and Ammonios, a brothel-owner with a newly developed interest in silver.

When Aristotle is requested by Lysippos to investigate the presumed abduction of Anthia and Kallirrhoe (Doody 2002: 53-5),² he and Stephanos depart on horseback for Delphi (72). Beneath a sacred oak in the hills of Boiotia, they discover the body of Straton; Aristotle deduces that he was stabbed on three separate occasions by three separate assailants (106). At the crossroads made famous by Oedipus, they next discover the body of Ammonios, who has been stabbed with a boar-spear (137-8). After being joined en route by Korydon, the lover of Kallirrhoe, they recover Kallirrhoe (238-41), and later Gorgias and Anthia (287-304), unharmed in the vicinity of Delphi. Before falling to his death above Delphi (331), Timotheos admits to the murder of Straton and Ammonios (329).

Near the end of the novel, Aristotle, ready for his *dénouement*, assembles all concerned and goes through the case point by point: the abductor was Glaukon (347-8); his prize was marriage to Anthia and thus a claim to her inheritance (353). In this instance, he was supported by Lysippos and, in particular, by Straton (352, 357). Since Ammonios wanted to gain a silver contract (360), and since he was interested in Anthia (362), he was poisoned by Straton (362). An indisposed Ammonios therefore set off to Delphi (361); at the oak tree, he stabbed Straton, already wounded by Gorgias, and left him dying (363). Ammonios, however, had to bustle off when he was interrupted by Timotheos, who finished off Straton (365), his object being to get total control of the family wealth (368). From what Timotheos learned from Straton before his death, he realised that Ammonios knew too much (366). He therefore killed him with a boar-spear at the crossroads (367). Timotheos also wanted to kill Lysippos (369) and attempted to frighten Myrrhine into committing suicide (370), in which case Timotheos would inherit all the family money; if not, Timotheos could lay hands on the money by marrying her (371).

2 All quotations from and page references to *Aristotle and poetic justice* are based on the 2002 Random House edition. Only the page numbers in parentheses are provided below.

3. Hypertext: theory

Since Doody's allusions to the *Poetics* will be discussed in literary-theoretical terms, the meanings of terms such as "intertext", "hypertext" and the like should first be briefly examined.³

In the introductory chapter to his magistral work on hypertextuality, Gérard Genette distinguishes five types of "hypertextualité",⁴ of which the following two are pertinent in this instance: "intertextualité" (Julia Kristeva's term), where text A is present in text B in the form of quotations or allusions (Genette 1982: 8-9), and "hypertextualité",⁵ where text B (the "hypertexte") is derived from text A (the "hypotexte") without B being a commentary on A (Genette 1982: 11-4).

Genette (1982: 451-2) compares the process whereby text A is transformed into text B to the creation of a *palimpsest*. A real-life *palimpsest* is the result of one or more texts written over the original on a *vellum* or papyrus manuscript. When applied to comparative literature, the metaphor of a *palimpsest* is similarly used to describe the result of Text B being "superscripted" or "superimposed" on Text A.⁶ An obvious example of such a "hypotexte" cited by Genette (1982: 355-7) is the *Odyssey*, with Vergil's *Aeneid* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* as two of its many "hypertextes".⁷

Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation in literature, cinematography and other media also makes use of the metaphor of a *palimpsest*:

Part of this ongoing dialogue with the past, for this is what adaptation means for audiences [or readers, FP], creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest – and knowingly so. [...] This is the

3 This section is an abbreviated and modified version of "hypo- and hypertexts" in Pauw 2008.

4 In this instance, *hypertextualité*, consisting of five subcategories, is used as "umbrella term" for an all-encompassing *textualité*.

5 In this instance, the term *hypertextualité* is more specific: it is one of the five subcategories.

6 Michael Alexander (Hutcheon 2006: 6) punningly speaks of the "palimpsestuous" relation between works: "If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence overshadowing the one we are experiencing directly."

7 Genette's terms will be anglicised in the remainder of this article.

intertextual pleasure in adaptation that some call elitist and others call enriching. Like classical imitation, adaptation appeals to the 'intellectual and aesthetic pleasure' [...] of understanding the interplay between works, of opening up a text's possible meanings to intertextual echoing. The adaptation and the adapted work merge in the audience's understanding of their complex interrelations [...] (Hutcheon 2006: 116-7).

Unlike Genette's examples of hypertextuality, some recent novels provide material for hypertextual study across generic parameters. It has been argued that this applies to Donna Tartt's *The secret history* (Pauw 1994 & 1995) and to William Golding's *The double tongue* (Pauw 2008), where Greek tragedies (Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Ion*, respectively) are used as acknowledged hypotexts. There thus appears to be a second way of adapting a classical hypotext: using a classical original in a certain genre as model for a hypertext in a different genre. A third approach could be added: using an historical or biographical novel to portray a particular period or historical personage, thus infusing the "facts" of history with the subjective element of fictionalisation.

For the sake of brevity, (i) will be called *intrageneric* (Homer → Vergil); (ii) *transgeneric* (Genette 1982: 15) (Euripides → Tartt); and (iii) *faction*, a conflation of historical fact and fictional elements (Van Heerden 1994: 5). These three theoretical options frequently overlap to some extent. To complicate matters, there is sometimes overlapping between the terms intertext and hypotext, depending on the extent of intertextual borrowing. In view of the frequency and importance of references to the *Poetics*, this will be regarded as more than a minor, incidental intertext. For the purposes of this examination, this will be treated as a solid hypotext.

4. Faction

The characters in Doody's novel frequently refer to historical events in the Greek world. This is no mere empty parading of historical knowledge on the part of the author, a well-versed classicist, but provides an historical intertext commensurate with the late classical era. Not surprisingly, in the fictional world of 330 BC such references usually have a bearing either on the conquests of Alexander

the Great or on the biographical background of Aristotle or his near-contemporaries such as Theophrastos.

An historical novel is a work of fiction. It is not to be judged by the same criteria as historiography for, in Aristotelian terms, it is “poetry” rather than “history”;⁸ in modern literary parlance, it is not fact but faction. Linda Hutcheon (1988: 5) coined the term “historiographic metafiction” to refer to works that fictionalise actual historical events or figures. In Hutcheon’s postmodernist field of reference, this term implies that the authorial personae allow themselves much more narratological liberties than Doody does, as witness her examples (*Midnight’s children*, *The tin drum*, *Flaubert’s parrot*, among others). Nevertheless, Doody’s novel qualifies as faction because, on the one hand, all the characters – even Aristotle, who has an historical equivalent – and the plot are fictional and, on the other, the setting could demonstrably be correlated with the historical Athens and Delphi of 330 BC. Thus, the overarching effect is that of a conflation of fact and fiction.

Against this background, should a distinction be made between the “fictional” Aristotle and the “historical” Aristotle? Brian McHale (1987), for one, disagrees with this principle. Applying Eco’s term “transworld identity”, he argues that

[i]f an entity in one world differs from its ‘prototype’ in another world only in accidental properties, not in essentials, and if there is a one-to-one correspondence between the prototype and its other-world variant, then the two entities can be considered identical even though they exist in different worlds.

The reader then intuits that “[...] a historical personage is in some sense the ‘same’ as his fictional representation in an historical novel” (McHale 1987: 35). Nevertheless, to avoid confusion a distinction shall be made, where necessary, between “the fictional Aristotle” (Doody’s character) and “the historical Aristotle” (the author of the *Poetics*).

How trustworthy is Doody’s fictional depiction of historical events, as reflected in narrations or conversations between characters? It appears that the author knows her history. She has been most meticulous in her

8 *Poetics* 9. 1451a-b.

research – except for the minor peccadillo that Aristotle could not yet have been 56 in the spring of 330, as the *List of characters* claims.

The single most important chronological reference for the purpose of dating the fictional time of the novel is made very early, when Stephanos places the *Anthesteria* with which the novel commences in the year “when Aristophanes [...] was arkhon – the spring when Alexander was making himself master of Persia, just after he had captured Persepolis [...]” (2-3, cf 15). Since Persepolis was taken in January 330 BC (Fox 1973: 256-7), this gives the novel a fictional date of spring 330 BC. This dating is reinforced by numerous references to the conquests of Alexander in the first half of the novel. Thus, for instance, first Stephanos (8) and then Lysippos (19) refer to Alexander’s taking of Egypt as an advantage for securing much-needed grain supplies. This event can be dated to 331 BC (Kinder & Hilgemann 1982: 65). On another occasion, Ammonios tells Stephanos about the death in battle of Pherekrate’s son Demodikos “seven years ago, at Khaironia, when Athens and Thebes fought together [...]” (13). This leads to Stephanos reminiscing that “I had been nearly old enough to fight myself in that war against King Philip of Macedon and his victorious son Alexander, who had led the Macedonian cavalry himself in that very battle” (14). The attempted Athenian-Theban resistance to the Macedonian invasion at Khaironia can be dated to 338 BC, so that Doody’s time frame squares with that of the historians. The resultant fate of Thebes is later recalled by Stephanos when they are travelling through rural Boiotia: “These rustics in their village had at least escaped the cruel destruction loosed by the Makedonian kings on that unfortunate city, formerly the capital of Boiotia” (128). Robert Lane Fox (1973: 88) describes the fate of Thebes in 335 BC as follows:

[The allied Greeks with resentments against Thebes] voted for Thebes’s utter destruction [...]. So the city was destroyed, all private ground was given to the allies to farm as a reward, and 30,00 Thebans are said to have been enslaved, women and children included.” Ammonios further enlightens Stephanos that “Gorgias [...] went off to war a few years ago. [...] Declared missing in action in one of the skirmishes after the battle of Issos town” (14).

The battle of Issos can be dated to November 333 BC (Kinder & Hilgemann 1982: 65).

When Korydon joins Aristotle and Stephanos, he naturally has occasion to refer to political events influencing his adventures in Ionia. He rhetorically asks, for instance: “You know the history of Ephesos – how the cities of the coast and ours among them were besieged by Alexander four years ago?” (164). Later, he recounts how “Alexander [...] gave [Halikarnassos] to Queen Ada. [...] So she ruled as vice-regent of Alexander [...] and all of Karia was put under her control” (175). Fox (1973: 136) mentions that she adopted Alexander as her son; thereupon, “mother Ada was named [Caria’s] satrap and given troops under a Macedonian commander to do work that might prove too strenuous for an elderly woman” (Fox 1973: 139-40). References such as the above authenticate Korydon’s account of his peregrinations in Ionia and add local colour to his narrative.

Some historical references relate to the historiographic activities of Aristotle. Both Aristotle (63) and Stephanos (199) recount how Aristotle and his nephew Kallisthenes had been involved “just after the Sacred War” (63), or “seven or eight years ago” (199) in writing the history of Delphi and compiling the *List of victors at the Pythian Games* at Delphi. According to De Ste Croix (1992: 29), the latter enterprise is proved beyond doubt by a Delphic inscription. Aristotle further informs Stephanos that “Kallisthenes my nephew has been writing his history as he accompanies Alexander ...” (169, 63).⁹

All these chronological allusions are revealed naturally in the course of Stephanos’ narration or in conversations between characters, so that they do not create the impression of an artificial history lesson. Thus, the fictional characters and the factual background are successfully integrated into fiction.

From the above examples, it appears that Doody is meticulous in framing her fictional plot and characters against a military-political background that can be checked for factual correctness. Although her references to socio-cultural practices such as inheritance laws, religious customs, dress codes or the architecture of Athens and Delphi

9 Allusions to historical events in the more remote past occur on pages 10 (Themistocles), 205 (the naval battle at Aigospotamoi in 405), 191 (the earthquake at Delphi in 373), and 205 (the battle of Leuktra in 371).

have not been closely examined, the author believes that she demonstrates the same attention to detail when dealing with them.

5. Aristotle's *Poetics*

Such is the importance of literature in Greek culture that no novel with a classical Greek setting, especially one in which Aristotle features, would carry conviction if it fails to contain ample references to Greek literature. In this, Doody does not disappoint the reader, for there is sufficient allusion to archaic and classical literature to ring true. Some allusions are explicitly identified per author or title; other literary hypotexts are implicitly alluded to. Authors who are mentioned or implied include, in chronological sequence, Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Menander, Theokritos and Chariton. This article will focus exclusively on Aristotle's *Poetics*.

It is to be expected that a philosopher such as Aristotle would, on occasion, intersperse small talk or discussions of the murder cases with discourses on his own philosophy. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle is known as an empirical researcher with a proclivity for the natural sciences that was not shared by his idealist precursor and mentor. What does come as a surprise, therefore, is the frequency and profundity with which remarks are made that the reader can trace to a single work of Aristotle that, in dealing with literary theory, is perhaps least representative of his oeuvre. Sizeable chunks of the fictional Aristotle's musings are taken over almost *verbatim*, or in a thematically recognisable form, from the *Poetics*.¹⁰ It should be noted that the historical Aristotle's interest in tragedy was not merely an ephemeral phenomenon limited to a monograph written in approximately 335 BC. Victor Castellani (1990: 32) has calculated that as early as in the second and third books of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle cites and quotes Attic playwrights even more often than Attic and other orators in nearly every chapter. This demonstrates not only the moral

10 Reference to other works of Aristotle, or allusion to his views, is made on pp 65 (the non-extant *For Eudemos on the Soul*), 184-5, 263 and 398 (*Politics*: on slavery, and on the collective inclination of social beings).

importance he attached to drama as educating the individual and the polis, but also his own acquaintance with and interest in Greek drama, in particular tragedy, even before he had started to write the *Poetics*.

In Doody's novel, the fictional Aristotle discusses, without attribution, aspects of the *Poetics* in 330 BC which his historical counterpart had put to paper some five years previously. Against this background, the hypertextual adaptations of the *Poetics* in *Aristotle and poetic justice* will be considered.

5.1 The manner of imitation

The narration in *Aristotle and poetic justice* commences with a description of the *Anthesteria* festival (1-2), and the first fifty pages are interspersed with references to this festival. The last day of the *Anthesteria*, the Day of the Pots, is a day of ill omen, on which it is customary to make an offering to Hermes of the Underworld (48). The slaves, the children and the women are therefore sitting in the kitchen regaling each other with fearful stories of spirits from the Underworld (49), probably for apotropaic reasons. When Stephanos' steward, Dametas, mimics different voices in telling his tales, Aristotle remarks:

Interesting [...] how all men naturally delight in imitation. There you see the native origin of all poetry, even the epics of Homer and the dramas of Sophokles. Dametas [...] creates character, and speaks in various voices. In its perfection, that is the technique of Homer, who wastes little time speaking for himself, but is always bringing forth characters who say and do things (49-50).

The fictional Aristotle's remark is a conflation of three separate passages in the *Poetics*. In the first,¹¹ the historical Aristotle argues that the origin of poetry is to be found in two natural causes (φυσικαὶ αἰτίαι): that man is the most imitative (μιμητικώτατον) of all living beings, and that he finds pleasure (τὸ χαίρειν) in imitation. Poetry derives especially from the second of these. The second passage¹² deals with the so-called "manner (or mode) of imitation".

11 *Poetics* 4. 1448b4-9.

12 *Poetics* 3. 1448a19-24.

Since Aristotle's argument suffers from the terseness customary to the *Poetics* and has been subjected to emendation, I take recourse to the paraphrase of Golden & Hardison (1986: 85-6), according to whom Aristotle provides for three different manners of representation: when the poet speaks in his own person (as in dithyramb, or in modern lyric poetry); when the characters in drama do their own "imitating" or impersonating,¹³ and the mixed kind, which is a combination of the previous two and epitomised by Homer.¹⁴

In the third passage,¹⁵ which specifically deals with epic poetry, Homer's narratological approach is praised because he limits his own "voice". A remark by Deborah Roberts (1992: 143) contextualises this passage:

What is implicit here is that the more closely [epic] narrative approximates to drama (a desideratum suggested by Aristotle's praise of Homer in Chapter 24 for being more mimetic in the dramatic sense than other epic poets), that is, the more vivid and more detailed its narration, the more it will evoke the same response as drama [...].

In fact, the phraseology of the fictional Aristotle ("Homer [...] wastes little time speaking for himself") as well as that of the historical Aristotle ("the poet himself should speak in his own person [...] as little as possible") does less than justice to Homer's contribution. Irene de Jong (1987: x, 7) has calculated that only 45% of the *Iliad* consists of speeches and 55% of simple or complex narration. If one follows De Jong, the latter is to be credited to the voice of the poet. In that case, the claim of the author, or of the fictional Aristotle as her mouthpiece, is exaggerated.

13 This is reiterated in 6. 1449b-26-27, where it is said that the *mimēsis* is to be accomplished by means of acting and not by means of narration (δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας).

14 For a summary of alternative interpretations, cf Woodruff 1992: 78-9.

15 *Poetics* 24. 1460a7-11.

5.2 The fearful: probability and necessity

When Aristotle resumes, he introduces a new topic, his subject matter, however, still being provided by Dametas' ghost stories:

Yet the marvellous is required in tragedy. And in epic. All narratives should cause wonder in some fashion. But this kind of fireside tale, the sort which endeavours to rouse horror without moral meaning, is admittedly not a high form. [...] The hearers recognize their own wonder is cheaply bought. Actions should be connected by cause and effect. A good story should not be made up of random or improbable incidents. There are improbabilities in Odysseus' being set ashore in Ithaka which would be unbearably absurd in the hands of a worse poet than Homer. If our belief is suddenly strained, we lose that faith in the work as a whole which is, while not the true pleasure of literature, the basis of all its pleasures (50).

Once again, the fictional Aristotle's discourse is a conflation of a number of passages in the *Poetics*. The function of "the marvellous" (τὸ θαυμαστόν) is discussed in a passage¹⁶ where it is commended, as being "pleasing" (ἡδύ), for tragedy and even more so for epic poetry. The censure of "horror without moral meaning" is reminiscent of a passage¹⁷ where Aristotle slates the use of "the monstrous" for shock effect: "Those who use the spectacle to create not the fearful (τὸ φοβερὸν) but only the monstrous (τὸ τερατώδες) have no share in the creation of tragedy."¹⁸ "The fearful", of course, plays an indispensable role in Aristotle's definition of tragedy, where he famously but ambiguously states that "tragedy achieves, through the representation of pitiable and fearful incidents (δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου), the catharsis of such pitiable and fearful incidents".¹⁹

Plato believed that dramatic poetry, on account of its mimetic (and thus misleading) quality, has the psychological power to harm the souls of his Guardians.²⁰ Aristotle's response is to address the

16 *Poetics* 24. 1460a11-18.

17 *Poetics* 14. 1453b8-10.

18 Translations of the *Poetics* are those of Leon Golden, occasionally slightly altered.

19 *Poetics* 6. 1449b27-28. In the context of Aristotle's definition, φόβος and ἔλεος, I think, can be better rendered by "awe" and "empathy", respectively.

20 *Republic* 606d6-7.

affective dimension of tragedy that had been attacked by Plato. He does so by arguing that the emotions of pity and fear are neutralised by catharsis and so rendered beneficial instead of harmful. Rorty (1992: 14) gives a comprehensive definition of catharsis:

[I]t is a medical term, referring to a therapeutic cleansing or purgation; it is a religious term, referring to a purification achieved by the formal and ritualized, bounded expression of powerful and often dangerous emotions; it is a cognitive term, referring to an intellectual resolution or clarification that involves directing emotions to their appropriate intentional objects.

Rorty (1992: 14) and Segal (1996: 155) argue that the three notions should not be separated but regarded as complementary.

In creating optimal conditions for experiencing painful emotions and for enjoying their subsequent relief, Aristotle thus counters Plato's criticism of dramatic poetry.

A further Aristotelian hypotext implicit in this passage²¹ deals with the importance of probability (τὸ εἰκὸς) or necessity (τὸ ἀναγκαῖον) in the plot of a tragedy. Since the poet writes fiction, he can improvise his plot, even if it is based on a well-known myth. When, however, he improvises his plot in a random or improbable manner, when it consists of a series of episodic and causally unrelated events, it will be considered inferior. To be effective, it should have an internally consistent logic, A. leading to B. and B. leading to C. according to the laws of probability or necessity.²²

By implication, such causal coherence should also hold true for the murder mystery plot which Aristotle has unravelled: the seemingly unrelated should be shown to be causally related "according to the laws of probability or necessity". Thus, for instance, his deduction

21 *Poetics* 9. 1451a38.

22 The role of probability is qualified by a passage near the end of the novel. When Aristotle and Stephanos cannot satisfactorily fit their experiences into any known genre, Aristotle adds: "As for improbabilities, an author can use them skilfully; I admit they exist in the world. As Agathon said, 'It is likely that unlikely things should happen.' One would rather have a probable impossibility than an improbable possibility" (393). The hypotext for this allusion is *Poetics* 18. 1455a23-25; also cf 24. 1460 a26-27; 25, 1461b11-12.

that by a combination of motive, opportunity and temperament, it was Timotheos who murdered Straton and dealt the final blow to Ammonios, was based on probability and logical “necessity”.

The fictional Aristotle’s example of Homer handling the improbability of Odysseus being set ashore in Ithaca more skilfully than poorer poets would have done is mentioned in a chapter in the *Poetics* dealing with epic poetry.²³

A last Aristotelian hypotext²⁴ is contained in the words “the true pleasure of literature”. According to Rorty (1992: 16):

The pleasures that are specific to tragic drama are those that connect the most profound of our pleasures – the pleasures of learning – with the therapeutic pleasures of catharsis, ‘the pleasure arising from pity and fear through mimesis’.

The above clearly indicates that the fictional Aristotle used a mundane experience (the telling of ghost stories by Dametas) to theorise, much like his historical counterpart but in a more casual manner, about what may be allowed in tragedy and epic. Since the tone is conversational, he does not attempt to recap or draw a consistent conclusion; in fact, he soon starts with a new topic.

5.3 The primacy of plot

After an interruption by Stephanos, Aristotle proceeds:

[P]hilosophers only discourse, and do not represent life. In their lectures and in their pages, nothing happens. [...] But in life men live by action – by *doing* – not for some static quality. It is finally in our deeds and our experience that we are happy or miserable. The spine of life is truly action of some kind or other. [...] You can have a tragedy without much in the way of character, but tragedy is impossible without action (51).

Aristotle then adds that he has tried his hand at tragedy, but that “[t]he characters, who all sounded the same, stood about philosophizing most tranquilly”, and that he therefore discontinued his attempts (52).

23 *Poetics* 24. 1460a34-37.

24 *Poetics* 14. 1453b10-14.

This discourse by the fictional Aristotle echoes a hypotext in the *Poetics*²⁵ where the historical Aristotle, having distinguished between the six components of tragedy, now grades plot and character in terms of importance. To the argument adduced in the quotation (“Tragedy is possible without character – ἄνευ ἠθῶν – but not without action – ἄνευ πράξεως”), three others are added: the purpose of tragedy is achieved by plot and incidents (action), rather than by speeches demonstrating character; reversal and recognition, by means of which tragedy “exerts an influence on the soul”, are parts of the plot, and the construction of plots is more difficult than the perfection of character (1450a29-38). According to these arguments, then, plot has primacy over character.

The above excursus is introduced by the words: “Aristotle pursued a topic which seemed to interest him”. The comments about the primacy of plot are thus made in passing by the fictional Aristotle; they are not necessitated by the preceding passage. Moreover, they occur too early in *Aristotle and poetic justice* to have any effect on the *dénouement* of the plot. However, the discerning reader might recall this passage and read through it as through a *palimpsest* when, much later (391), the plot of *Aristotle and poetic justice* is likened to the plot of a tragedy.

5.4 The length of a plot

After viewing the friezes of the Siphnian Treasury and the Treasury of the Athenians in the course of their tour of Delphi, Aristotle remarks:

[T]hese friezes are just right, as they are various and intricate yet of a size to be taken in with the eye – just as a good literary plot, while it cannot consist of a tiny episode, must be of a length which memory can retain. [...] Polygnotos was a great painter. [...] But no painter nowadays would create murals so crowded with various figures and actions. Meaning requires unity. If a story is full of mere episodes, then the story is mistakenly planned [...] (212-13).

25 *Poetics* 6. 1450a15-25.

This passage is based on a hypotext in the *Poetics*²⁶ where the proper magnitude for other works of art is also applied to literature. The argument is that there are limitations to the human eye (in the case of the visual and plastic arts) and the human memory (in the case of literary genres). Just as the friezes must be of a size (μέγεθος) to be perceived at a glance (εὐσύνοπτον), so a tragedy must have a length (μῆκος) to be taken in by memory (εὐμνημόνευτον). If these limitations are exceeded, communication will fail. If the object seen or the text read is too small or too short, the same applies. This proviso has been succinctly formulated by Rorty (1992: 4):

Like all representation, drama selectively condenses and structures what it presents. It reveals the inner logic and causal organization of an apparently disconnected series of events, encompassing them to form a single extended, self-contained and completed activity.

Moreover, as Deborah Roberts (1992: 134) reminds us: “Where even epic is limited in what it can actually include, tragedy – both shorter and more compact – is more radically so.” This is reinforced by a remark earlier in chapter 7²⁷ about the completeness and wholeness of tragedy: “To be a whole is to have a beginning (ἀρχήν) and a middle (μέσον) and an end (τελευτήν)”.

But are Greek tragedies really so neatly packaged? It could be argued that part of what happens in Athenian, and especially Euripidean, tragedy precedes the prologue and succeeds the *exodos*. The retrospective part of a typical Euripidean prologue and the prophetic component of the parting speech by a *deus ex machina* imply action outside the parameters of “beginning” and “end”. In that sense, beginning and closure should not be used as absolute terms referring to the first and last lines of a tragedy, respectively.

The quotation from chapter 7 of the *Poetics* serves as hypotext for the *dénouement* scene in the novel. When Aristotle has assembled all the characters involved in Doody’s murder mystery, he is ready to explain his deductions and conclusions step by step, *à la* Hercule

26 *Poetics* 7. 1451a3-6.

27 *Poetics* 7. 1450b26-27.

Poirot. But before he starts, he remarks, seemingly stating the obvious: "Every story should have a beginning, a middle and an end, but where to start is often a puzzle" (343). For the purposes of his *dénouement*, he starts with the abduction of Anthia, although he realises that it was preceded by planning.

Aristotle's remarks concerning the correct length of a plot in tragedy have thus been triggered off by the mathematical proportions he observed in the architectural friezes at Delphi.

5.5 Historical personae?

Still in Delphi, Aristotle notices the votive marble Sphinx dedicated by the Naxians, and is reminded of the riddle of the Sphinx and thus of the Delphic maxim "Know Thyself" (218-19). These musings then set off the following train of thought:

[...] if a man doesn't fully know himself, how can he fully know another? The poets pretend to know, but they fully know only men they themselves create. Tragedy, it is true, usually deals with historical persons, and often with what has manifestly happened. Yet different poets give different accounts of the same persons. Aiskhylos and Euripides created different Elektras, for instance. Who is the real Elektra? (219).

Does Greek tragedy, in fact, deal with historical persons? A demanding student might answer that there are only three tragedies to which this applies: Aeschylus' *Persians*, produced in 472 BC, based on the events of the naval battle off Salamis in 480 and containing historical personae such as Queen Atossa and King Xerxes, as well as the non-extant *The capture of Miletos*, produced in 492, and *The Phoinissai*, produced in 476, both by Phrynichos. Does the fictional Aristotle, then, err in his judgment? Let us examine his hypotext:²⁸ "In regard to tragedy [...], our poets cling to the names of the heroes of the past (τῶν γενομένων ὀνομάτων) on the principle that whatever is capable of happening is readily believable." The solution for a modern reader is to realise that for the Greeks, myth constituted history. This consideration accounts for the fictional Aristotle's choice of words: "historical

28 *Poetics* 9. 1451b15-16.

persons” and “what has manifestly happened”. Whereas the personae in Middle and New Comedy were usually invented by the playwright, Greek tragedy had a vast pool of mythical material, regarded as historical, to draw on for both plot and characters.

Do different poets treat the same mythical material in different ways? The Aristotelian hypotext for this claim²⁹ reads as follows: “A poet may not alter completely (λύειν) the traditional stories; [...] but he should be inventive (εὐρίσκειν) in adapting the stories that have been handed down.” Euripides, for instance, made use of the available mythical material when composing his *Medea*, but innovatively added the Aigeus scene, thus introducing the theme of childlessness and providing a refuge for Medea in Athens.

As regards Aristotle’s claim concerning Elektra, we are, as it happens, in the exceptional position to evaluate it because Elektra tragedies by all three the major fifth-century tragic poets are extant: Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*, Sophokles’ *Elektra* and Euripides’ *Elektra*. Indeed, these three versions portray the psychology and motivation of Elektra, her relationship with Orestes, and her role in the matricide differently. To compare but the first variable: the Aeschylean Elektra is motivated not so much by love of her father as by hatred of her mother and obedience to Apollo (De Marre 1988: 7); the Sophoklean Elektra by love of her father and a sense of duty, obedience to the oracle playing a lesser role (De Marre 1988: 11). In Euripides, the heroic is debunked and the full horror of the murders depicted, with Elektra showing hypocritical concern for her mother (De Marre 1988: 23, 38).

Aristotle’s claim about the historical basis of tragedy has thus been set in motion by a totally different subject – self-knowledge. This, in turn, was a natural consequence of his being reminded of the Delphic maxim γνῶθι σεαυτὸν. It therefore becomes clear that Aristotle’s reflections on the *Poetics* are no mere *obiter dicta*, but are triggered by the specifics of the situation in which he finds himself as he attempts to solve the murder mystery.

29 *Poetics* 14. 1453b22-26.

5.6 Reversal and recognition

Aristotle and Stephanos have come to Delphi to consult the Oracle of Apollo on the liberation of slaves (in particular, Korydon and Kallirrhoe) and marriage, respectively. They are uncertain as to how to proceed and are seeking divine guidance. Against the background, then, of divine omniscience and the limitations of human knowledge, Aristotle remarks:

The unforgettable thing about Tragedy – and it is present even in Comedy – is Ignorance. Ignorance reminds us of our true condition. Discovery is most important in the plot of fiction. [...] Discovery moves us from ignorance to knowledge. [...] All memorable stories have in them the divine element of piercing recognition. And recognition usually accompanies a change, a reversal (220).³⁰

Two famous definitions in the *Poetics* serve as the hypotext of this passage:

- Reversal (περιπέτεια) is the change of fortune (μεταβολή) in the action of the play to the opposite state of affairs [...]; and this change [...] should be in accordance with probability and necessity.³¹
- Recognition (ἀναγνώρισις) [...] is a change from ignorance (ἐξ ἀγνοίας) to knowledge (εἰς γνῶσιν), bringing about a state of friendship or one of hostility on the part of those who have been marked out for good fortune or for bad.³²

In the latter definition, the relationship between the key words is reinforced by their etymological kinship.

An example of ἀναγνώρισις is provided by the fortunes of Oedipus, who experiences a recognition or a discovery – a change from ignorance to knowledge – when first the Corinthian Messenger and then the Theban Shepherd provide new information pertaining to his genealogy. But since the ostensible good news brought by the Messenger

30 For a comparable passage, cf p 260: “Indeed, although this has been a scene rich in *peripeteia* and recognition, our rich heiress is still lost. [...] Who would believe that Anthia could be abducted for two days and still be marriageable? An impossible probable, or probable impossible.”

31 *Poetics* 11. 1452a22–24.

32 *Poetics* 11. 1452a29–32.

proves to be bad news, Oedipus simultaneously experiences a change of fortune for the worse. Paradoxically, then, blissful ignorance has protected him from the pain of knowledge. The role of ignorance versus knowledge was not limited to tragedy; as Erich Segal (1969: 77) remarks, “Ἄγνοια has often been called the patron goddess of New Comedy”. It is often ignorance of family relationships that creates dramatic suspense in New Comedy. When, at the end of a comedy, the impoverished suitor serendipitously discovers his relationship to a rich testator, he is ready to marry the girl of his choice. Sometimes this is facilitated by the discovery that she is also of noble birth.

Once again, a happenstance in the story line – a visit to the oracle – has given the fictional Aristotle occasion to reflect on the hypotext of his historical counterpart, thus providing the reader with literary food for thought in addition to the murder mystery.

5.7 Family ties

With reference to family relationships and the role of inheritance law in the planning of the murders,³³ the fictional Aristotle remarks: “It was a family crime. As in so many dramas. Dreadful deeds seem more terrible and pitiful when they are committed by natural friends” (371).³⁴

The hypotext for this remark is to be found in a passage³⁵ where the historical Aristotle is discussing different ways of eliciting fear and pity when the characters in tragedy have different degrees of ignorance or knowledge of the tragic incidents. The pivotal sentence reads as follows: “Whenever the tragic incidents (τὰ πάθη) occur in situations involving close ties of blood (ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις), [...] there will be something pitiable.” Once again, it should be borne in mind that fear and pity play an indispensable role in Aristotle’s definition

33 Doody is clearly well acquainted with the intricacies of Athenian inheritance law, and the lure of inheritance money is the prime motive for the murders. However, this issue lies outside the scope of this article.

34 For a comparable passage, cf 390: “Families are important, [...] as recent events have shown us. But not always happy, are they? Like Agamemnon’s ill-starred family.”

35 *Poetics* 14. 1453b19-22.

of tragedy. Fear and pity can best be elicited when characters are emotionally and genetically close, and a tragic deed such as murder threatens to take place, with the would-be perpetrator achieving *anagnorisis* in time.³⁶ One example adduced by the historical Aristotle is that of Orestes' sacrifice being averted in *Iphigenia amongst the Taurians* when Iphigenia recognises him in time. White (1992: 232) gives an apt summary of this theme:

The importance of personal ties (*philia*) is that the protagonists harm (or almost harm) people they themselves would much rather not harm. In the better plays, their own horror when they recognize the terrible things they have done, or the joy when they learn in time what they were about to do, dramatizes for us in the audience the moral importance of concerns for *philoï*. For when enemies do (or almost do) terrible things to one another, their actions typically cause them bitter satisfaction, not grief – witness the *Hecuba*.

In the passage from *Aristotle and poetic justice*, the fictional Aristotle's thoughts on the importance of family ties in tragedy are not an abstract academic exercise devoid of context, but are triggered by the real-life parallel of the role of family ties in the planning of the murders.

5.8 Surprise

The passages discussed in 5.8 to 5.11 appear in the last chapter of the novel, called *Aristotle's Poetics*, thus suggesting a more coherent focus on what is promised in the title of the novel.

After Stephanos has suggested that the events of the previous days would make a wonderful tragedy – or even an epic – (390), Aristotle comments, with reference to the young lovers Korydon and Kallirrhoe:

What epic or dramatic writer of worth would ever deal with the lives of two unimportant [...] young people who pass through many illogical vicissitudes? Now, Lysippos' and Timotheos' story has logical unity, certainly. Cause and effect – though with a certain dash of chance, of the kind not uncommon in Tragedy (391).

In the discussion of a previous passage (5.2), the role of Aristotelian “probability” and “necessity” was emphasised. By the same token, randomness was censured. This is commensurate with the “logical unity”

36 *Poetics* 14. 1454a4-9.

and “cause and effect” ascribed by the fictional Aristotle to Lysippos’ and Timotheos’ experiences. Now, however, the possibility of “a certain dash of chance” is added. Is this not inconsistent? Does it not fly in the face of logical coherence? There is a hypotext in the *Poetics* which may shed some light on it.³⁷ After slating episodic plots, Aristotle argues that

fearful and pitiable incidents [...] are intensified when they occur unexpectedly (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν), yet because of one another (δι’ ἀλληλα). For there is more of the marvellous (τὸ θαυμαστὸν) in them if they occur this way than if they occurred spontaneously and by chance (ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης). Even in regard to coincidences (τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης), those seem to be most astonishing (θαυμασιώτατα) that appear to have some design (ὥσπερ ἐπίτηδες) associated with them.

Hardison’s commentary on this passage (Golden & Hardison 1968: 163) makes it even clearer:

An incident such as a murder is pitiable and fearful by itself; it is all the more so if it carries with it the shock of surprise. Finally, the shock will be greater if, after the incident has occurred, we realize that the plot was leading up to it all along.

When one compares the passages in Doody and in the *Poetics*, the historical Stageiran proves to be more circumspect in his qualifications than his fictional counterpart. Nevertheless, the *Poetics* passage quoted has clearly served as hypotext.

5.9 The tragic hero and plot

When asked by Aristotle about the central figure or hero of their adventure, Stephanos suggests, first, Straton, and then, Timotheos. Aristotle then sets out his criteria for deciding on a hero and a plot:

The passing of a thoroughly bad man from good to bad fortune satisfies the feelings of an audience. For no one who loves mankind and respects social law would wish it otherwise. So too with the reward of the good. We may call this ‘philanthropic justice’. But the discovery and rightful death of a bad man is not the stuff of true tragedy. It does not stir pity and fear. The protagonist of a tragedy ought to be a man somewhat like our own selves – or ourselves as we think we are – but really better in some ways. A man who falls not through gross villainy but through making some fatal mistake (391).

37 *Poetics* 9. 1452a1-7.

In this scheme, the fictional Aristotle suggests three types of plot: the passing of a thoroughly bad man from good to bad fortune (to be rejected); the passing of a thoroughly good man from bad to good fortune (to be rejected), and the passing of an above-average man from good to bad fortune through a fatal mistake (to be commended).

In the hypotext for this passage,³⁸ the reasons for the rejection of the first and second types and for the endorsement of the third type are provided in more detail, with a further two possibilities: the passing of thoroughly bad men (τοὺς μοχθηροὺς) from bad to good fortune (ἐξ ἀτυχίας εἰς εὐτυχίαν), and the passing of thoroughly good men (τοὺς ἐπιεικέεις ἄνδρας) from good to bad fortune. The historical Aristotle also rejects both these last possibilities.

Much speculative energy has been invested in the nature of the “fatal mistake” (ἄμαρτία) leading to the tragic hero’s fall. Golden’s translation (“miscalculation”) gives an intellectual air to it which will be applicable to a fair number of tragic heroes, but is too one-sided; Rorty (1992: 2) opts for the quaint term “an erring waywardness”. Sherman (1992: 178) gives the following explanation of the protagonist’s position: “The tragic hero is not simply the victim of arbitrary fate or irrational accident. [...] Rather what matters is that the agent chooses, but chooses in a way that leads to calamity. The choice goes awry because of ignorance or misjudgement [...].”

What responsibility do tragic heroes have for their choices? Is actual culpability at stake, or mere negligence? White (1992: 230) provides the following alternatives:

Whether or not [the protagonists] act intentionally for bad ends that they choose at the start, their action must bring about (or at least threaten to bring about) unwanted results; whether or not their choice is a ‘moral error’, their action has a ‘moral cost’ only if it results in the loss (or imminent loss) of something they rightly value. This may be a cost they are willing to pay, as in Medea’s decision to sacrifice her children, or Electra’s support for matricide; or it may come as a complete surprise, as when Oedipus discovers his relationship to the man he killed and the family with whom he lives.

38 *Poetics* 13. 1452b30-1453a17.

By the criteria of the implicit hypotext of the *Poetics*, the fictional Aristotle concludes, Timotheos does not pass muster as a tragic hero. Since he regards Timotheos as a thoroughly bad man, neither pity nor fear was elicited when he walked off the cliff at Delphi. Pity, according to the historical Aristotle, would have been experienced had his misfortune been undeserved, and fear if the onlookers could identify with him. But now, the fictional Aristotle argues, “[the audience] would feel something more like satisfaction: ‘Ah! There he goes! Serves him right!’ That sort of thing isn’t found in good literature” (392).

Aristotle’s judgment is probably influenced by the fact that Timotheos is depicted in the novel as a holier-than-thou Platonist who regards himself as a lover of the Beautiful and the Good (65). In support, Timotheos quotes from the *Symposium* (65-6):

The soul of the true lover, passing beyond particular things, climbs aloft to the highest beauty so that in the end he knows the being of Beauty itself, pure and unmixed, uncontaminated with the flesh and colouring of humanity and that sort of transient and dying stuff.³⁹

Timotheos is dismissive of his non-philosophical brother Lysippos:

He has set his mind on particulars, material things, mere shadows and shows of the real. If he had learned, as Plato says, to love the Good, he would know that what happens – or seems to happen – in this shadowy cave⁴⁰ is not of importance. He sets his heart on that which passes away, on mortal flesh subject to decay (279).

Timotheos’ Platonic otherworldliness is dangerous: he thinks that his Platonism elevates him above ordinary mortals (328), and it is this hubris that leads to the callous murders he commits. In fact, in another passage (329) he exclaims: “I am a midwife of the spirit, true descendant of Sokrates and Plato. Yet I was despised.” Clearly, he had a chip on his shoulder: he even wanted to found another Academy, with himself as head (372).

39 The intertext for this quotation is *Symposium* 211d-e.

40 The metaphor of the cave is described in *Republic* 514a-518b. For a comparable passage, cf p 308, where a despondent Gorgias disparages Aristotle’s suggestion to pray to Apollo: “Phantom and illusion. The shadows of the imitation of things, flickering on cave walls.”

Aristotle's judgment of the character of Timotheos as *μοχθηρός* is thus exacerbated by the discrepancy between Timotheos' avowed idealism and his hidden opportunism and greed. If someone lacking the lofty ideals of Timotheos had been guilty of a double murder, it would already have been morally reprehensible; the huge gap between Timotheos' theory and practice makes it all the more repugnant.

A question that cannot be avoided is whether Aristotle shows prejudice against Timotheos as a member of a rival philosophical school. Although there was no love lost between the Academy and the Lyceum, and although Timotheos is depicted almost as a caricature of a pie-in-the-sky philosophy Aristotle as realist would have rejected, there is no suggestion of prejudice in the text: throughout, Aristotle remains the detached observer who weighs his evidence with impartiality and arrives at his conclusions with an almost Olympian aloofness. But he does so without dispensing with his humanity: above all, he remains true to his humanist principles, as is borne out when he advises Lysippos to flee to Naxos in order to avoid the Athenian charge of *bouleusis* (336), or when he arranges for Korydon and Kallirrhoe to be set free (374), or when he goes out of his way to help procure a wife for Stephanos.

5.10 The double plot

After Aristotle has discarded Lysippos as protagonist, Stephanos asks: "But what about the *Odyssey*? There you have different endings for good and bad characters. And nobody could call the *Odyssey* a shabby work!" Aristotle replies:

[...] the *Odyssey* is a tale of wonders. It is not a tragedy, and you see at once how difficult it would be to make a play of it. The sort of ending you describe, where the good are rewarded and the bad punished, belongs more properly to comedy, which is not intended to arouse pity and fear (392).

The hypotext for this passage⁴¹ reads as follows:

The second ranking plot (σύστασις) [...] has a double structure of events, as in the *Odyssey*, ending in opposite ways (ἐξ ἐναντίας) for the better and worse characters. [...] But this double structure

41 *Poetics* 13. 1453a30-38.

of events involves a pleasure (ἡδονή) that is not an appropriate (οἰκεία) pleasure of tragedy but rather of comedy. For in comedy, whoever are the greatest enemies in the story – for example, Orestes and Aegisthus – become friends at the end, go off together, and no one is killed by anyone.

The double plot is comparable to a modern subplot in that attention is diverted from a single main plot, for which Aristotle has a definite preference in tragedy. Earlier in chapter 13 he criticised the reward of a “good” hero and the punishment of a “bad” hero as belonging to a plot that will not elicit pity and fear;⁴² now he gives an example from epic: the reward of Odysseus, who is reunited with Penelope, and the punishment of the suitors, who are killed. In a genre such as epic this may be allowed; in tragedy, it violates dramatic economy. Moreover, the “pleasure” of such a double plot is not really tragic, but comic. The pleasure appropriate to tragedy is fear and pity; that of (Middle and New) comedy, according to Hardison (Golden & Hardison 1968: 188) is the reconciliation of enemies and the sudden triumph of love over hate. Comic catharsis, Hardison speculates, could involve such a mechanism.

The fictional Aristotle thus used the background provided by the vicissitudes of the “bad” hero Timotheos to theorise about two further genres: epic and comedy. However, his conclusion is that “[...] once murder comes in at the door, Comedy flies out of the window” (393).

5.11 Fiction

Having discarded tragedy and comedy, but still speculating on the question whether their experiences could be expressed in terms of a literary genre, Aristotle remarks:

There is, however, [...] an art for which we have no name yet – a lower art than the pure poetic. This can be seen in Sophron’s comic sketches and Plato’s dialogues, where characters talk of whatever occurs to them in ordinary language (more or less) without metre [...]. If this art were to develop itself further, as we know Epic and Tragedy have developed, then we might have a new form which could accommodate you. [...] Literature is in the process of becoming. [...] For purging of fear and pity may not be all we want or need (393-394).

42 Cf 5.9 above.

The hypotext for the fictional Aristotle's remark is to be found in the first chapter of the *Poetics*:⁴³

The art that imitates by words alone (τοῖς λόγοις ψιλοῖς), in prose and in verse [...], has been nameless (ἄνώνυμοι) up to the present time. For we cannot assign a common name to the mimes (μίμους) of Sophron and Xenarchos and the Socratic dialogues (λόγους) [...].

Poetry was held in higher regard by the ancient Greeks than prose. Indeed, when Plato⁴⁴ and Aristotle⁴⁵ classify different genres in terms of the manner of imitation, they restrict themselves to the three main poetic genres, discarding existent prose genres such as historiography, rhetoric and philosophical dialogue, the first two being perceived as non-mimetic, and thus non-fictional, in any case. For that reason, too, the discussion of the fictional Aristotle and Stephanos has until now focused on the poetic genres of tragedy and comedy. But since the nominated "hero", Timotheos, does not meet the requirements of a tragic hero, and murder is not commensurate with comedy, Aristotle has to explore other generic avenues, dispensing with poetry.

According to Lucas (1972: 60), the mimes of Sophron of Syracuse (late fifth century) and his son Xenarchos are brief realistic sketches from everyday life, probably in rhythmic prose, developed, perhaps, from the comedies of Epicharmos. Plato's dialogues, of course, are longer philosophical prose discourses with a (semi-)fictionalised Socrates as main interlocutor. What do these two genres have in common? Hardison believes that currently these would probably be called simply "fiction" (Golden & Hardison 1968: 70). In that sense they would differ from historiography or rhetoric, for instance. At any rate, it should be clear that, in dispensing with poetry, the fictional Aristotle has a narrower focus than his historical counterpart. This is probably to sidestep the historical Aristotle's hazy terminology and to accommodate Doody's preference for narrative prose fiction.

At the end of the novel we find Aristotle evaluating his adventure and its participants in literary terms. Their yardstick is Aristotle's

43 *Poetics* 1. 1447a28-b11.

44 *Republic* 392d.

45 Cf 5.1 above.

Poetics. Ultimately, Stephanos has to concede that the “drama” they have experienced – if it is a tragedy at all – is not “the best kind of tragedy”, since the protagonist, if it is Timotheos, does not meet Aristotle’s criteria, and they have not experienced fear and pity. Nor is it comedy, for murder is not commensurate with this genre. Perhaps, however, it is a yet unnamed genre. In this instance Doody, with Aristotle as her mouthpiece, probably anticipates the Hellenistic novel. Had they known the term, they would therefore have called it a novel or, more specifically and proleptically, a detective novel with romantic and philosophical overtones.

6. Evaluation

In conclusion, Doody’s use of hypertext should be evaluated, with the modified version of Genette’s scheme in Section 4 as criterion. The many examples of intertextual adaptation or allusion in Doody’s novel (for example, Hesiod, Euripides’ *Ion*, Menander) lie outside the scope of this article. Moreover, I have stated my reasons for treating the *Poetics* as *trans-generic hypo- and hypertext* rather than intertext: it represents a genre different from the (Hellenistic or modern) novel and allusions to it appear with sufficient frequency to justify the categorisation of hypertext.

How does Doody make use of her Aristotelian hypotext? To what extent are Aristotle’s musings on a literary-theoretical subject integrated into the murder mystery plot? An analysis of the eleven examples I have identified in Section 6 gives the following results.

There is only one case of *obiter dicta*, where the fictional Aristotle’s comments on action in drama are made out of the blue (5.3). Most of his thoughts on drama (six out of the eleven examples) are triggered by associations with his immediate environment. For instance, he starts talking about narrative style and “the fearful” as a natural result of hearing Dametas’ ghost stories (5.1 & 5.2); his comments on the length of a plot arise from exposure to the proportions of Delphic friezes (5.4); his thoughts on *anagnorisis* are triggered by his ignorance when he goes to consult the oracle (5.6). A third category is to be found towards the end of the novel (6.8-5.11), where the solution to the murders leads to an independent literary discussion between

Aristotle and Stephanos which appears to form more of a logically coherent argument, fulfilling the catchy title. In the process, Doody, with Aristotle as her mouthpiece, attempts to apply the requirements of different literary genres to different heroes (or villains), as if they were characters in fiction rather than in real life.

It could be asked why Doody has included forays into poetics in what purports to be a detective novel. The answer is twofold. First, Doody's academic research has focused on the history and generic specifics of the novel,⁴⁶ albeit her field of specialisation is the eighteenth century. Secondly, she has admitted in an interview that she would be just as happy to be called a "historical novelist" as a "detective story writer" or a "mystery writer".⁴⁷ Thus, the detective plot could be regarded as a useful backdrop against which she displays her knowledge of not only, for instance, Athenian inheritance law or late fourth-century history, but also the *Poetics*.

The genre of Doody's work clearly warrants the use of *fiction hypertextuality*. Although her genre necessitates that not only the plot but also all the characters, including the seemingly historical, are fictional, her novel is solidly grounded in 330 BC, and biographical references to Alexander, Aristotle and Theophrastos, for instance, are in accord with the known historical facts gleaned from the works of the latter two authors and from historiographers. In fact, in a novel not without its defects, attention to historical detail is Doody's forte.

The application of Genette's term *palimpsest* to Doody's novel implies that even a classicist who is thoroughly acquainted with Aristotle's *Poetics* will not be able to re-read the latter work without recalling her flesh-and-blood philosopher-turned-detective. Linda Hutcheon (2006: 121) describes this process as follows:

If we know the [adapted] work(s) in question, we become a knowing audience [*or knowing readers*, FP], and part of what hermeneutic theory calls our 'horizon of expectation' involves that adapted text. What is intriguing is that, afterward, we often come to see the prior adapted work very differently as we compare it to the result of the adapter's creative and interpretative act.

46 Cf <<http://www.nd.edu/~mdoody/>>

47 Cf <<http://www.nd.edu/~mdoody/>>

Doody's novel thus becomes a palimpsest through which the cerebrally dry document is read as not merely a set of rules wrested from the Stageiran's cognitive machinery in his study, but a set of attitudes which he could innovatively apply to everyday situations. The term τὸ θαυμαστόν, for instance, will be concretised in the example of Dametas' ghost stories; the character defects of a μοχθηρός will be embodied in the fake Platonist Timotheos; tragic ἀναγνώρισις will be associated with Aristotle's a-gnostic visit to the Delphic oracle.

Aristotle's *Poetics* will remain lurking in the subconscious of a reader who embarks on other Aristotelian murder mysteries by Doody, even in the absence of a tragic hypotext. Moreover, Doody's Aristotle will keep hovering in the background when one re-reads the *Politics* or the *Metaphysics* or the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Thus, any further "innocent" reading of either Aristotle or Doody has been irrevocably undermined by exposure to this palimpsest.

7. Conclusion

Popular novels and films have done much for the popularisation of the classics. Some moviegoers may have gone to see *Troy* for the sake of Brad Pitt or Diane Kruger, but went home with a newly discovered interest in antiquity. The latter consideration, I believe, outweighs the flaws of the film. The same argument could probably be applied to films such as *300*, *Alexander* and *Gladiator*. In an article criticising the many historical inaccuracies in *Gladiator*, Allen Ward nevertheless is positive about the role it plays in popularising the classics:

One of the best things about this movie is that it is part of a long line of books, plays, films, and works of art that keep alive interest in the Ancient World among the general public, something at which artists and writers have been far more successful over the centuries than professional historians.⁴⁸

Writing about adaptations in general, Linda Hutcheon (2006: 176) also strikes a positive note:

An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.

Readers would, I think, rather become involved with the mis-adventures of Gordianus the Finder than struggle through Cicero's courtroom speeches.⁴⁹ By the same logic, many non-classicists reading Doody's novel for the sake of a whodunnit will unwittingly become acquainted with the world of Aristotle and thus, perhaps, become converts to the classics. Such a Trojan Horse technique is perfectly justifiable in an age when cultural literacy is dwindling and the same readers are very unlikely to read a translation of the *Poetics* or an academic book about Aristotle.

Not every murder mystery author is a P D James. Some *aficionados* might complain that Doody has made a meal of the plot by complicating it with too many digressions. If that is the case, at least she has also provided a dessert delectable to the gourmet and, perhaps, even delicious to the gourmand by giving Aristotle a makeover. When one reads Aristotle again, it will be through the palimpsest of Doody's astute and likeable PI.

48 <<http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/showcase/wardgladiator4.html>>

49 Popular films and novels such as those mentioned in this instance have recently spawned books and collections of articles in reception studies (cf Pomeroy 2009, Hilton 2005, Bitarello 2009, Goldhill 2009 & Easton 2009).

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