

Introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics*

Aristotle's *Poetics* is one of the earliest and most influential works of **literary criticism**, written around **335 BCE**. It is a systematic study of **poetry and drama**, especially **tragedy**, and it laid the foundation for Western critical thought. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher and a student of **Plato**, approaches literature not philosophically or morally, as Plato did, but **scientifically and analytically**, examining how literary works are constructed and how they affect the audience.

The term *Poetics* comes from the Greek word “**poiein**,” meaning *to make or create*. In this treatise, Aristotle defines poetry as a form of **mimesis** or **imitation**. Unlike Plato, who considered imitation harmful and inferior to reality, Aristotle views mimesis as **natural and beneficial**, since human beings learn and take pleasure through imitation. Thus, poetry is not a false copy of life but a meaningful representation of human action.

Poetics mainly focuses on **tragedy**, which Aristotle considers the highest form of dramatic poetry. He defines tragedy as “*the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude, in embellished language, performed by actors, and arousing pity and fear, effecting the catharsis of such emotions.*” This definition is central to objective questions related to Aristotle. According to Aristotle, tragedy has **six essential elements**: **Plot (mythos)**, **Character (ethos)**, **Thought (dianoia)**, **Diction (lexis)**, **Melody (melos)**, and **Spectacle (opsis)**. Among these, **plot is the most important**, while spectacle is the least artistic.

Aristotle emphasizes the concept of **unity of action**, meaning that a tragedy should have a single, coherent plot with a clear **beginning, middle, and end**. Though Aristotle discusses unity of action in detail, he does **not** formally propose the unities of time and place; these were later derived by Renaissance critics. He also introduces key tragic concepts such as **hamartia** (tragic error), **peripeteia** (reversal of fortune), **anagnorisis** (recognition), and **catharsis** (emotional purification), all of which frequently appear in objective examinations.

Aristotle also compares **tragedy and epic poetry**, stating that tragedy is superior because it achieves its effect within a shorter time and with greater intensity. Overall, *Poetics* is essential for B.A. students as it provides fundamental concepts, definitions, and terms that form the basis of literary criticism and objective-type questions in English literature.