The Poetics of *Fabula*:
Mythos and Epeisodion in Aristotle's *Poetics*

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In Chapter 6 of his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself (1449b24-25)[1]." As "[t]ragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life (50a16-17)," μῦθος must be the first and the most important part of tragedy, for μῦθος, which is the "combination of the incidents (50a15)[2]," is itself the imitation of the action. He calls it the τέλος, the ἀρχὴ and οἷον ψυχὴ of tragedy[3].

In this paper, I will re-evaluate the concept of the tragic μῦθος and try to show that it is not the "combination of the incidents" performed before the audience, but one imitated through a work. To help articulate this thesis, I shall refer to the Russian Formalists' theory of the *fabula* and *sjuzhet*. Our interpretation of the tragic μῦθος will shed new light on the meaning and the dramatic function of the two important but cumbersome terms discussed in Chapter 17, namely, λόγος καθόλου and ἐπεισόδιον.

(1) Tragic μῦθος

In the seventh and eighth chapters, Aristotle tries to derive several general requirements for the tragic μῦθος from the fact that "a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, as a whole of some magnitude." First, tragic μῦθος must have a "beginning, middle and end."

> Now a whole is that which has beginning, middle, and end. A beginning is that which is not itself necessarily after anything else, and which has naturally something else after it; an end is that which is naturally after something itself, either as its necessary or usual consequent, and with nothing else after it; and a middle, that which is by nature after one thing and has also another after it. A well-constructed μῦθος, therefore, cannot either begin or end at any point one likes; beginning and end in it must be of the forms just described (1450b27-31).

This requirement may seem tautological and trivial, but it demands that the poet should not begin and end his μῦθος arbitrarily, but must put a recognizable beginning and end and make causal connections between the incidents of the μῦθος.

Another requirement laid down in this chapter is an aesthetic one and determines the length of the tragedy. As beauty in general consists in "size and order (50b37)," it follows that the μῦθος, to be beautiful, must have some length, too. "[A]s a beautiful whole made up of parts, or a beautiful living creature, must be of some size, but a size to be taken in by the eye, so a μῦθος must be of some length, but of a length to be taken in by the memory (51a3-6)." Aristotle then makes a general rule for the length of tragic μῦθος. "A length which allows of

the hero passing by a series of probable or necessary stages from bad fortune to good, or from good to bad, may suffice as a limit for the magnitude of the μῦθος (51a12-15)." Tragedy, being the imitation of an action, must depict the "happiness or the reverse (6. 50a20)" that is in the action. The magnitude that is necessary to depict the change from happiness to unhappiness or its reverse, then, should be sufficient for tragedy.

Chapter 8 discusses the tragic unity.

> The unity of μῦθος does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity ; and in like manner there are many actions of one man which cannot be made to form one action (51a6-9).

Tragic poets should not follow the authors of the *Heraclid* and *Theseid*, who suppose that, "because Heracles was one man, the story also of Heracles must be one story (51a19-20)," but Homer, who in the *Odyssey* "did not make the poem cover all that ever befell his hero (51a24 -25)." For instance, he depicted neither the wound Odysseus got in Parnassus nor his feigned madness at the time of the call to arms, because "the two incidents had no necessary or probable connexion with one another (51a27)." Instead, "he took as the subject of the *Odyssey*, as also of the *Iliad*, an action with a unity (51a28-29)."

> [I]n poetry the μῦθος, as an imitation of action, must represent one action, a complete whole, with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposition or with-drawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole (51a31-34).

In these chapters, Aristotle makes three requirements for the tragic μῦθος, namely, wholeness, magnitude and unity. He must have considered that *Oedipus Rex*, one of his canonical tragedies in *Poetics*, met these requirements. Here our first problem arises, because we can draw from *Oedipus Rex* two kinds of "arrangement of incidents" that would satisfy them.

The first series begins from the suppliance of the Theban citizens who have been suffering from the spread of the disease. Oedipus, having heard from Creon the Delphic oracle that the disease is the punishment of Apollo on the Thebans for letting the murderers of their former king Laios go free, starts the investigation. He brings into the open the fact that he himself is the murderer, and still worse, that the man he killed was his father and the woman he married was his mother. As a result of this recognition, he blinds himself and this series of incidents ends with his ruin. This is the story of investigation and discovery and it coincides with what we call the "story" of *Oedipus Rex*.

The second series begins from the Delphic oracle to Oedipus who had asked what his true identity was. It told him that he would kill his father and sleep with his mother. Oedipus then left his country and started wandering. On the road, he met Laios and his men and was attacked by them. In self defense, he killed Laios, not knowing that Laios was his father. Then he went to Thebes, solved the riddle of Sphinx, and saved the city. As a reward, he was

made King of Thebes and married Iocasta, Laios' widow. However, after ruing for some years, he recognized the truth and was ruined. This is the story of patricide and incest. This second series is a part of what the Russian Formalist Tomashevsky called *fabula*, which he defines as "совокупность событий, связанных между собой, о которых сообщается в произведении (totality of the incidents related to each other, which are reported in a work)[4]." *Fabula* has the natural chronological and causal order of the incidents and can be described in natural language[5]. We shall call the first series S and the second F.

It is impossible to accept Downing's claim that μῦθος has plural meanings in *Poetics*, including S and F which in their turn are divided into several kinds. The ambiguity in the most basic term would seriously damage the value of this work as a treatise on the craft of *poiesis* (τέχνη ποιητική). The meaning of μῦθος, as far as it is used as the first and the most important part of tragedy, should be identical throughout *Poetics*. We have to ask whether it is F or S (or one of their variations).

This problem has been discussed as the question of whether tragic μῦθος should contain incidents outside tragedy. In *Poetics*, Aristotle argued several times that some incidents should be outside the action performed on stage. He used "play (δρᾶμα)," "tragedy" and "μύθευμα" to denote this action.

In Chapter 14, discussing the possible patterns of πάθος, περιπέτεια, and ἀναγνώρισις, he refers to *Oedipus Rex* and recommends the pattern where the hero murders one of his φίλοι without knowing the relationship and discovers it later.

> [H]e may do it, but in ignorance of his relationship, and discover that afterwards, as does the Oedipus in Sophocles. Here the deed is outside the play (ἔξω τοῦ δράματος) ; but it may be within it, like the act of the Alcmeon in Astydamas, or that of the Telegonus in *Ulysses Wounded* (53b31-34).

The πάθος of *Oedipus Rex* is 'outside the play,' in contrast with that of *Astydamas* and *Ulysses Wounded* which are 'within the play.' That these πάθοι are within the play cannot mean they are enacted in the play, because in Greek tragedies there are no 'murders on stage.' These πάθοι should occur between the 'acts' and should be reported by the messenger. The πάθος outside the play, then, should not include these inter-acts murders. They should happen before the play begins, as it did in *Oedipus Rex*. In Chapter 11, he tells us that πάθος, besides περιπέτεια and ἀναγνώρισις, is the one of the three constitutive parts of tragic μῦθος. In *Oedipus Rex*, then, what happened before the play is a part of the μῦθος. As D. H. Roberts has argued convincingly[6], μῦθος includes incidents that are outside the play.

Other references to the incidents outside the play point in the same direction.

In Chapter 18, Aristotle discussed the complication and the dénouement of the tragedy.

> Every tragedy is in part complication and in part dénouement ; the incidents before the opening scene, and often certain also of those within the play, forming the complication ; and the rest the dénouement. By complication, I mean all from the beginning of the story to the point just before the change in the subject's fortunes ; by dénouement, all

from the beginning of the change to the end (55b24-29).

The dénouement and the complication are associated with the 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end' of the μῦθος discussed in Chapter 7.　The phrase "dénouement of the μῦθος（λύσεις τῶν μύθων）" in Chapter 15 strongly suggests that these two terms define quantitative parts of the tragic μῦθος.　These parts, then, are divided into ἔξωθεν and ἔσωθεν.　What is ἔξωθεν, as well as what is ἔσωθεν, is part of the tragic μῦθος.

In Chapter 15, Aristotle talks about the improbable (ἄλογον) in the incidents.

> From this one sees that the dénouement（λύσεις τῶν μύθων）also should arise out of the μῦθος itself, and not depend on a stageartifice.　... The artifice（μηχανή）must be reserved for matters outside the play（ἔξω τοῦ δράματος）— for past events beyond human knowledge, or events yet to come, which require to be foretold or announced; since it is the privilege of the gods to know everything.　There should be nothing improbable among the actual incidents.　If it be unavoidable, however, it should be outside the tragedy, like the improbability in the Oedipus of Sophocles (54a37-b8).

Chapter 24 claims that a likely impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility. However, in such cases, the improbable should still be avoided.

> The story（τούς τε λόγους）should never be made up of improbable incidents; there should be nothing of that sort in it.　If, however, such incidents are unavoidable, they should be outside the piece（ἔξω τοῦ μυθεύματος）, like Oedipus' ignorance in *Oedipus* of the circumstances of Laios' death; not within it（μὴ ἐν τῷ δράματι）, like the report of the Pythian games in *Electra*, or the man's having come to Mysia from Tegea without uttering a word on the way, in *The Mysians* (60a27-32).

The improbable may appear neither in the play nor in the μύθευμα.　Chapter 15 claims that the dénouement of the μῦθος should not use μηχανή.　*Deus ex machina* is allowed only when it is used to show us incidents outside the play, such as past ones which mortals cannot know and the future events which need foretellings and reports.　However, it should not interfere with the actions on stage, which would make the scene improbable.　Aristotle did not claim that the deities from the μηχανή are improbable in themselves.　We admit that the gods are omniscient.　But they should not control the actual incidents and determine the dénouement.　In that case, it would not arise from the μῦθος and would therefore become improbable. Improbabilities on stage must be avoided.　If they are unavoidable, they should, at least, be placed outside the play, an example of which we may find in *Oedipus Rex*.　This is the same improbability that is mentioned in Chapter 24, namely, Oedipus' ignorance of the circumstances concerning Laios' death.　This improbability, however, does not consist of μηχανή.　It is mentioned here because it is an example of unavoidable improbables and it is unavoidable because it is necessary for the μῦθος itself, for μῦθος should be constituted in a way in which "the transposition or withdrawal of any one of them (incidents) will disjoin and dislocate the

whole"

Aristotle makes the same argument in Chapter 24, where he argues that the improbable must be kept outside μύθευμα [7]. Having cited two examples of the unrecommendable improbability, Aristotle adds that "it is ridiculous to say that one's μῦθος would have been spoilt without them, since it is fundamentally wrong to make up such plots (τοιούτους) (60a33-34)." Not all improbabilities in the λόγος and the μῦθος in general are inadmissable, for here, as well as in Chapter 15, he adds the *Oedipus Rex* where improbability is unavoidable. Λόγος and μῦθος should avoid improbabilities, but when they are unavoidable, they should be outside the μύθευμα, that is, they should not appear in the play (ἐν τῷ δράματι). Aristotle did not absolutely prohibit the use of the improbable in the μῦθος. It is better to avoid using the improbable, but if it is unavoidable, that is, if the μῦθος requires the improbable, it must at least be kept outside the δρᾶμα or μύθευμα.

In the face of these evidences, some still claim the identity of the μῦθος on the one hand, and play, tragedy and μύθευμα on the other. They regard the evidences cited above as stemming from the ambiguity of the word μῦθος, and that as a technical term it should be identified with the structure of the action happening on stage. They cite several reasons for this identification.

First, the appearance of the phrase 'outside μῦθος' in Chapter 17 might seem to support the identity of 'outside μῦθος' on the one hand, and 'outside δρᾶμα, μύθευμα etc.' on the other. Aristotle here argues that the poet should make the λόγος of his tragedy in general form. He then tries to explain this general λόγος by recourse to examples and describes that of *Iphigenia Taurica* in the following way.

> [A] certain maiden having been offered in sacrifice, and spirited away from her sacrificers into another land, where the custom was to sacrifice all strangers to the Goddess, she was made there the priestess of this rite. Long after that the brother of the priestess happened to come ; the fact, however, of the oracle having bidden him go there, and his object in going, are outside the μῦθος of the play. On his coming he was arrested, and about to be sacrificed, when he revealed who he was (. . .) and the disclosure led to his salvation (55b3-15).

I shall have to postpone the discussion of the exact relationship of the μῦθος and the λόγος to the next section. But we cannot agree with the argument that the exclusion from the μῦθος of the decree to and the madness of Orestes amounts to the exclusion of the supernatural and the improbable. Aristotle's reason for the expulsion of the supernatural from the dénouement is that it should arise out of the μῦθος itself. The decree does not belong to the dénouement and it will not make the μῦθος improbable. There is no improbability in these incidents. Further, the spiriting away of Iphigeneia by Athena is included in the λόγος. If, as Halliwell assumes, Aristotle excluded the supernatural because it does not fit his rational thinking, there can be no explanation of this inclusion [8].

The reason Aristotle excluded the Apollo's decree and the purpose of Orestes from the λόγος is actually rather simple. They do not constitute Iphigeneia's action [9]. For Aristotle

Iphigenia Taurica represents the action of Iphigeneia and not that of Orestes. This is clear from Chapter 14 where he cites *Iphigenia Taurica* as a example of the μῦθος in which a person is "meditating some deadly injury to another, in ignorance of his relationship, to make the discovery in time to draw back (54a2-3)." It is Iphigeneia who was about to kill Orestes and not vice versa. The subject of the action (and the object of our pity and fear) is the (actual or intended) murderer, but not the murdered[10]. There are several incidents in this play but what constitutes the μῦθος of this play is that of Iphigeneia. Orestes' deeds, as far as they join Iphigeneia's, such as his appearance, arrest and the salvation, are parts of the μῦθος because they go together with the corresponding deeds of Iphigeneia. But the madness and the purpose that occurred offstage do not. What is outside μῦθος is not same as what is outside the play.

Second, the totality of the *fabula* of *Oedipus Rex* does not seem to constitute the wholeness and the unity required for the tragic μῦθος as described in the seventh and the eighth chapters. However, Aristotle did not require the totality of these incidents to have such qualities. What he asked the poets is merely that they should make their μῦθος so that it has the unity and the wholeness of the action. The totality of the *fabula* may contain elements outside μῦθος and lack unity and wholeness. In some cases, it may be too large to be taken in a memory. But this does not mean that the action constituting μῦθος is restricted to the incidents on stage. Even the action enacted on stage does not necessarily constitute such a unity and wholeness.

We may again take *Oedipus Rex* to illustrate our argument. In the second act, having been accused by Teiresias of being the murderer of Laios, and presuming that Teiresias was plotting against him with Creon, Oedipus called Creon to his palace and tried to punish him. Creon's sophistic argument that being the brother of a king is better than being a king did not persuade him. However, when Jocasta begged him to forgive her brother, Oedipus, although convinced of Creon's guilt, forgave Creon. One can easily recognize that this series of incidents could be "transposed or withdrawn without disjoining and dislocating the whole." It is not part of the μῦθος.

The fact that the totality of the *fabula* does not constitute the unity and the wholeness, then, does not damage our interpretation that the μῦθος is a part of the *fabula* which the poet should make first so as to satisfy these requirements. He can add other incidents to this μῦθος. But this does not mean that it is superfluous or meaningless episodes that are added.

In Chapter 6, having enumerated the six constitutive parts of tragedy (μῦθος, character, διάνοια, diction, spectacle and melody), Aristotle said that "two of them [arise] from the means, one from the manner, and three from the objects of the dramatic imitation ; and there is nothing else besides these six (50a10-12)." 'Character' in *Poetics* is the second of the three constitutive elements of tragedy related to the object of the tragic imitation, namely, serious action. It is the part which "reveals the choice, namely what kind of thing he is choosing or avoiding (50b8-10)[11]." Later, in Chapter 15, Aristotle maintained that "[t]here will be an element of character in the play, if (as has been observed) what a personage says or does (ὁ λόγος ἢ ἡ πρᾶξις) reveals a certain choice (54a17-19)."

Character does not simply mean the character of the person imitated. It is the expression of this character in concrete words or deeds in the play. Therefore, although the action imitated through tragedy must always have certain quality in character, tragedy as the imita-

tion of such an action may lack the parts that reveal the character of the person imitated. In that case, the tragedy would be without 'character.' However, Oedipus' decision to forgive Creon in the second act shows his 'choice,' and therefore, his noble 'character.'   This deed is one of the several 'characters' in this play.

'Thought' as a part of the tragic imitation should be understood in the same manner. In Chapter 19, thought is said to be "shown in everything to be effected by their language (56a36 -37)."   It is expressed mainly in words, i.e., in the speeches of the actors. That is why Aristotle entrusted the detailed study of thought to his *Rhetoric*.   However, it can be expressed through action, too. "It is clear, also, that in actions it (the thought) must be used on the same principle[12], whenever they wish them to arouse pity or horror, or to have a look of importance or probability (56b2-4)."   'Thought' is not simply the thought of the person itself, but its presentation through words *and actions* in a work.

The *fabula*, being the totality of the incidents reported in a work, is constituted by these three parts.   Aristotle denied the possibility of tragedy having other 'parts' concerning the object of the tragic imitation, that is, a serious action.   This leads to our next problem, which concerns the relationship between μῦθος, λόγος καθόλου , and ἐπεισόδιον.

(2) Μῦθος, λόγος, and ἐπεισόδιον

We are now ready to investigate the meaning of the λόγος καθόλου and the ἐπεισόδιον in Chapter 17. Having finished the argument of the tragic μῦθος and character, Aristotle starts Chapter 17 with the following paragraph.

> At the time when he is constructing his μῦθος, and working it out through λέξις[13] in which they are worked out, the poet should remember to put the actual scenes as far as possible before his eyes. In this way, seeing everything with the vividness of an eye-witness as it were, he will devise what is appropriate, and be least likely to overlook incongruities. ... As far, as may be, too, the poet should even act his story with the very gestures of his personages. Given the same natural qualifications, he who feels the emotions to be described will be the most convincing ; distress and anger, for instance, are portrayed most truthfully by one who is feeling them at the moment (55a22.-34).

Here the concrete process of tragic ποίησις is divided into two stages[14], the construction of the μῦθος and the working out of this μῦθος through λέξις, that is, the making of the entire scenes of his tragedy with concrete words. To use Formalist terminology again, this is the stage of the *sjuzhetization of the fabula*[15].   In this theory, contrasted to the *fabula* is the *sjuzhet*, which is "the same events [as those of *fabula*], but in its *narration*, in the order in which they are shown in the work, in the relationship in which the information about them are given in the work[16]."   *Sjuzhetization* is the stage in which the *fabula* (including the character and the thought as they are represented by the incidents) is transformed into the *sjuzhet*[17].   It is on this stage that the poet must "put the scenes as far as possible before his eyes' and 'act his story with the very gestures of his personages."

The third monition he should follow is to "make his λόγοι, too (τε), whether already made

or of his own making, καθόλου before he episodizes and lengthens them (ἐπεισοδιοῦν καὶ παρατείνειν)[18] (55a34-b2)." That this is the third monition together with the visualization and the use of the gesture is shown by the use of the particle τε (too) in 55a34.

This suggests that the λόγος does not precede the μῦθος[19]. Rather, what Aristotle recommends the tragic poets is to abstract λόγος καθόλου from his μῦθος first and then to extend this λόγος with the ἐπεισόδιον. Λόγος seems to be necessary for the creation of the ἐπεισόδιον, but what do these two terms mean and in what respect does the λόγος prepare the ἐπεισόδιον?

The example of *Iphigenia Taurica* cited above shows that the λόγος is not the 'structural schematization' of the μῦθος[20]. As Neschke-Hentschke has pointed out[21], Aristotle used passive aorist participles, avoiding not only the proper names but also the subordinate conjunction which are necessary to express the causal structure. The concrete and causal construction of the μῦθος is here reduced to the mere juxtaposition of the abstract acts arranged only with a view to factual linkage and chronological order, that is, according to Tomashevsky, хронология (chronology)[22]. Another important aspect of this λόγος is that the abstracted acts do not cover the whole of the μῦθος. They are reduced to the three aspects of beginning (the background situation and the arrival of the brother), main change (anagnorisis, peripeteia, intended but not fulfilled πάθος), and the end (the salvation). Aristotle recommends the tragic poet to reduce his μῦθος to the factual juxtaposition of the central events made abstract and lacking causal relations. The same is true of his another example, which is, however, taken from the *Odyssey* and not from a tragedy.

> A certain man has been abroad many years ; Poseidon is ever on the watch for him, and he is all alone. Matters at home too have come to this, that his substance is being wasted and his son's death plotted by suitors to his wife. Then he arrives there himself after his grievous sufferings ; reveals himself, and falls on his enemies ; and the end is his salvation and their death (55b19-23).

In the *Odyssey*, as well as in *Iphigenia Taurica*, the incidents counted as λόγος are the beginning, main change of fortune, and the end.

What, then, is the purpose of this λόγος ? Aristotle does not answer this question. But the key to this question lies in Chapter 18, just after the quotation above, where Aristotle talks about the complication and the dénouement of the tragedy which I have quoted in the first section (55b24-29)[23]. There Aristotle explains these terms in relation to the beginning, the middle, and the end of the μῦθος.

This explanation corresponds to the incidents discussed as the λόγος καθόλου in Chapter 17, which suggests that for Aristotle making the καθόλου λόγος seems to be necessary in order to make the complication and the dénouement of a tragedy clear. And they, in turn, can determine the part of the μῦθος that should be displayed on stage. First, you must make the μῦθος which has a certain length and is one and whole. But this μῦθος is still too complicated to determine systematically which part is to be enacted on stage and which is to be incoporated into the work as messenger's reports, recollections, foretellings etc. What is to be shown

directly is the last part of the complication and almost all the parts of the dénouement. With λόγος καθόλου, I may add, you can also test the causal structure of the whole by looking at the juxtaposed incidents themselves which lack just this causal explanation. The proper nouns must be excluded from the λόγος because they help the poet to supplement the causal relationship which in reality does not exist in the μῦθος. After that, you can 'episodize' and lengthen this λόγος using the rest of your μῦθος, character and thought (as far as they are represented by action).

Ἐπεισόδιον, then, is not, as Else claimed, "a non-essential added scene[24]." Aristotle left no room for such additions in his *Poetics*. As we have emphasized in the last section, it is only μῦθος, character and thought that pertain to the object of representation, that is, the action. Nor can it be identified with the μῦθος, as Nickau thought, because the latter precedes the former. Μῦθος itself, although it contains enough concrete incidents to arouse our tragic emotions, is not still equiped with concrete λέξις. You can tell the same μῦθος in several ways. They will be different instances of the same μῦθος so far as they contain the same incidents[25]. After the stage of μῦθος-making comes that of writing individual scenes. Ἐπεισόδιον and ἐπεισόδια refer to this *sjuzhetization* and the concrete scenes it makes.

Of course, these ἐπεισόδια should be 'proper (οἰκεῖα)' and Orestes' madness was an example of this proper ἐπεισόδιον, but this neither means they should be part of the μῦθος, nor they should not. Scenes representing character or thought can be proper ἐπεισόδιον as far as they square with the μῦθος. The examples Aristotle cited show this point more clearly. The madness of Orestes does not constitute the μῦθος. The reason for his arrest could be otherwise as far as the actions themselves are concerned. However, it explains his character, what kind of a man he is[26]. Ἐπεισόδια can be both inside and outside μῦθος.

We should, now, collate our interpretation of the ἐπεισόδιον with other instances of this word in *Poetics*. As is generally admitted, Aristotle used this word in two ways. In Chapter 12, he defined ἐπεισόδιον as "all that comes in between two whole choral songs (52b20-21)." This ἐπεισόδιον is a quantitative part of tragedy and roughly corresponds to the 'act' in modern theatrical terminology. The same usage can also be found in Chapter 4, where he speaks about the "a plurality of episodes (49a29)." Chapter 9 is ambiguous in this regard. Here he argues that "[o]f simple plots and actions the episodic (ἐπεισοδιώδεις) are the worst. I call a plot episodic when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of its episodes (ἐπεισόδια) (51b33-35)." This ἐπεισόδια can mean the same thing as we see in Chapter 12. However, the importance of the probable or necessary relationship can not be restricted to the inter-act incidents. Intra-act ones also must keep this rule. The may mean the incidents enacted on stage which extend the limit of one 'act.'

In other places, ἐπεισόδιον is discussed in the comparison between tragedy and epic. In Chapter 17, having quoted two ἐπεισόδια of *Iphigeneia Taurica*, Aristotle continues :

> In plays, then, the episodes are short ; in epic poetry they serve to lengthen out the poem. The λόγος of the Odyssey is not a long one. ... This being all that is proper[27] (ἴδιον) to the Odyssey, everything else in it is episode (55b15-23).

And in Chapter 23, comparing the tragic with the epic μῦθος, he argues that the epic μῦθος, as well as the tragic one, "should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle, and end (59a19-20)." Herein lies the superiority of Homer.

> As it is, he has singled out one section of the whole; many of the other incidents, however, he brings in as episodes, using the Catalogue of the Ships, for instance, and other episodes to relieve the uniformity of his narrative (59a35-37).

In these examples, one from the *Odyssey* and the other from the *Iliad*, Aristotle's claim is basically the same. He requires not only of tragedy but also of epic the unity and the wholeness of the μῦθος. The λόγος, then, will be short in epic as well as in tragedy. The example of the ἐπεισόδια from *Iphigenia Taurica* included the madness and the salvation of the Orestes and was not restricted to the events happening on stage. The ἐπεισόδια of the *Odyssey* were claimed to be "everything else in this poem" except the λόγος and those of the *Iliad* included the *Catalogue of the Ships* in the Book 2. These examples show that what matters in making ἐπεισόδια are the diverse ways of *sjuzhetization*. The ἐπεισόδια must be proper, that is, must be derived from the *fabula* of the tragedy which the poet has constructed beforehand, but even *the Catalogue*, in so far as it is a necessary precondition for the μῦθος of this poem, can be an example of the proper ἐπεισόδιον. In this respect, epic allows much more freedom than tragedy, but whence comes this freedom?

> For the extension of its length epic poetry has a special advantage, of which it makes large use. In a play one cannot represent an action with a number of parts going on simultaneously; one is limited to the part on the stage and connected with the actors. Whereas in epic poetry the narrative form makes it possible for one to describe a number of simultaneous incidents; and these, if germane to the subject, increase the body of the poem (24, 59b23-27).

The epic length does not derive from the μῦθος itself, that is, not from the object of the imitation, but from the different ways this object is imitated. Epic, since it uses the narrative form, can "describe a number of simultaneous incidents (πολλὰ μέρη ἅμα ποιεῖν περαινόμενα), and these, if germane (οἰκεῖα) to the subject, increase the body of the poem." However, the description of simultaneous events, although found in Homer himself[28], cannot explain the bulk of the epic poetry, because epic does not describe simultaneous events very often. We should follow Else who found in this passage the simultaneity not of the events imitated, but of the action imitating and the action imitated. Else wrote,

> Aristotle is then saying that "in tragedy it is not possible to imitate a number of developments *at (as of) the time they are, happening*, but only the one (that is taking place) on the stage and (involves) the actors, while in the epic, thanks to its being narrative, it is possible to 'compose' (give poetic expression to, incorporate into the poem) many events *at (as of) the time they are being carried forward*[29]."

In theatre, the events which are imitated as happening simultaneously (that is, in front of us) are restricted to the ones played on stage and by the actors. They have their own physical limit which in Chapter 7 is regarded as "relative to public performances and spectators" and which "does not belong to the τέχνη (51a6-7)[30]." In epic, however, the poet does not have to consider these things and can make many more scenes and imitate the incidents simultaneously, that is, as happening in front of the audience. It is important to remember that Aristotle thought this freedom to be a 'special advantage' of epic over tragedy.

That epic will become larger with the use of the ἐπεισόδιον does not mean epic adds non-essential scenes which are not contained in the μῦθος. Rather, the difference lies in the way ἐπεισόδια are. Although in epic, many incidents can be portrayed 'simultaneously', that is, "as of the time they are being carried forward," in tragedy, on the contrary, many incidents that are included in the *fabula* (μῦθος, character, thought) are not represented directly before the audience. They were reported by a messenger, told by characters as a recollection, etc. in a truncated way. These constitute the special characteristics of the tragic ἐπεισόδια. Ἐπεισοδιοῦν, then, means the totality of the making of concrete scenes from the *fabula* regardless of whether they belong to the μῦθος or other constituents of the *fabula*. Through ἐπεισοδιοῦν the *fabula* is transformed into the *sjuzhet*.

(3) Conclusion

The unity Aristotle intended to state was not the unity of the theatrical action, but the unity of the action the work imitated in multiple ways. The Unity of Action, as well as the other two Unities, has nothing to do with Aristotle. This conclusion conforms better to his underestimate of the 'manner' of the tragic imitation throughout *Poetics*. He talks about the tragic action itself in Chapter 17, where the λόγος καθόλου determines the frame of this action and ἐπεισόδιον its concretization. In his theory of μῦθος, however, what Aristotle develops is the Poetics of *Fabula*.

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1   Unless otherwise stated, I will follow Ingram Bywater's translation in this paper, except for some essential terms that I did not translate and left in Greek.   In places where I diverge from Bywater.   I shall quote his translation in the notes, adding (B.) at the end of each quotation.

2   "[T]he action is represented in the play by the plot. (B)"

3   50a22, 38.

4   Tomashevsky (1925), 137

5   cf. ibid.   "Фабула может быть изложена прагматически, в естественном хронологийеском и прийинном порядке событий"

6   cf. Roberts (1992), 134-141.

7   Although this is the first recorded instance in Ancient Greek of the word μύθευμα and the exact meaning of this word cannot be determined, it is clear that Aristotle made the same recommendation and had recourse to the same example as in Chapter 15.   Μύθευμα here is a synonym for δρᾶμα.   Whence the interchangeability of μύθευμα and δρᾶμα within Chapter 24 derives.   However, as Euripides (*Heracles* 77 et al.) and Aristotle himself have used the verbal form μυθεύω in the sense of 'telling stories,' it can be argued that here in Chapter 24

Oedipus' ignorance of the details of the death of Laios was to be placed 'outside the μύθευμα' because it should neither be acted on stage, nor refered to indirectly in the dialogues.

8　Cf. Halliwell (1987), 151.

9　Cf. Roberts (1992), 139. "[I]t can be plausibly argued that he sees Orestes' arrival but not the reason for it as integral to what is essentially Iphigenia's story."

10　Sure, Aristotle tells us that the action cannot have unity because it is about one person. However, this does not mean the action can be about several persons. That the tragic action is 'about' one person is presupposed throughout Poetics.

11　"Character in a play is that which reveals the choice of the agents (B)." The manuscripts read " ἦθος μὲν τὸ τοιοῦτον ὃ δηλοῖ τὴν προαίρεσιν, ὁποία τις ἐν οἷς οὐκ ἔστι δῆλον ἢ, προαιρεῖται ἢ φεύγει." This sentense is corrupt and there have been a number of suggested emendations. Bywater, following the Arabic version, omitted ὁποία κτλ. Here I followed the more traditional emendation, which omits "ἐν οἷς οὐκ ἔστι δῆλον."

12　"their mental procedure must be on the same lines in their actions likewise (B)."

13　"and engaged on the diction in which they are worked out (B)."

14　These stages correspond to the object and the media of the tragic imitation.

15　Cf. Shklovsky (1929), 204.

16　Tomashevsky (1925), 137, " те же события, но в их изложении, в том порядке, в каком они сообщены в произведении, в той связи, в какой даны в произведении сообщения о них."

17　Else called it the 'writing stage' of tragedy. cf. Else (1957), 515.

18　"His story, again, whether already made or of his own making, he should first simplify and reduce to a universal form, before proceeding to lengthen it out by the insertion of episodes (B)." I would translate the verb ἐπεισοδιοῦν with 'episodize' in order to keep the awkwardness of this word.

19　Neither can we accept the identification of λόγος καθόλου with μῦθος. In Chapter 14, Aristotle says that "The μῦθος in fact should be so framed that, even without seeing the things take place, he who simply hears the account of them shall be filled with horror and pity at the incidents ; which is just the effect that the mere recital of the μῦθος in Oedipus would have on one (1453b3-7)." The μῦθος should be concrete enough for us to be filled with pity and horror in hearing it. The λόγος καθόλου, the examples of which in tragic and epic *poiesis* are shown in Chapter 17, do not meet this demand.

20　cf. Nickau (1966) 163.

21　Neschke-Hentschke (1976) 289-99.

22　Tomashevsky (1925), 135.

23　supra 71f.

24　Else (1957) 326, n. 85.

25　In Chapter 18, Aristotle recognized the identity of the μῦθος in the complication and the dénouement. Tragedies with different titles and scenes are, so far as they have the same complication and dénouement, identical, because they have the same μῦθος.

26　The madness reported by the messenger is itself one of the 'characters' of this play in the Aristotelian sense of the word.

27　Although ἐπεισόδια should be proper (οἰκεῖα), they are not ἴδιον to the μῦθος. Here Aristotle seems to restrict the ἴδιον to the λόγος alone.

28　e.g. *Iliad* 8. 489ff. and 9.9-78. That these two scenes are simultaneous is shown from the mention of the Trojan watchfire in 9. 78.

29　Else (1957) 608f.

30　"It does not fall within the theory of poetry (B)."

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