ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ AS DISCONTINUOUS ACTION: ARISTOTLE *POETICS* 11. 1452a22–29

ELIZABETH BELFIORE

As one of the two defining characteristics of the best tragic plot—the "complex" plot—περιπέτεια is of obvious importance in Aristotle's theory of drama. It has, however, received relatively little attention from scholars, and discussion of it has often been hampered by a lack of clarity about basic concepts. Specifically, the long-standing debate about whether περιπέτεια is a "reversal of fortune" or a "reversal of intention" has been marked by the failure of both sides adequately to define their terms.[1] Turner, for example, correctly noted that "reversal of intention" is ambiguous, since it can mean either "change of purpose" or "frustration of an unchanged purpose." Yet he himself concluded that only a "very vague" interpretation could embrace all of Aristotle's examples of περιπέτεια: "being in a situation which may be expected to lead to the development indicated."[2] Not only is this too imprecise, it is also not clear how Turner's "expectation" is to be distinguished from the "intention" of his opponents. Such confusion is understandable, since the *Poetics* itself gives little explicit information about περιπέτεια. The approach adopted in this paper should, however, make possible a new clarity and precision.

Aristotle's introductory statement about complex plots invites us to consider περιπέτεια in the light of a subject about which he has a great deal to say elsewhere: action.[3] At *Poetics* 10. 1452a12–14, he states: "Of plots (μύθων) some are simple (ἁπλοῖ), others complex (πεπλεγμένοι), for the actions (πράξεις) of which plots are imitations fall naturally into

1. For "reversal of intention," see W. Lock, "The Use of περιπέτεια in Aristotle's *Poetics*," *CR* 9 (1895): 251–53; F. L. Lucas, "The Reverse of Aristotle," *CR* 37 (1923): 98–104; and H. House, *Aristotle's "Poetics,"* rev. C. Hardie (London, 1956), p. 96. For "reversal of fortune," see I. Bywater, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry* (Oxford, 1909), pp. 198–99; G. F. Else, *Aristotle's "Poetics": The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), pp. 343–45; and P. Turner, "The Reverse of Vahlen," *CR* 9 (1959): 207–15. Though J. Vahlen, *Beiträge zu Aristoteles "Poetik"* (Berlin, 1914), pp. 34–35, is often identified with "reversal of intention," it should be noted that he himself did not use this phrase or its equivalent. Rather, he wrote that περιπέτεια is "was man tat oder tut zu einem bestimmten Zweck, das aber nicht diesen sondern den gerade entgegengesetzten zur Folge hat" (p. 34). It is entirely possible that his meaning has been distorted by some of his followers.

2. "Reverse," pp. 207–8.

3. The term "action" (πρᾶξις) is used in this paper to refer, in a general, nontechnical sense, to anything done by an agent, or, more specifically, to the series of actions that make up the passage between good and bad fortune imitated by a tragic plot, the σύνθεσις τῶν πραγμάτων (1450a4–5).

0009-837X/88/8303-0001$01.00

these categories."[4] If actions as well as plots can be complex, involving recognition or περιτέτεια or both, Aristotle's views on actions and other processes (for example, locomotion and qualitative alteration) should be relevant to his concept of tragic περιπέτεια.[5]

Aristotle's brief remarks in *Poetics* 11 support this hypothesis. Aristotle defines περιπέτεια and gives two rather puzzling examples (1452a22–29):[6]

> Περιπέτεια is the change to the opposite of the things done, as was said (ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολὴ καθάπερ εἴρηται), and this [occurs], as we say, according to probability or necessity. For example, in the *Oedipus,* [the messenger], by coming to cheer Oedipus, and by showing who he was to free [him] from his fear concerning his mother, did the opposite (ἐλθὼν ὡς εὐφρανῶν τὸν Οἰδίπουν, καὶ ἀπαλλάξων τοῦ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα φόβου δηλώσας ὃς ἦν, τοὐναντίον ἐποίησεν). And in the *Lynceus,* the one being led away to be put to death and Danaus following to kill [him] (ὁ μὲν ἀγόμενος ὡς ἀποθανούμενος, ὁ δὲ Δαναὸς ἀκολουθῶν ὡς ἀποκτενῶν), it happened as a result of the things done that the one [Danaus] was put to death and the other [Lynceus] was saved.

On the most natural reading of the Greek, περιπέτεια involves actions as well as motives and beliefs.[7] Περιπέτεια is defined as a "change . . . of the things done" (τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολή), and the result of the action is stressed in Aristotle's examples: the messenger "did (ἐποίησεν) the opposite" and "it happened as a result of the things done" (ἐκ τῶν πεπραγμένων).[8] That περιπέτεια should also be connected with belief and motive is indicated by Aristotle's use of ὡς and the future participle (ὡς εὐφρανῶν, ὡς ἀποθανούμενος, and ὡς ἀποκτενῶν), a construction normally used to indicate an agent's purpose or beliefs.

Though Aristotle has a great deal to say about actions, processes, and intentions in his other works, studies of περιτέτεια have largely ignored this important philosophical material. I shall argue that Aristotle's views on action provide the philosophical basis for a detailed account of περιπέτεια that takes both "fortune" and "intention" into consideration. On my showing, περιπέτεια is the specific kind of discontinuous action that occurs when the action of an agent is prevented from achieving its intended result and instead arrives at an opposite actual result. The exact meaning of this statement will become clear when we have studied

4. Save for a change of punctuation (see n. 6 below), the text of the *Poetics* used in this paper is that of R. Kassel (Oxford, 1965).

5. I am particularly indebted to D. Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (Ithaca, 1984), a study that makes clear the relevance of Aristotle's theory of κίνησις in the *Physics* to his theory of action in the ethical works.

6. I have departed here from Kassel's text by adding a comma after Οἰδίπουν and deleting a comma after φόβου. For a discussion of text and interpretation, see section III below.

7. "Fortune" and "intention" are often assumed to be mutually exclusive; an exception is I. Glanville, "Note on ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ," *CQ* 41 (1947): 75, who does not, however, adequately discuss Aristotle's theories.

8. I cannot agree with D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle: "Poetics"* (Oxford, 1968), p. 128, that τῶν πραττομένων is ambiguous because it can mean either "the course of events" or "what the characters are trying to achieve." The phrase simply refers to the events that "occur as a result of the construction of the plot" (γίνεσθαι ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ μύθου) discussed in the previous paragraph, at 1452a18–20. Aristotle's καθάπερ εἴρηται (1452a23) tells us as much. On καθάπερ εἴρηται, see further below, section II.

Aristotle's examples of περιπέτεια in conjunction with his accounts of involuntary and discontinuous actions.

I. INVOLUNTARY ACTIONS DONE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESULT

Two passages in Aristotle's ethical works give a good account of the kind of involuntary action that περιπέτεια involves. These are *Eudemian Ethics* 2. 9. 1225b1–6:

> The voluntary seems to be the opposite of the involuntary; and [acting] with knowledge of who [it is] or with what [it is done] or the result (οὗ ἕνεκα) (for sometimes one knows that it is one's father but [does] not [think one is acting] to kill but to save [him] [οὐχ ἵνα ἀποκτείνῃ ἀλλ' ἵνα σώσῃ]—as the daughters of Pelias did—or knows that this [τοδί] is drink but [thinks] that it is a love-charm or wine, when it was hemlock) seems to be the opposite of [acting] in ignorance of who [it is] and with what [it is done] and what [the act is], through ignorance and not accidentally;

and *Nicomachean Ethics* 3. 1. 1111a2–14:

> The person who is ignorant of one of these things acts involuntarily. Perhaps it is not bad to set down what and how many these are: who [the agent is] and what [the act is] and concerning what or in what circumstances [the act is done] and sometimes with what, for example, with what instrument, and with what result (ἕνεκα τίνος), such as for safety. . . . Giving someone drink for safety (ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ), one might kill [the person].

Both of these passages include among involuntary actions those done in ignorance of the actual result, the οὗ ἕνεκα.[9] In such cases the agent does something voluntarily in order to produce a given result, but a different result actually occurs. For example, when Pelias' daughters voluntarily boil their father in the mistaken belief that this will restore the old man's youth, they do not act "to kill" (ἵνα ἀποκτείνῃ) but "to save" (ἵνα σώσῃ). Because the actual result is not intended, the action should be regarded as involuntary under a description that includes this result: "boiling in order to kill." The *Rhetoric* describes this kind of action in less technical terms (3. 1416a17–20):

> [In justifying oneself] it is possible to offer the intended result in compensation [for the actual result],[10] [claiming] that one intended not to injure but [to do] this [other thing] instead of what one is accused of doing, and [the victim] happened to be injured. [One might say:] "It would be right to hate [me], if I did it so that this [result] would come about."

Aristotle's expression οὗ ἕνεκα (or ἕνεκα τίνος) is potentially confusing. In the passages from the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* cited above, it denotes the actual result of an action.[11] In the *Rhetoric,* however, it denotes the intended result of an action, as it does

9. On the meaning of οὗ ἕνεκα and τίνος ἕνεκα in these passages, see immediately below and at n. 11.

10. The Greek phrase is ἀντικαταλλάττεσθαι τὸ οὗ ἕνεκα: on the meaning of ἀντικαταλλάττεσθαι, see E. M. Cope, *The "Rhetoric" of Aristotle,* rev. J. Sandys, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1877), p. 180.

11. See M. Woods, trans. and comm., *Aristotle's "Eudemian Ethics," Books I, II, and VIII* (Oxford, 1982), p. 147.

also at *Poetics* 1461a4–9 ("One must consider . . . for what purpose [οὗ ἕνεκα] the agent acts") and at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b1–2 ("Everyone who does something does it for some purpose [ἕνεκά του]"). To avoid confusion, I will continue to distinguish between the two uses of the expression by translating one as "actual result" and the other as "intended result."

Aristotle's examples in *Poetics* 11 show that περιπέτεια involves the kind of involuntary action that we have been considering, done in ignorance of the actual result. When the messenger in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* tells Oedipus that Polybus is dead, Oedipus' joy is the intended result (ὡς εὐφρανῶν τὸν Οἰδίπουν); the actual result—Oedipus' misery—is very different: "he did the opposite." The example from the *Lynceus* also concerns involuntary action done in ignorance of the actual result. When Danaus follows Lynceus, the latter's death is the result Danaus intends (ἀκολουθῶν ὡς ἀποκτενῶν); but Danaus' action produces a different actual result: Lynceus' salvation and his own death.[12] In this example, Aristotle uses ὡς with the future participle to describe the experience of the subject of the passive verb, Lynceus (ὁ μὲν ἀγόμενος ὡς ἀποθανούμενος). This phrase has created needless confusion. As O. Schrier points out, ἀποθνήσκω serves here, as often, as the passive of ἀποκτείνω, and the intention is that of the agent, Danaus, who is leading Lynceus away to put him to death.[13] We can understand ὑπὸ Δαναοῦ, "by Danaus," and translate: "the one [Lynceus] being led away to be put to death [by Danaus]."[14]

Even though an intended result enters into the account of περιπέτεια, it is misleading to translate it as "reversal of intention." Περιπέτεια is a part of the plot (1452b9–10 "these are two parts of the plot, περιπέτεια and recognition"), and the plot is an imitation of action. Intention enters into the account only because περιπέτεια includes a voluntary action, and the intended result of a voluntary action is an essential property of this action. For example, when someone piles bricks on top of one another, we need to know what his or her intentions are before we can decide whether to call this action "building" or "playing."[15] This principle also applies to the actions with morally qualified goals discussed in the ethical works. At *Nicomachean Ethics* 3. 1115b22, Aristotle states that "each thing is defined by its goal (τέλος)": for example, a brave man acts "for the sake of the good" (1115b23 καλοῦ ἕνεκα), and it is this goal that makes his action brave. Thus, in περιπέτεια, intentions help to

12. This much is clear from Aristotle's own words; for a reconstruction of the plot, see G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth-Century Tragedy* (Athens, 1980), pp. 53–54.

13. "A Simple View of *Peripeteia*," *Mnemosyne* 33 (1980): 102. It is a mistake to interpret the passage as implying anything about Lynceus' expectations (cf. D. W. Lucas, *"Poetics,"* p. 129; Turner, "Reverse," p. 208) or those of the audience (cf. Else, *Argument,* pp. 346–48).

14. Cf. *Poet.* 13. 1453a38–39, 14. 1453b23–25.

15. Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy,* pp. 5–108, 252, makes it clear that intended results are essential properties of actions, just as goals are essential properties of processes; the example of building is based on Arist. *Ph.* 201a10–19, cited by Charles, ibid., p. 16.

define action, which changes direction as actual result conflicts with intended result: intentions are not themselves reversed.

Aristotle's account of περιπέτεια differs in one way from his account in the ethical works of involuntary actions done in ignorance of the actual result. In περιπέτεια the actual result does not simply differ from the intended result, it is the opposite of the intended result (ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον . . . μεταβολή). What this means is clear from Aristotle's examples: in the *Lynceus,* death and salvation are opposites; in the *Oedipus Tyrannus,* the action that is intended to cheer produces misery.

II. DISCONTINUOUS ACTIONS

Because an action does not achieve its intended result in περιπέτεια, περιπέτεια must be discontinuous action of the kind Aristotle describes elsewhere. Indeed, in the *Poetics* itself Aristotle indicates that περιπέτεια is discontinuous action when he states that a simple plot is an imitation of an action that is "continuous (συνεχοῦς) and one," such that the "change occurs without περιπέτεια or recognition" (10. 1452a15–16). In complex plots, this passage implies, recognition or περιπέτεια breaks up continuity of action.

Though several scholars have connected περιπέτεια with discontinuous action,[16] the connection has not been worked out in detail, nor has its importance been appreciated. To understand fully Aristotle's view of περιπέτεια as discontinuous action we must study in some detail his views on continuous processes (κινήσεις).

For Aristotle, κίνησις includes qualitative alteration, locomotion, and quantitative change. It can also include actions, as is clear from *Eudemian Ethics* 2. 1220b26–27: "κίνησις is continuous, and action is κίνησις." Accordingly, Aristotle's account of κίνησις in the *Physics* and elsewhere should bear on his account of actions in the *Poetics.* As Charles notes, "In the *Physics,* the account of processes [κινήσεις] is applied explicitly to actions: teaching, learning (III 3), walking (V 4), building, doctoring, jumping (III 1). Aristotle himself assumes that in giving an account of processes he has provided an ontology of actions."[17]

Each Aristotelian κίνησις is continuous (συνεχής) only if it reaches its endpoint without hindrance. In *Physics* 8. 8, Aristotle distinguishes continuous from discontinuous motion along a straight line (264a9–13):

> Everything in motion moves continuously if it is turned aside by nothing and if it arrives at that place toward which it was originally set in motion. For example, [something moves continuously from A to B] if it arrives at B [from A] and was in motion toward B not only when it came near to B but as soon as it began to move.

16. See Turner, "Reverse," p. 208 (after L. Potts, *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction* [Cambridge, 1953], p. 81); Glanville, "Note," pp. 73 (citing an unpublished paper of F. Cornford), 75; A. Garvie, "Aeschylus' Simple Plots," in *Dionysiaca,* ed. R. D. Dawe, J. Diggle, and P. E. Easterling (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 63–64.

17. *Aristotle's Philosophy,* p. 63.

If, however, the moving thing goes back to A immediately upon reaching B, it cannot be said to move continuously (261b31–34):

> It is clear that the thing in motion along a straight and finite line is not in motion continuously [forever]. For it turns back (ἀνακάμπτει), and that which turns back along a straight line moves with opposite motions.

Other kinds of κινήσεις also are continuous or discontinuous depending on whether or not they reach their endpoint without impediment. Aristotle often calls the endpoint of changes other than locomotion the οὗ ἕνεκα, an expression that can mean "final cause" or, in the case of action (cf. section I above), "intended result." For example, Aristotle writes in *De partibus animalium* 1. 641b23–25: "Everywhere we say that this is for the sake of this (τόδε τοῦδ' ἕνεκα), wherever there appears some end toward which the κίνησις proceeds (περαίνει) when nothing impedes"; and in *Physics* 2. 194a29–30 he states: "When a κίνησις is continuous (συνεχή) and there is some end of the κίνησις, this last thing is also the οὗ ἕνεκα."[18]

Aristotle's distinction between continuous and discontinuous κίνησις can help us to understand both the kind of action that περιπέτεια itself is and the role of περιπέτεια in the larger dramatic action of which it is a part. First, περιπέτεια, as a part of the tragic plot, is itself a discontinuous action. It is a κίνησις proceeding toward an endpoint (the result intended by the agent) that it is prevented from reaching; for, like the discontinuous motion along a straight line in *Physics* 261b31–34, περιπέτεια includes a "turning back" (ἀνάκαμψις). As Aristotle puts it, περιπέτεια is "the change to the opposite of the things done [by the agent]."

The discontinuous action of περιπέτεια also helps to constitute a discontinuous plot. A plot, whether simple or complex, is a "putting together of things done" (e.g., *Poet.* 6. 1450a5 σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων), a series of "things that happen successively" (7. 1451a13 ἐφεξῆς γιγνομένων).[19] This series of "things done" constitutes the imitation of action: a protagonist's change from bad to good fortune or from good to bad fortune. Thus, a tragic imitation of action is a motion between two endpoints, good fortune and bad fortune. Each of the "things done," including those that make up the περιπέτεια, contributes to the protagonist's tragic change, whether or not he or she is the agent of each of them. For example, the "things done" that constitute the περιπέτεια of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* are done by the messenger, but they contribute to the imitation of action of which Oedipus is the protagonist, for this first

18. I follow W. Charlton, ed., *Aristotle's "Physics," Books I and II* (Oxford, 1970), p. 48, in reading τοῦτο ἔσχατον at 194a30. The two passages quoted here are cited by Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy*, p. 252; cf. ibid., p. 108, for two other passages that contain an "and nothing impedes"-clause (*Mot. an.* 701a16–17, 702a15–16).

19. In *Ph.* 8. 259a16–20 τὸ ἐφεξῆς, "successive," is opposed to τὸ συνεχές, "continuous"; in *Poet.* 1451a13, then, ἐφεξῆς may be used as a technical term for the genus that includes both simple (continuous) action and complex (discontinuous) action.

step in the revelation of Oedipus' identity is a necessary part of the series of events that leads to his misfortune. In a simple plot, the motion is "continuous" (συνεχής), each of the individual "things done" representing a segment of the straight line AB. In complex plots, motion between A and B is prevented from continuing along a straight line and is instead made to change directions one or more times. In the περιπέτεια of the *Oedipus Tyrannus,* the "things done" by the messenger at first proceed toward his intended result of cheering Oedipus, that is, toward Oedipus' good fortune (A). Prevented from attaining this result, the messenger's action turns back and moves in the opposite direction, toward Oedipus' bad fortune (B). As a consequence, the action imitated by the plot moves from A to B in a line that doubles back on itself. Thus, as "the change to the opposite of the things done" by the messenger, the περιπέτεια also helps to constitute the tragic plot itself. At *Poetics* 11. 1452b2–3 Aristotle makes explicit this contribution of περιπέτεια to the tragic plot as a whole when he writes that "bad fortune and good fortune will follow from this kind [of περιπέτεια and recognition]."[20]

This analysis of περιπέτεια in terms of discontinuous action can help to explain in what way it differs from the tragic change (μετάβασις) that is essential to all plots, whether simple or complex, as Aristotle states at *Poetics* 10. 1452a14–18. Περιπέτεια is neither a tragic change of an especially sudden sort nor the means by which the tragic change takes place.[21] In the tragic change there is not necessarily an opposition between intended result and actual result, as there is in περιπέτεια. The tragic change is a movement between the two endpoints of good and bad fortune, whereas περιπέτεια is a change in direction within the movement between these two endpoints. Furthermore, there is only one tragic change in each play, but there can be several περιπέτειαι: though Aristotle never states this, it is suggested by his use of the plural περιπετειῶν (e.g., 24. 1459b10) and by the close association between περιπέτεια and recognition, which Aristotle does say can occur more than once in a single play (11. 1452b3–8, 16. 1454b26–28).

This account of περιπέτεια allows us to understand the significance of Aristotle's phrase καθάπερ εἴρηται in his definition of περιπέτεια (11. 1452a23). It refers back to the passage in *Poetics* 10 where simple and complex plots were distinguished on the basis of their respective continuity and lack of continuity: περιπέτεια is "the change to the opposite of the things done, as was said [sc. when we denied that complex plots are imitations of continuous actions and implied that they therefore involve the discontinuity produced by a change in direction]."

20. Vahlen and Else each saw only part of the truth: Else, *Argument,* p. 344, correctly wrote that in the definition of περιπέτεια "τῶν πραττομένων are simply *the events of the play as it moves along*" (emphasis in the original); some of these individual πραττόμενα that make up the plot, however, are also actions done by an agent "zu einem bestimmten Zweck," as Vahlen wrote, *Beiträge,* p. 34.

21. Sudden change: Bywater, *Aristotle,* pp. 198–99; Else, *Argument,* p. 345. Means: Vahlen, *Beiträge,* p. 34. Most recently S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's "Poetics"* (London, 1986), p. 213, has identified περιπέτεια with the tragic change.

This explanation of καθάπερ εἴρηται is preferable to the view that the phrase refers back to παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα (9. 1452a4).[22] The passage in *Poetics* 10 is nearer; moreover, it is the passage in which Aristotle first distinguishes simple and complex plots. The phrase παρὰ τὴν δόξαν, on the other hand, occurs in a discussion of simple plots: the paragraph at 9. 1451b33 begins τῶν δὲ ἁπλῶν μύθων κτλ., and there is no mention of complex plots until the beginning of the next chapter, at 10. 1452a12.[23]

Two important points emerge from the preceding study of Aristotle's theory of actions and κινήσεις: περιπέτεια is the kind of discontinuous action that occurs when the action of an agent is prevented from achieving its intended result and produces instead the opposite actual result; and περιπέτεια is the "turning back" that helps to constitute the discontinuous action of the complex plot. I shall argue below that this account fits the examples of περιπέτεια that Aristotle gives in the *Poetics* and elsewhere.

III. ARISTOTLE'S EXAMPLES OF ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ

Of the two examples given in *Poetics* 11, only the one drawn from the *Oedipus Tyrannus* requires more discussion. This is a vexed passage, since the most natural reading of the Greek—taking both εὐφρανῶν and ἀπαλλάξων with ἐλθών ("by coming to cheer Oedipus . . . and to free him from his fear")—does not accord with our text of the play: the messenger does not come with the intention of freeing Oedipus from his fear. The somewhat conflicting demands of Aristotle's philosophy of action, the text of the play, and Greek usage can best be met by repunctuating to take ἀπαλλάξων with δηλώσας instead of with ἐλθών: οἷον ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι ἐλθὼν ὡς εὐφρανῶν τὸν Οἰδίπουν, καὶ ἀπαλλάξων τοῦ πρὸς τὴν μητέρα φόβου δηλώσας ὅς ἦν, τοὐναντίον ἐποίησεν ("For example, in the *Oedipus,* [the messenger], by coming to cheer Oedipus, and by showing who he was to free [him] from his fear concerning his mother, did the opposite").

With this text, Aristotle's statement is entirely consistent with the events of Sophocles' play. The περιπέτεια takes place in the messenger-scene.[24] In this scene the ultimate result intended by the messenger is his own good fortune (1005–6): "Indeed I came for this reason most of all, to get some benefit when you return to your house." The messenger

22. For the latter view, see R. Dupont-Roc and J. Lallot, *Aristote: La "Poétique"* (Paris, 1980), p. 231; Glanville, "Note," pp. 73–78; Halliwell, *"Poetics,"* p. 213, n. 16; J. Kamerbeek, "A Note on Arist. *Poet.* C. XI, 1452 A 22–26, 29–33," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965): 279; D. W. Lucas, "Pity, Terror, and *Peripeteia," CQ* 12 (1962): 52–55. For a survey of other suggestions, see D. Allan, "Peripeteia quid sit, Caesar occisus ostendit," *Mnemosyne* 29 (1976): 338–41.

23. Else, *Argument,* pp. 323–24, argued that chapter 10 should begin at 1452a1 ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐ μόνον κτλ. I see no problem with the traditional chapter-division.

24. *OT* 911–1085. Bywater, *Aristotle,* pp. 200–201, confusing περιπέτεια with the tragic change itself, thought that the περιπέτεια takes place in the following scene (1110–85).

intends to bring about this ultimate result by way of an intermediate result: cheering Oedipus with the announcement of his good fortune in becoming king of Corinth (934–40). Because only this intermediate result is important for the imitation of action of which Oedipus is the protagonist, it is the only one that Aristotle mentions (ἐλθὼν ὡς εὐφρανῶν τὸν Οἰδίπουν). The messenger intends to cheer Oedipus by announcing that Polybus is dead (942). This announcement, however, produces an actual result that is the opposite of the intended result, for it sets in motion, "according to what is probable or necessary," a chain of events that leads to the terrible revelation of Oedipus' parentage, and so to Oedipus' misery and bad fortune. After learning that Polybus is dead, Oedipus rejoices because he thinks that the oracle about his parricide has proved false (964–72); he still refuses, however, to go to Corinth for fear of committing incest with Merope (1007–13). To free him from this fear (1014), the messenger reveals to Oedipus that he is not the son of Polybus (1016). This first step in the revelation of Oedipus' identity firmly turns the movement of the action back toward Oedipus' bad fortune: Jocasta exits, calling him "wretched" (1068, 1071). This περιπέτεια, then, involves a sequence of events in which actions intended to achieve certain results actually produce the opposite results. As Aristotle puts all this in the compressed language of *Poetics* 11, "[The messenger], [1] by coming to cheer Oedipus, and [2] by showing who he was to free [him] from his fear concerning his mother, did the opposite." Action 1, instead of cheering Oedipus, brings to his mind the fear of incest; and action 2, instead of removing that fear, increases it.

On this reading, Aristotle condenses the plot slightly, but his choice of words preserves all the relevant relationships among actions, intended results, and actual results. The two aorist participles express the two actions of the messenger; the two future participles, each construed with one of the aorist participles, express the intended result of each action. Construing ἀπαλλάξων (ὡς understood) with δηλώσας makes Aristotle's statement consistent with what actually happens in the play: the messenger intends to free Oedipus from his fear concerning his mother only after his arrival.[25] The future participle ἀπαλλάξων expresses this later intention.[26]

We can now turn to the other examples of περιπέτεια that Aristotle presents. At *Poetics* 16. 1454b29–30, Aristotle praises *Odyssey* 19. 317–490, in which the nurse's recognition of Odysseus comes about ἐκ

25. W. Verdenius, "Arist. *Poet.* 1452a25," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965): 281, took ἀπαλλάξων to refer to "a later stage in the conversation," though the brevity of his remarks makes it impossible to tell whether or not his reading is the same as mine. I cannot see why D. W. Lucas, *"Poetics,"* p. 129, and Schrier, "Simple View," p. 106, claimed that Verdenius' separation of ἀπαλλάξων from ἐλθὼν ὡς εὐφρανῶν makes the sentence "obscure." On my reading, the sentence consists of two clauses with the same construction, arranged in chiastic order; ὡς is omitted before the second future participle because it appears with the first future participle immediately preceding.

26. For surveys of the disputes about the text of this passage, see Allan, "Peripeteia," and Schrier, "Simple View."

περιπετείας. As D. W. Lucas noted, ἐκ does not indicate the cause of recognition but the manner of its introduction into the story.[27] An examination of the passage shows that this is indeed a case in which the actual result conflicts with the intended result. Odysseus asks the old nurse to wash his feet, with (as she realizes) the intention of avoiding as much as possible the "outrage and many shameful deeds" of the young maidservants.[28] Instead, because this action leads to his recognition by the nurse, Odysseus risks facing what he had tried to avoid. The nurse's recognition nearly causes her to reveal his presence to his enemies, a revelation that could lead to the greatest outrage of all, his own death. For this reason, when the nurse recognizes him and attempts to betray his presence, Odysseus says to her (482): "Mother, why do you wish to destroy me?"

At *Poetics* 18. 1456a19–23, Aristotle writes: "In περιπέτειαι and in simple actions they aim at the effects they wish marvelously; for this is tragic and φιλάνθρωπον. This happens when the clever but evil man is deceived, like Sisyphus, and a brave but unjust man is defeated." The text of this passage is problematic, and it is not clear whether the examples are intended to illustrate περιπέτεια, the marvelous in simple plots, the tragic, or the φιλάνθρωπον. The best that can be said is that the examples could well illustrate περιπέτεια, in which intended result conflicts with actual result. A clever but wicked Sisyphus might perform an action with the intended result of deceiving but instead produce the opposite result, his own deception. A brave but unjust man might attack with the intention of winning but produce instead his own defeat. As in the example drawn from the *Lynceus* at *Poetics* 11, something (we are not told what) would then have prevented these actions from achieving their intended results.

In *Poetics* 24. 1459b14 the *Iliad* is classified as "simple." This epic in fact has no περιπέτεια, for there is no opposition between actual result and intended result in the "things done" that constitute the plot, the imitation of Achilles' change from good to bad fortune. Achilles regrets his refusal to fight the Trojans, for this has the unexpected consequence of Patroclus' death; but this is not περιπέτεια, for Achilles' action did not have his friend's safety as its intended result. Again, Achilles' lending Patroclus his armor is followed by his friend's death; but this too is not περιπέτεια, for Achilles' action was intended not to save Patroclus but to drive the Trojans back from the ships and to win glory for Achilles himself (*Il.* 16. 84), which in fact does happen. And though Achilles' killing of Hector will lead to his own death, this is by no means

27. *"Poetics,"* p. 168. There is no need to accept the view of Bywater, *Aristotle,* p. 235, A. Gudeman, *Aristoteles: "Peri Poietikes"* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1934), p. 293, and Lock, "The Use of ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ," p. 253, that περιπέτεια does not have a technical sense here.

28. *Od.* 19. 373–74. On Odysseus' intention, cf. Turner, "Reverse," p. 213, though his view of the nature of the περιπέτεια here differs from mine.

περιπέτεια, for in killing Hector Achilles does not intend to prevent his own death, which he well knows must follow.[29]

Though it has received a sort of notoriety in the literature, *Historia animalium* 8. 590b13–19 is a red herring.[30] Aristotle writes that "crayfish master even big fish, and a περιπέτεια happens to some of these (τούτων). For (γάρ) octopuses master crayfish. . . ." Aristotle goes on to write that crayfish master congers, which in turn eat octopuses. Unfortunately, it is impossible to decide which fish is subject to περιπέτεια, for we cannot determine the referent of τούτων. Grammatically, we would expect it to refer to the nearer subject, the big fish.[31] Logically, however, it would seem to refer to the crayfish, who are mastered by larger fish in the example immediately following γάρ.[32] The chief obstacle to using this example to gain an understanding of περιπέτεια in the *Poetics,* however, is the fact that it does not concern human beings. Animals have perception but lack the rational part of the soul (*EN* 1097b33–1098a5); they are incapable of προαίρεσις (1111b8–10) and of πρᾶξις (1139a20; cf. *EE* 1224a28–30). For this reason, the events that happen to crayfish and octopuses have little relevance for an understanding of human actions.

Finally, at *Rhetoric* 1. 11. 1371b10–11 Aristotle states that "περιπέτειαι and being barely saved from dangers" are pleasant. Bywater, citing this passage in support of the view that περιπέτεια means "a sudden change of fortune," apparently took καί to mean "that is."[33] Though this is possible, καί could merely be linking two distinct possibilities. In that case, περιπέτεια would not have to mean "a sudden change," for Aristotle writes at 1371a25–28 that change itself, even if not sudden, is pleasant. The passage thus offers no firm support for Bywater's view.

A study of Aristotle's views on actions and κινήσεις allows us to conclude that Vahlen's statement was substantially correct, as far as it went: περιπέτεια does indeed involve "was man tat oder tut zu einem bestimmten Zweck, das aber nicht diesen sondern den gerade entgegengesetzten zur Folge hat."[34] But an understanding of Aristotle's philosophy of action allows us to be more precise and to avoid the inaccuracy of those who translate περιπέτεια as "reversal of intention." Περιπέτεια is the kind of discontinuous action that occurs when the action of an

29. Cf. Turner, "Reverse," p. 209; differently, Halliwell, *"Poetics,"* p. 264, n. 18, who believes that the *Iliad* does have περιπέτεια, following R. Rutherford, "Tragic Form and Feeling in the *Iliad,*" *JHS* 102 (1982): 146.

30. The passage is frequently used as evidence for one or another view of περιπέτεια; see, e.g., Allan, "Peripeteia," p. 349, n. 8; S. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*[4] (New York, 1911; repr. New York, 1951), p. 331, n.; Bywater, *Aristotle,* p. 198; F. L. Lucas, "Reverse," pp. 100–101.

31. Thus Allan, "Peripeteia," p. 349, n. 8.

32. Allan, ibid., notes that the passage was taken this way by D'A. W. Thompson (now in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation,* vol. 1 [Princeton, 1984], p. 925) and by P. Louis in the Budé edition (Paris, 1969).

33. *Aristotle,* p. 198.

34. *Beiträge,* p. 34.

agent is prevented from achieving its intended result and instead arrives at an actual result that is the opposite of the one intended. Περιπέτεια breaks up the simple plot's linear motion between the endpoints of the tragic change and forces it to turn back in the opposite direction. Thus, περιπέτεια is neither a "reversal of intention" nor a "reversal of fortune" but a turning back (ἀνάκαμψις) of the action from its straight course.[35]

University of Minnesota

35. An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association in San Antonio, Texas, December 1986. I am indebted to Norman Dahl, Sandra Peterson, George Sheets, and the Editor and anonymous referees of *CP* for helpful criticisms of earlier drafts. I also wish to thank the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota for a Faculty Summer Research Fellowship that helped make it possible for me to complete this paper.