ACTORS AND THEATRE IN ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC* AND BEYOND

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1. *Introduction*

Ἡ ῥητορική ἐστιν ἀντίστροφος τῇ διαλεκτικῇ, «Rhetoric is the choral response – *antistrophe* – to dialectic». Thus Aristotle's *Rhetoric* opens with a resounding metaphorical reference to choral dancing, and in particular to the manoeuvres of the chorus in the recitation of the choral odes (*rhet*. I 1, 1). *Strophe* denotes the physical movement of a chorus in one direction, to which the *antistrophe* or counter-movement exactly corresponds, the same gestures and postures being repeated. The terms are extended to encompass the poetic verses sung by the chorus, in which the metre corresponds with that of the *strophe*. Discrete fields and methods of conducting philosophical enquiry are thus visualised in the first sentence of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as a dancing, singing chorus, wheeling as it turns to repeat in an *antistrophe* the same formal structure, although not the identical content, of the foregoing strophe.

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a crucial text from the perspective of any study of ancient oratory because it is the earliest technical treatise on the art of persuasion to have survived. But there are several reasons why it is especially relevant to the relationship between ancient oratory and ancient theatre performance. This article aims to outline and illustrate these reasons. It also broadens out to embrace Aristotelian texts other than the *Rhetoric*, because his views on the best ways of persuading others are tightly related not only to his views on dramatic and epic poetry in the surviving book of his *Poetics*, but also to his broader philosophical project, especially in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and his *Politics*. Here I build on an interesting article by Victor Castellani suggesting that much of his ethical theory was built on examples of human behaviour he had seen in both tragic and comic theatre[1]. I am also intrigued by Christopher Johnstone's suggestion that the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Rhetoric*, and the *Politics* can be seen as companion works, comparable with a tragic trilogy, delineating «a unified conception of the mechanisms by which human beings must work to establish and maintain the communities upon which their well-being depends. The deliberative functions of rhetoric identify it as the instrument whereby individual moral visions are shared, modified, and fused into the communal moral

[1] C.L. Johnstone, *An Aristotelian Trilogy*. Ethics, Rhetoric, Politics, *and the Search for Moral Truth*, «Philos. Rhet.» 13 (1980), p. 17.

principles that regulate our shared undertakings. Out of individual knowing we create communal moral truths; rhetoric is the instrument of that creation»[2].

My own over-arching argument here is that the aspect of Aristotle's rhetorical theory in his *Rhetoric* which has been most discussed in relation to theatrical performance – delivery, *hypokrisis* – is actually the least important aspect; dramatic texts are everywhere in the *Rhetoric*, illustrating a wide variety of rhetorical points. Since the life of the happy human via friendships with others and the social, political and deliberative life as a "political animal" in the *polis* is conducted via verbal reasoning and communication, this means that drama, in underpinning rhetorical theory and informing rhetorical practice, is fundamental to Aristotle's entire moral philosophy.

2. *Aristotle's Actors*

He included real-life actors in his discussion not only of poetry in *Poetics* but of ethics in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and of persuasive prose speech in his *Rhetoric*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he advises us to regard those who lack self-control when they speak as beings *like actors*, whose words and meanings are not real (*EN* VII 3, 1147a22-24). But he also shows his high regard for actors and acting in a remark intended only to illustrate a logical point, namely that we may classify neither a bad physician nor a bad actor as a bad person "in the technical sense" (*EN* VII 4, 1148b6-9). Here, almost by accident, he reveals that he sees acting as of similar status as a profession to medicine, the ancestral profession of his father Nicomachus' family (Diogenes Laertius V 1, 1). While discussing abuse in the *Rhetoric*, he even says that while actors call themselves «Artists of Dionysus», those who wish to ridicule their profession call them «flatterers of Dionysus» instead (*rhet*. III 2, 10).

In the *Rhetoric*, the references to the two actors whom Aristotle mentions by name suggest that he had witnessed them both in live performance. The nonpareil tragic actor of the fourth century BCE was Theodorus, who, unlike the other actors, says Aristotle, perfected the art of speaking in a way that sounded natural and convincing, «for his seemed to be the voice of the speaker, that of the others the voice of someone else» (*rhet*. III 2, 4)[3]. The comic actor he singles out – again in relation to delivery – is Philemon. While discussing the tragic poet Anaxandrides, he commends the actor Philemon for being able to deal with *asyndeta* and repeti-

[2] V. Castellani, *Drama and Aristotle*, in J. Redmond (ed.), *Drama and Philosophy* (Themes in Drama 12), Cambridge 1990, pp. 21-36.

[3] On Theodorus see further E. Hall, *Tragedy Personified*, in C. Kraus et al. (eds.), *Visualizing the Tragic. Drama, Myth and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature*, Oxford 2007, pp. 243-248 and Ead., *Greek Tragedy 430-380 BC*, in R. Osborne (ed.), *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution*, Oxford 2007, p. 284. Aristotle also refers to Theodorus in *pol*. VII 1336b, where he is saying that very small children need to be kept away from obscene images and scurrilous poetry. After all, the tragic actor Theodorus insisted on delivering the first speech in any tragedy, since «audiences are attracted by what they hear first; and this also happens in regard to our dealings with people and to our dealings with things – we prefer anything that comes first. We ought, therefore, to make all base things unfamiliar to the young, and especially those that involve either depravity or malignity». Here theatrical practice illuminates the ethics of elementary education.

tion of words – techniques "rightly censured in written speeches" – by varying his delivery. He did something of the sort when delivering a speech containing the phrase «Rhadamanthys and Palamedes» in Anaxandrides' *Gerontomachia*; he used expression to vary the repeated ἐγώ in the same comic writer's *Euseboi*, *Pious Ones* (*rhet*. III 12, 7)[4].

These two examples suggest that Aristotle had paid close attention to live delivery of both tragedies and comedies in the Athenian theatre during his two extended periods of residence in that city, between 367 BCE and 347 BCE and again between 335 and 323. The latter period was during Lycurgus' government of the city and supervision of the creation of canonical texts of the great tragedians (long ago linked by Werner Jaeger with Aristotle's work on theatre texts)[5], and for three years afterwards. It is true that in one notorious passage Aristotle describes delivery as a vulgar (φορτικόν) dimension of rhetoric, proposing that it is only effective because of the corruption of governments, since speeches, rightly considered, should deal with the facts alone (*rhet*. III 1, 4-5). Yet his treatise, taken as entirety, undermines this Platonic position, as William Fortenbaugh has convincingly shown[6].

3. *Aristotle* φιλοθέωρος?

I am currently at the beginning of research for a study that will examine all Aristotle's works and fragments *other* than the *Poetics* in order to demonstrate the extent to which his experience of theatre and familiarity with dramatic texts informed his entire philosophical project. It even informed his scientific works, as certain enigmatic references, for example to puppet shows in his zoological works, amply testify[7]. But here I want to outline some of the ways in which his *Rhetoric* is informed by his openness to theatre arts, and his intimate knowledge of theatre texts and their influence on other walks of life where persuasion is paramount. This is a man, let us not forget, whose lost works include *On Tragedies*, perhaps the "published treatise" dealing with visual effects he mentions in the *Poetics* (1454b): two of his other lost treatises reflected his project of creating a comprehensive chronological record of the results of the dramatic competitions at Athens, *Victories at the Dionysia*, and *Didaskaliai* (Diogenes Laertius V 1, 22-27), possibly in collaboration with Lycurgus.

First, it is important to recognise that, unlike his teacher Plato, Aristotle thoroughly respected the theatre and regarded it is a useful in the education of citizens and

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[4] Anaxandrides fr. 10 and 13 Kassel-Austin.

[5] W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung*, Berlin 1923, pp. 348-349; R. Scodel, *Lycurgus and the Tragic Canon*, in C. Cooper (ed.), *The Politics of Orality*, Leiden 2007, pp. 129-154; J. Hanink, *Lycurgan Athens and the Making of Classical Tragedy*, Cambridge 2014, pp. 191-193. The ancient source for Lycurgus' theatre reforms is [Plutarch], *Vitae X oratorum* 841-842.

[6] W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle's Platonic Attitude towards Delivery*, «Philos. Rhet.» 19 (1986), pp. 242-254.

[7] See *e.g. gen. animal*. II 1, 734b5-17, with E. Hall, *Master of Those Who Know. Aristotle as Role Model for the Twenty-first Century Academician*, «Europ. Rev.» 25 (2017), pp. 12-14.

the life of the flourishing city-state[8]. His *Poetics* can be seen as a riposte to Socrates' request in the *Republic* for a prose treatise which demonstrated that poetry other than hymns to the gods and encomia of worthy men could be useful to communities as well as pleasurable[9]. He was, I suspect, what he himself called a φιλοθέωρος, an individual who takes enormous pleasure in spectacles, especially theatrical ones. Near the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the different things in which different people take pleasure, commenting that the Greeks used compound words beginning with the prefix φιλο- to describe such individuals. Men who enjoy horses we call φίλιπποι; those who enjoy a θέαμα we call φιλοθέωροι; the man who takes pleasure in just actions we call the φιλοδίκαιος, and the one who likes virtuous deeds we call φιλάρετος (I 8, 1099a7-11). There are two things to note about this passage. First, the context suggests that loving a θέαμα is enjoyment of one of four types of things, the others being horses, justice and virtue, which seem to be presented as elevated types of pleasure rather than base or bodily ones. Second, the word itself also occurs in a drama which Aristotle might himself have seen, a comedy by Alexis (Menander's uncle), a famous comic poet about twelve years Aristotle's junior[10]. I am not claiming that Aristotle learned the word from Alexis, although Pierre Destrée has recently written a brilliant article showing that Aristotle's esteem for comedy, even for the broad humour of Aristophanes, has been thoroughly under-estimated[11]. I am, however, pointing out the first of many instances where language which Aristotle uses is shared with the writers of drama contemporary with his life and Athenian residence.

He certainly uses rich analogies from theatrical activities in his works on other matters[12]. He incorporates the typical activity of the trainer of the chorus, χοροδιδάσκαλος, into a metaphor about judging and ensuring proportion (*pol*. III 1284b). The same performers could, Aristotle indicates, be cast in either tragedy (and, presumably satyr play) or comedy, a fact that increases the likelihood of specialist performers taking part in multiple productions in a single year (*pol*. III 1276b4). Aristotle notes how the χοροδιδάσκαλος pays attention to ensuring this unity in sound in the unison singing of the chorus (*pol*. III 1284b12-13c). When making an abstract point about the relation between entities arranged in a sequence in his *Metaphysics*, the first example he cites is the relationship between the chorus leader (κορυφαῖος) to those standing beside him (*met*. V 1018b26-9). His *Politics* returns to the comparison between the citizens constituting the state and the *choreutai* constituting a

[8] See also S. Halliwell, "*We were there too". Philosophers in the Theatre*, in S. Bigliazzi - F. Lupi - G. Ugolini (a cura di), Συναγωνίζεσθαι. *Studies in Honour of Guido Avezzù*, Verona 2018, pp. 15-39, although I think he under-estimates the difference between the views of theatre espoused by Aristotle and by Socrates/Plato.

[9] E. Hall, *Is there a Polis in Aristotle's* Poetics?, in M.S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the Tragic*, Oxford 1995, pp. 294-309.

[10] Alexis fr. 337 *PCG*, a one-word fragment quoted by Pollux VI 166.

[11] P. Destrée, *Aristotle on Aristophanic Humour*, in P. Swallow - E. Hall (eds.) *Aristophanic Humour*, London 2020, pp. 111-116.

[12] Thoroughly discussed in L.C.M.M. Jackson, *The Chorus of Drama in the Fourth Century BCE*, Oxford 2019; see the passages referred to in her index *s.v. Aristotle*.

chorus: «For inasmuch as a state is a kind of partnership, and is in fact a partnership of citizens in a government, when the form of the government has been altered and is different it would appear to follow that the state is no longer the same state, just as we say that a chorus which on one occasion acts a comedy and on another a tragedy is a different chorus although it is often composed of the same persons» (*pol*. III 1276b3-9); moreover, «the goodness of all the citizens is not one and the same, just as among dancers the skill of a head dancer (κορυφαῖος) is not the same as that of a subordinate leader» (*pol*. 1277a10-11).

Admittedly, Aristotle protests against *excessive* expenditure, in democracies, on choruses by the rich. His ideal of the mean prompts him to disapprove of excess or paucity in any sphere of moral and social existence. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, spending more than necessary on equipping a comic chorus in expensive purple-dyed robes throughout their shows "as they do in Megara", merely to show off their wealth, is a sign that a man is vulgar and wasteful with money (*EN* IV 2, 1123a19-23)[13]. But in his *Politics* (IV 1299a) he places leadership of a chorus in a list of civic offices, which are highly significant but not actually political magistracies, second only after priests and before heralds and ambassadors. He has also given a great deal of thought to the kind of musical harmonies and rhythms used in the theatre and their emotional effects on people, saying that people of all classes need to be given access to "contests and shows" as restorative recreation (*pol*. VIII 1342a20-22).

4. *Dramatists on Trial*

I suspect that if we had more of Aristotle we would find that he had studied intensively, and perhaps written specifically on what is now one of the least researched facets of the relationship between ancient Greek rhetoric and ancient Greek theatre: that is, anecdotes about famous playwrights appearing in court as defendants. There is a story told in ancient sources, including the *Life of Sophocles* 13, and by Cato in Cicero's *De senectute*, about Sophocles' performance in court. His sons allegedly tried to wrest from him control of his business affairs and gain what in English law we call the power of attorney (*Cato* 22):

«Sophocles composed tragedies to extreme old age; and when, because of his absorption in literary work, he was thought to be neglecting his business affairs, his sons haled him into court in order to secure a verdict removing him from the control of his property on the ground of imbecility, under a law similar to ours, whereby it is customary to restrain heads of families from wasting their estates. There upon, it is said, the old man read to the jury his play, *Oedipus at Colonus*, which he had just written and was revising, and inquired: "Does

[13] See G.M. Sifakis, *Aristotle*, E.N., *IV, 2, 1123a19-24, and the Comic Chorus in the Fourth Century*, «Am. Journ. Philol.» 92 (1971), pp. 410-432. L.C.M.M. Jackson, *The Chorus of Drama*, cit., p. 150 says, on this occasion I think incorrectly, that «Aristotle had a decidedly negative view of the choregia and repeatedly criticizes it as something of minor importance in society. The context is crucial: he is saying that any polity needs to look after those with less power in it: in an oligarchy, it is similarly important to take care of the poor».

that poem seem to you to be the work of an imbecile?" When he had finished he was acquitted by the verdict of the jury».

If this trial really happened, it is difficult to believe that Sophocles can have recited the entire play; Plutarch claims that he just performed the *parodos*, beginning 668-673, «You have come, stranger, to the best place to live, in this land far famed for its horses, white Colonus, where the melodious nightingale ever sings, sheltered by verdant valleys» (*Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 3 = *Moralia* 785A)[14]. But it is not difficult to believe that its exquisite contents would have convinced the jury of his mental competence.

I am inclined, however, to infer, as have other scholars, that this particular story may derive, rather than from an actual lawsuit, from a scene in a comedy. The comedy will itself have been informed by the hostility between Oedipus and his sons as portrayed in *Oedipus at Colonus*[15]. If so, we have a complicated sequence in which oratory and drama repeatedly cross-fertilise one another. A tragedy informs a comedy, leading the comic poet to imagine a legal trial with the rhetorical performance by the defendant replaced with a recitation of tragedy[16].

The earliest trial of a tragedian of which we know is the arraignment of Phrynichus, Aeschylus' older contemporary, for reducing the Athenian audience to tears in his *Sack of Miletus*. He was supposedly fined ὡς ὑπομνήσας οἰκεῖα κακά («for reminding them of their own misfortunes») when their allies' city was sacked in 494 BCE by the Persians as a punishment for rebelling (Herodotus VI 21, 10). But the earliest trial that we hear of relating to a dramatist whose works are extant is that of Aeschylus. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, when Aristotle is talking about ignorance of circumstances in relation to moral action, his example of a person being ignorant of what he is doing is illustrated by the phrase οὐκ εἰδέναι ὅτι ἀπόρρητα, «ignorance of it being a secret»:

«A man, however, may be ignorant of what he is doing, as for instance when people say "it slipped out while they were speaking", or "they were not aware that the matter was a secret", as Aeschylus said of the Mysteries»[17].

This seems to be a reference to the prosecution of Aeschylus on the ground that he had revealed some of the secrets of the Mysteries. As Renaud Gagné says, such a trial would have opened a «contest and competition of speech and the possibility of finding a defendant whose stagecraft skills would allow him to turn the spectacle

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[14] See also Apuleius, *apol*. 37; [Lucian], *macr*. 24; the comments of W.B.Tyrrell. *The Suda's Life of Sophocles (Sigma 815). Translation and Commentary with Sources*, «Electr. Ant.» 9/1 (2005-2006), pp. 174-179.

[15] See R.G. Jebb, *Sophocles'* Oedipus at Colonus, Cambridge 1899, pp. XL-XLII; P. Mazon, *Sophocle devant ses juges*, «Rev. Etud. Anc.» 82 (1945), pp. 82-96.

[16] It is also possible that Cicero's version of the story was in turn influenced by the declamatory procedure of the *actio dementiae* (in Greek γραφὴ παρανοίας), on which see *e.g*. Quint. *inst*. VII 4, 11 and 29-31.

[17] *EN* III 2, 1111a9-10. See R. Gagné, *Mystery Inquisitors. Performance, Authority, and Sacrilege at Eleusis*, «Class. Ant.» 28 (2009), pp. 218-221.

of the trial to his advantage»[18]. The other fourth-century source which mentioned this trial was Heraclides Ponticus, who was, just like Aristotle, an eminent student of Plato from the northern part of the Greek world; amongst the 87 works attributed to Heraclides, there are some on rhetoric, three books *On Passages in Euripides and Sophocles* and one *On the Three Tragic Poets*[19]. One fragment of his work *On Homer* says that Aeschylus was at risk of being killed when actually on stage because he had revealed some of the secrets of the mysteries, and he took refuge at the altar of Dionysus:

«After the members of the Areopagus summoned him, informing him that he first needed to be tried, it was believed he was brought before the court and was acquitted, the judges letting him go mostly on account of things he had done at the Battle of Marathon. For his brother Cynegirus had his hands cut off, and he himself sustained many injuries and was brought back on a litter. The epigram on his tomb also bears witness to these deeds»[20].

We are asked here to imagine Aeschylus, in front of the court of the Areopagus like Orestes in *Eumenides*, using patriotic rhetoric and characterisation of himself as a loyal patriot in order to persuade the Areopagites.

The most famous incident of a dramatist's trial is probably the tradition that Aristophanes' fellow demesman, Cleon, lodged a complaint against Aristophanes for abusing the Athenians in his *Babylonians* of 426, though we only have Aristophanes' comedic word for this (*Ach*. 370-384)[21]. Cleon may have used such abuse in a claim that Aristophanes, who had Aeginetan connections, should not have been enrolled in the Cydathenaean deme and thus registered as an Athenian citizen. The ancient biography (usually called the *Vita*) of Aristophanes, in the context of Cleon's alleged prosecutions of Aristophanes, discusses the suggestion at *Acharnians* 634 that the comic poet came from or held property in Aegina (section 19). The passage in the biography of Aristophanes is somewhat incoherent, but it makes the claim that this is an allusion to one of the three separate occasions on which Aristophanes was accused of not being an Athenian citizen[22].

What would we scholars, whether of rhetoric, drama or both, not give for a transcript of any speech Aristophanes made in legal defence of himself, whether for criticising Athens in front of her allies or for falsely claiming Athenian citizenship?

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[18] *Ibi*, p. 221.

[19] See further E. Hall, *The Tragedians of Heraclea and Comedians of Sinope*, in D. Braund - E. Hall - R. Wyles (eds.), *Ancient Theatre and Performance Culture around the Black Sea*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 52-57.

[20] Anon., *Comm. ad Arist.* EN *III 2* = Heraclides fr. 97 Schütrumpf.

[21] See further J.E. Atkinson, *Curbing the Comedians. Cleon versus Aristophanes and Syracosius' Decree*, «Class. Quart.» 42 (1992), pp. 56-64; J. Hesk, *Deception and Democracy in Classical Athens*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 263-264.

[22] The Greek text of the *Vita* is in R. Kassel - C. Austin (eds.), *Poetae comici graeci*, III/2, Berlin 1981; there is an English translation in M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, Baltimore 1981, pp. 169-172. See further E. Hall, *The Boys from Cydathenaeum. Aristophanes versus Cleon Again*, in D. Allen - P. Christensen - P. Millett (eds.), *How to Do Things with History. New Approaches to Ancient Greece*, Oxford 2018, pp. 346-367.

We know from *Knights* that the comic poet was fully alive to the rhetorical skills required to make an effective speech to the Assembly or in front of the Βουλή[23]; we know from *Wasps* that Athenian jurors loved to have performers – actors of tragedy and musicians – before them in court to entertain them with paradramatic recitals[24]. It is difficult to believe Aristophanes would not have exploited his own virtuosity as a comic writer when performing in a *dikastērion* rather than writing for a *theatron*.

All three major Athenian tragedians were said in antiquity to have been defendants in trials on one charge or another. One of the earliest and most reliable sources for these trials is, of course, Aristotle. The only extant text, as far as I am aware, that mentions trials in connection with all three major tragedians is Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The trial he mentions in this text in relation to Aeschylus is not the trial related to the Mysteries. When discussing references to previous legal decisions, he refers to an otherwise obscure prosecution of Mixidemides by Autocles. He says that Autocles asked, «if the awful goddesses were content to stand trial before the court of the Areopagus, why should not Mixidemides?» (*rhet*. II 23,12).

The trial in connection with which he mentions Sophocles is not that involving his sons, but a different one. It is a trial connected with those accused of establishing the Council of Four Hundred. This trial must have taken place after the institution of the 400, in the early summer of 411, before Peisander's flight to Deceleia some four months later[25]. During the trial, Sophocles was asked if he had voted, as had the other *probouloi*, to establish the Four Hundred. Sophocles answered, «Yes». His questioner, Peisander enquired in response, «What? Didn't it occur to you that this was wrong?» Sophocles replied, «It did». «So you yourself committed this wrong?» now asked Peisander. «Yes», said Sophocles, «for there was nothing better to do» (*rhet*. III 18, 6). Aristotle is using this as an example of a situation in which a speaker needs to justify an action he has taken and which he admits, but which meets disapproval.

A little earlier in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle may well be referring to the same trial when discussing another rhetorical technique for use in self-defence. While discussing defence against *diabolē*, an insinuation or unfair imputation, Aristotle writes (*rhet*. III 15, 3):

> «Another way to defend oneself is to say that it is a mistake or an accident or beyond one's control. So Sophocles said that he was not trembling, as his opponent insinuated, in order to seem old, but because he could not help it. He did not choose to be eighty years old».

Some have sought to link this to the other trial, supposed by the tradition that his sons prosecuted him. But Sophocles would indeed already have been eighty years old at the time of the Four Hundred. Moreover, Sophocles is here stressing his age, rather than playing down its effects[26].

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[23] E. Hall, *Competitive Vocal Performance in Aristophanes' Knights*, in A. Markantonatos - E. Volonaki, *Poet and Orator. A Symbiotic Relationship in Democratic Athens*, Berlin-Boston 2019, pp. 71-82.

[24] Ead., *The Theatrical Cast of Athens*, Oxford 2006, pp. 363-364; A.P. Dorjahn, *Poetry in Athenian Courts*, «Class. Philol.» 22(1927), pp. 85-93.

[25] See M.H. *Jameson Sophocles and the Four Hundred*, «Historia» 20 (1971), pp 541-568 at p. 547.

[26] *Ibi*, pp. 546-547.

In the case of Euripides, the trial Aristotle mentions is more illuminating (*rhet*. III 15, 8). Aristotle says that Euripides was prosecuted by Hygiainon for impiety. Hygiainon alleged that Euripides encouraged perjury with the verse, «My tongue has sworn but my heart hasn't» (*Hipp*. 612). As a defence, Euripides used the claim that his accuser had erred in transferring the decisions of the Dionysiac contests to the lawcourts, according to Aristotle[27]. This trial therefore involved both close quotation of tragedy and discussion of the entire arrangements and procedures of the dramatic competitions at a major city festival.

The allusions to arguments used in trials of all three major tragedians in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* are suggestive. Lefkowitz wants to write them *all* off as fictions stemming from comedy[28], but I do not think Aristotle's testimony can be dismissed as lightly as this. He had manifestly studied tragic texts intensively in his search for rhetorical tropes to illustrate his arguments in the *Rhetoric*, and there is evidence of interest in biography as a form and in the lives of the tragedians in some of his other treatises[29]. Perhaps someone at the Lyceum had collected speeches made by the tragedians in their own persona, too.

5. *Drama as Illustrative of Rhetorical Techniques*

Fourth-century tragedians were said by Aristotle to make their characters speak more "rhetorically", whereas the earlier tragedians' characters spoke "politically" (*poet*. 1450a38-b12)[30]. The fragments of fourth-century tragedy could support the view that there was an increased interest at least in detailed forensic rhetoric[31], for example in the work of the important tragedian of the time, Carcinus. Aristotle knows both his *Medea* and *Oedipus* well. Both points he makes about Carcinus' plays in the *Rhetoric* are forensic rather than aesthetic. Carcinus' *Medea* points out that it would have been a mistake of hers not to have killed Jason if she had indeed killed the children (*rhet*. II 23, 28); Jocasta made a great effort to insist on the veracity of what she said had happened to the son she had given birth to. Aristotle here recommends that if anything seems incredible, the speaker immediately promise to give proof of it, and submit it to the judgement of the hearers, as for example Jocasta

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[27] Another source, the *Life of Satyrus*, says that Cleon had prosecuted Euripides for impiety; see G. Arrighetti (ed.), *Vita di Euripide*, Pisa 1964, pp. 125-126. See also P.R.T. Stevens, *Euripides and the Athenians*, «Journ. Hell. Stud.» 76 (1956), pp. 87-94, at pp. 88-89.

[28] M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets*, cit.

[29] V. Castellani, *Drama and Aristotle*, cit., p. 30; G. Huxley, *Aristotle's Interest in Biography*, «Gr. Rom. Byz. Stud.» 15 (1974), pp. 203-213. When he is concluding his discussion of shame in *rhet*. II 6, 27, he quotes the tragedian Antiphon's response to the shame of the other men condemned to die alongside him by the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse, «Why cover your faces? Is it because you are afraid that one of the crowd should see you tomorrow?» In his *Politics* he reports an incident in the life of the poet Euripides which took place while he was residing at the Macedonian court (V 1311b23).

[30] On this controversial passage see C. Zatta, *Aristotle's* Poetics *and the Political Thought of Tragic Heroes*, «Quad. Urb. Cult. Class.»100 (2012), pp. 67-94.

[31] G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *The Influence of Rhetoric on Fourth-Century Tragedy*, «Class. Quart.» 29 (1979), pp. 66-76; E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy 430-380 BC*, cit., pp. 284-286.

in the *Oedipus* of Carcinus, «is always guaranteeing the truth of her account to someone who is enquiring about the truth concerning her son» (*rhet*. III 16, 11). These guarantees of truth may have occurred in a long speech or dialogue in which Carcinus' Jocasta was questioned by Oedipus[32].

In the *Rhetoric* there are far more illustrations of rhetorical techniques from dramatic texts than there are from speeches of any kind – political, forensic, epideictic – and the content of some of them is so technical and complicated that it is difficult to see how they could have been identified and recorded from a single hearing in the theatre[33]. For example, when talking about the relationship between a species and a genus, he quotes the tragedian Agathon as saying that we must do some things by art, while others fall to our lot by compulsion or chance (*rhet*. II 19, 13). And a similar very fine distinction is drawn when discussing probability:

«Similarly, in Rhetoric, an apparent enthymeme may arise from that which is not absolutely probable but only in particular cases. But this is not to be understood absolutely, as Agathon says: "One might perhaps say that this very thing is probable, that many things happen to men that are not probable" (ὥσπερ καὶ Ἀγάθων λέγει "τάχ' ἄν τις εἰκὸς αὐτὸ τοῦτ' εἶναι λέγοι, / βροτοῖσι πολλὰ τυγχάνειν οὐκ εἰκότα"), for that which is contrary to probability nevertheless does happen, so that which is contrary to probability is probable» (II 24,10).

Fine logical distinctions could clearly be made in tragic poetry.

When discussing rhetorical play around the ideas of more, less, and proportion, Aristotle quotes a couplet (*rhet*. II 23, 5), «Your father deserves to be pitied for having lost his children; is not Oeneus then equally to be pitied for having lost an illustrious offspring?». The tragedy from which this is quoted from may well also have been Antiphon's *Meleager*, since Oeneus was Meleager's father, and shortly afterwards, when discussing appeal to probable cause, Aristotle quotes a tragic fragment without naming an author (*rhet*. II 23, 20), «It is not from benevolence that the deity bestows great blessings upon many, but in order that they may suffer more striking calamities»:

πολλοῖς ὁ δαίμων οὐ κατ' εὔνοιαν φέρων
μεγάλα δίδωσιν εὐτυχήματ', ἀλλ' ἵνα
τὰς συμφορὰς λάβωσιν ἐπιφανεστέρας.

But then Aristotle quotes verses which he explicitly ascribes to the *Meleager* of Antiphon: «Not in order to slay the monster, but in order to bear witness in Greece to the valour of Meleager». Aristotle then also quotes from the tragedian Theodectes' *Ajax*, that Diomedes chose Odysseus before all others, not to do him honour, but so that his companion might be his inferior (ὅτι ὁ Διομήδης προείλετο Ὀδυσσέα οὐ τιμῶν, ἀλλ' ἵνα ἥττων ᾖ ὁ ἀκολουθῶν· ἐνδέχεται γὰρ τούτου ἕνεκα ποιῆσαι). These are extremely sophisticated uses of figurative language, which it

[32] L. Cooper, *Aristotle, Rhetoric 3. 16. 1417b16-20*, «Am. Journ. Philol.» 50 (1929), pp. 170-180 at p. 170.

[33] W.S. Hinman, *Literary Allusion and Quotation in the* Rhetoric, Poetics *and* Nicomachean Ethics *of Aristotle*, New York 1935 assembles all the quotations and identifiable allusions to other literature in the *Rhetoric*, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*.

is hard to believe Aristotle has remembered from merely hearing being delivered in the theatre.

Chaeremon, a fourth-century tragedian whom Aristotle describes as «suitable for reading», ἀναγνωστικός, because he is «as precise as a writer of speeches» (ἀκριβὴς γὰρ ὥσπερ λογογράφος), furnishes him with two points about word-play and style (*rhet*. III 12, 2). The tragedian Antiphon is another favourite. At *rhet*. II 2, 19, Aristotle is talking about reasons why people become angry with their friends. He has been struck by a scene in Antiphon's *Meleager* where the hero's uncle Plexippus became angry with his nephew because he failed to perceive that the uncle wanted something. This is a subtle point – not taking hints is a delicate *ethical* point, rather than one illustrating a rhetorical device or aesthetic effect. It may be that Plexippus had wanted the hide of the Calydonian boar, which Meleager gave to Atalanta. In any case, «in Antiphon's tragedy he reproached Meleager; for failure to perceive this is a sign of slight; since, when we care for people, these things are noticed»[34].

A famous passage of Sophocles is adduced when Aristotle wants to make a point central to his advice both on tragedy and on rhetoric. His point is that even an orator should speak so as to suggest that his choices issue from his good character rather than from his thought, unless what he has to say may sound implausible, in which case the speaker should also state his reasoning. The philosopher adduces an example of Sophocles' *Antigone*, saying that she cared more for her brother than for a husband or children (which might sound improbable), but providing as a justification the irreplaceability of siblings: «But since my mother and father have passed away, no brother can ever be born to me» (*rhet*. III 16,7; Soph. *Ant*. 911-912)[35].

But the tragedian who dominates Aristotelian references to tragedy, not only in the *Rhetoric* but the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, is Euripides. Euripides provides us with the clearest evidence that experts in ancient rhetoric acknowledged that innovations in speech often happened in poetry rather than prose, and that rhetoric had learned from tragic poetry in particular (*rhet*. III 2, 5): «Art is cleverly concealed when the speaker chooses his words from ordinary language and puts them together like Euripides, who was the first to show the way». And Euripides is cited for a great variety of reasons. He is quoted exactly on no fewer than eleven occasions: several are gnomic, from *Orestes* (*rhet*. I 2, 20 = *Orestes* 234, «change is also sweet»)[36]. Aristotle shows that a maxim can be an effective second part of a syllogism, quoting exactly, although splitting in two, *Medea* 294-297 (*rhet*. II 21, 2). On the same theme he quotes a line from Euripides' *Stheneboea* (*ibidem*). To illustrate a maxim that becomes clear after a little consideration, he quotes *Trojan Women* 1051, «he is no lover who does not love always» (*rhet*. II 21, 5). The same *Medea* passage mentioned above is quoted more briefly (only lin. 294) to show that some maxims, accompanied by an epilogue, form part of a syllogism (*rhet*. II 21, 6).

[34] E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy 430-380 BC*, cit., pp. 276-277.

[35] See G.M. Sifakis *Aristotle*, E.N., *IV, 2, 1123a19-24*, cit., p. 150.

[36] See G.W. Most, *Euripides* ὁ γνωμολογικώτατος, in M.S. Funghi (a cura di), *Aspetti di letteratura gnomica nel mondo antico*, vol. I, Firenze 2003, pp. 141-158. This phrase from *Orestes* is also quoted in *EN* IX 9,1169b.

The prominence of proverbial or gnomic statements illustrated from the tragedians as a group is striking, and we need to remember that paroemiography, or the making of collections of proverbs for specific purposes, is usually said to have begun with Aristotle in a work of his entitled Παροιμίαι, *Proverbs* (Diog. Laert. V 26). Aristotle's younger friend and colleague Theophrastus, who wrote a treatise on delivery, also wrote a Περὶ παροιμιῶν, *On Proverbs*. Others who wrote on proverbs were Aristotle's student, the Peripatetic Clearchus of Soli in Cyprus, and later the Stoic Chrysippus.

But Aristotle's close reading of at least some Euripidean plays in his *Rhetoric* extends beyond proverbs and syllogisms. In one instance, *rhet*. II 23, 29 – one of only two where the name Euripides seems needed to accompany a direct citation[37] – he quotes the play on Aphro-dite/ἀφρο-σύνη at *Trojan Women* 990, where Hecuba is discussing the invincible power of love with Helen. He has listened hard to Euripides' *Orestes*, noting that Orestes «corrects» the term «mother-slayer» to «father-avenger» in his altercation with Menelaus (*rhet*. III 2, 14 = Eur. *Or*. 1587-1578). He may have in mind Euripides *Helen* 185 when he uses the example of ἄλυρον to illustrate the poets' use of amplification through invention (*rhet*. III 6, 7). At *rhet*. III 14, 10, he says that in *exordia* every speaker tries to arouse prejudice in their listeners or remove apprehension. This is followed by a quotation from Sophocles followed by one from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1162[38]. When discussing how to seize on the weakest argument your opponent has used or might use before starting your own case (*rhet*. III 17, 15), he comments that Hecuba does this in *Trojan Women* 969 and 971, where she says that she will defend the goddesses, because she does not believe that Hera could have committed immoral acts.

For those of us who bitterly regret the loss of Aristotle's lost book of the *Poetics* devoted to comedy, the references to comic dramatists in his *Rhetoric* are precious. He has scoured the contemporary comic poet Anaxandrides for a specific figure – the metaphor involving proportion of a financial kind. A parent in this Middle Comic poet had said «My daughters are "overdue the payment day" for marriage» (ὑπερήμεροί μοι τῶν γάμων αἱ παρθένοι, *rhet*. III 10, 4). Anaxandrides was clearly a delicate wordsmith, for the other occasion on which Aristotle cites him is when he is discussing smart word-play with similar words or homonyms. He gives as example (*rhet*. III 11, 8) «the celebrated saying of Anaxandrides, "it is good to die before doing anything worthy of death"» (τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ Ἀναξανδρίδου τὸ ἐπαινούμενον, "καλόν γ' ἀποθανεῖν πρὶν θανάτου δρᾶν ἄξιον"). It is interesting that Aristotle explicitly says that this line was «celebrated»: it is testimony to lively appreciation and discussion of the finer points even of comic scripts in the mid-fourth century BCE.

There is one resounding quotation of Aristophanes, to illustrate the use of diminutives (*rhet*. III 2, 15) «It is the diminutive which makes the good and the bad appear less, as Aristophanes in the *Babylonians* jestingly uses "goldlet, cloaklet,

[37] See also III 2,10, where a quotation from his *Telephus* is accompanied by citation of Euripides' name.

[38] This is not actually from an *exordium*. Thoas asks «Why this preamble?» when trying to ameliorate his own apprehension.

affrontlet, diseaselet" instead of "gold, cloak, affront, disease". But one must be careful to observe the due mean in their use as well as in that of epithets». There is another quotation from Aristophanes at *rhet*. III 9, 9, when Aristotle is discussing *paromoiosis*: «Such then is the nature of antithesis; equality of clauses is *parisosis*; the similarity of the final syllables of each clause *paromoiosis*. This must take place at the beginning or end of the clauses. At the beginning, the similarity is always shown in entire words; at the end, in the last syllables, or the inflections of one and the same word, or the repetition of the same word. For instance, at the beginning: Ἀγρὸν γὰρ ἔλαβεν ἀγρὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ, "for he received from him land untilled"». This is a quotation from Aristophanes (fr. 666 Kassel-Austin).

6. *Aristotle, Author of Dramatic Dialogues*

Finally, it is important to remember that Aristotle himself wrote dialogues, as Plato had done; these were designed for the general reader rather than the specialist student at the Lyceum, and were stylistically different. They were a treat to read, even by "the multitude", said Themistius, since they were «full of light and translucent; their usefulness is not unmixed with enjoyment and pleasure; Aphrodite and the Graces blossom on them» (*or*. 319c). They were often or customarily in dialogue form. In a letter to Quintus (III 5, 1), Cicero says that Sallustius had read a draft of Cicero's work on the best state and citizen. Sallustius responded by suggesting that the discussion of these topics would be lent greater authority if Cicero spoke in his own persona. Sallustius then suggested that Aristotle could furnish a model for Cicero, because he «presented himself as speaker, in the things he wrote about the state and the leading man» (*Aristotelem denique, quae de re publica et praestanti viro scribat, ipsum loqui*). Since Aristotle appears as a speaker in none of his own extant treatises, it is probably in his exoteric works that he had presented an alternative, dialogue rendition of some of the political arguments which occur in both his *Politics* and his *Rhetoric*.

He also seems to have used comparisons between the theatre and philosophy in the exoteric works. Iamblichus paraphrased and excerpted extensively from Aristotle's *Protrepticus* in his own *Encouragement to Philosophy* (early fourth century CE)[39]. Some passages are occasionally held to be direct quotations from Aristotle, such as this rousing pronouncement, almost certainly in his own persona, that philosophical enquiry is desirable for its own sake rather than because it confers a monetary advantage:

«For as we travel to Olympia for the sake of the spectacle itself, even if nothing were to follow from it (for the spectacle itself is worth more than much wealth), and as we view the Dio-

[39] Some modern scholars have attempted to reconstruct Aristotle's *Protrepticus* from Iamblichus wholesale. See I. Düring, *Aristotle's* Protrepticus. *An Attempt at Reconstruction*. Göteborg 1961, A.-H. Chroust, *Aristotle*. Protrepticus. *A Reconstruction*, Notre Dame 1964 and especially the project led by Douglas S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson at the University of Toronto, http://www.protrepticus.info/. s

nysia not in order to gain anything from the actors (indeed we spend money on them), and as there are many other spectacles we should prefer to much wealth, so too the contemplation of the universe is to be honoured above all the things that are thought useful. For surely it cannot be right that we should take great pains to go to see men imitating women and slaves, or fighting and running, just for the sake of the spectacle, and not think it right to view without payment the nature and reality of things» (Iamblichus, *protr*. 52, 16-54, 5 Pistelli).

The value of attending plays at the City Dionysia is here directly compared with the value of asking philosophical questions about «the nature and reality of things».

Aristotle's influential *Eudemus, or On the Soul* was also a dialogue. It was written to memorialise his friend Eudemus of Cyprus, to whom the *Eudemian Ethics* was dedicated. Eudemus was an alumnus of Plato's Academy who died fighting in Syracuse in about 354 BCE (Cicero, *div*. I 25, 3; Plut. *Dio* 22, 3). One long fragment, which Plutarch says he is quoting verbatim (αὐτὰς τὰς τοῦ φιλοσόφου λέξεις παραθέσθαι), is preserved in Plutarch's consolatory letter to Apollonius (*mor*. 115b-e). It features a passage in Aristotle's own voice in which he converses with a high-status listener:

«"This is why, O mightiest and most blessed of men, we not only consider the dead to be blessed and happy, but also believe that it is impious to say anything untrue or slanderous about them because they are already better than us and our superiors. And this is such a primal and ancient belief of ours that nobody know when or by whom it was first stated, but it has been maintained as a conviction for all time. Additionally, reflect on the saying which is on everyone's lips and has been circulated in common parlance for many years".
"Which one?" he said. And the other one [Aristotle] replied,
"That not to be born is the best of all, and to be dead is better than to be alive"».

At this point the figure of Aristotle introduces a fable, which requires him to bring the satyr Silenus to life in the dialogue by the use of *oratio recta*:

«So, for example, they say that Silenus, after the hunt when Midas captured him, when Midas kept putting questions to him, asking what is the best and most desirable of things for all people, at first refused to define it and kept an unbroken silence. But when eventually by using every stratagem Midas with difficulty coerced him into responding, Silenus, under pressure, said this: "Short-lived progeny of a spirit of travail and a harsh fate, why are you forcing me to say what it is better for you not to know? The least painful life is the one spent in ignorance of one's private sorrows. For humans it is completely impossible to have what is the best of all things, or even to have a share in its nature, so it is best for all men and all women not to be born. But the next best thing, and the best of those that are achievable by humans, but still only second best, is to die as soon as possible after being born". It is clear therefore that Silenus made this pronouncement in the belief that existence in death is superior to the time spent alive»[40].

The use of the fable and the impersonation of the mythical satyr, unlike anything in Aristotle's surviving treatises, are reminiscent of drama and of Plato's liveli-

[40] On the "better never to have been born" trope, which Aristotle's Silenus shares with the author of *Ecclesiastes* 4, 1-2 and the chorus of Sophocles' *OC* 1224-1235, see E. Hall, *Greek Tragedy. Suffering under the Sun*, Oxford 2010, pp. 10-11.

est dialogues. The diction used by the sagacious satyr is sonorous; Ammonius of Alexandria, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* (VI 25-27, 4), said that in his public-facing works, «he aims at a certain fullness, a careful choice of diction and metaphor, and modifies the style of his diction to suit the speakers, and in short does everything that can beautify his style».

Moreover, the reference in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1447b1) to the Sicilian mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus alongside the Socratic dialogues alerts us to his interest in the history of the form. In his own popular dialogue *On Poets* he expanded the discussion to include discussion of Plato's form and style (Diog. Laert. III 37 [25]) and of other dialogists preceding Plato: Athenaeus (XI 505b-c) quotes him: «Are we then to deny that the so-called mimes of Sophron, which aren't even in metre, are stories and imitations, or the dialogues of Alexamenos of Teos, written before the Socratic dialogues?»

7. *Conclusion*

Aristotle writes in his *Rhetoric* that an orator should speak so as to suggest that his choices issue from his good ἦθος rather than from his thought, unless what he has to say may sound incredible, in which case the speaker should also state his reasoning. As we have seen above, the philosopher adduces an example of this from tragedy: «as Sophocles does in the Antigone, [when Antigone says] that she cared more for her brother than for a husband or children, for if the latter were lost they might be replaced, "But since my mother and father have passed away / no brother can ever be born to me"» (*rhet*. III 16, 7, see Soph. *Ant*. 911-912). There is no disputing the importance of drama to Aristotle's moral conception of ἦθος, as well as of ἁμαρτία, and of the emotions of pity and fear[41], but it would take another article to explore these connections.

What I hope I have shown, however, is that the references to actors and dramatic texts in the *Rhetoric* are part of a much larger picture in which Aristotle's great human-centred secular ethics, and not only his advice on techniques of persuasion, are fundamentally informed by the theatre culture of Athens which he so enjoyed and which was being given such a boost at the time of the Lyceum's heyday by the reforms being carried out by his supporter Lycurgus. I would like to conclude with one of his most beautiful metaphors, where he says that it is an advantage for the pursuit of happiness, which is ultimately dependent solely on *internal* goods, nevertheless to have the necessary equipment in terms of external goods, and these he calls χορηγία (*EN* I 8, 1099a). The relationship between internal and external goods is like that of the dramatic text – the words themselves – to the aspects of performance – dancer training, costumes, props and scenery: ὄψις and μελοποιΐα

[41] See *e.g*. T.C.W. Stinton, Hamartia *in Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, «Class. Quart.» 25 (1975), pp. 221-254 on *hamartia*, and A. Nehemas, *Pity and Fear in the* Rhetoric *and* Poetics, in D. Furley - A. Nehemas (eds.) *Aristotle's* Rhetoric. *Philosophical Essays*, Princeton NJ 1994, pp. 257-282 on pity and fear.

as he calls them in the *Poetics* – which it was the responsibility not of the dramatic writer, but of the χορηγός or official funder of the production, to provide. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was certainly born out of the philosopher's intense engagement with Athenian drama. It is everywhere informed by theatre and theatrical texts. But this foundational work on the science of persuasion can only fully be understood as part of his much larger project of creating a wholistic ethical system in which citizens, in dialogue and cooperation with one another, can fully flourish[42].

Abstract: This article examines the references to actors, dramatists, Greek tragedy and comedy and use of theatrical imagery in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and some of his other treatises, especially the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. It argues that Aristotle was immersed in theatrical culture and that this explains the preponderance of quotations from dramatic texts rather than, for example, rhetorical speeches, across his *oeuvre*. It places particular emphasis on his account of trials in which the dramatists were believed to have defended themselves, and shows that the aspect of Aristotle's rhetorical theory which has been most discussed in relation to theatrical performance, delivery, is actually the least important aspect. Since the life of the happy human via friendships with others and the social, political and deliberative life as a "political animal" in the *polis* is conducted via verbal reasoning and communication, this means that drama, in underpinning rhetorical theory and informing rhetorical practice, is fundamental to Aristotle's entire moral philosophy.

Keywords: Aristotle, Theatre, Rhetoric, Tragedians, Comedy, Actors.

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