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For example:

Aristotle’s Poetics, translation and commentary in progress, Chapter 3

January 28, 2016  By Gregory Nagy  listed under By Gregory Nagy

In the postings for 2015.11.27 and 2016.01.21, I translated and commented on Chapters 1 and 2 of Aristotle’s Poetics. In the posting here for 2016.01.28, I continue by translating and commenting on Chapter 3. For my overall strategy, I refer back to my Introduction in the posting for 2015.11.27.

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Introduction

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Aristotle’s Poetics Chapter 3

Besides these things, there is a third difference [diaphorá], which is, the actual way in which one makes-mimesis [mimélthai] of each and every thing. So, you see, it is possible to make-mimesis [mimélthai] of the same things by using the same media, as when one makes-mimesis by being-the-narrator [ap–angellein]—or by becoming some other thing. That is just exactly the way Homer composes [poieîn]. He either makes a mimesis of his own same self [as narrator] and thus does not get transformed [into some other thing = character], or he makes a mimesis of any and all persons

Detail of marble panel featuring Plato and Aristotle, or Philosophy. From the north side, lower basement of the bell tower of Florence, Italy. Museo dell’Opera del Duomo. Image by Luca della Robbia [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons
who are in the act of doing things [prattein] and engaging-in-the action [energein] as they thus make-their own -mimesis [mimelthai] of themselves.[1] So, now we see that there are these three differences [diaphorai] that constitute mimesis [mimêsis], as we said from the start: (1) what forms are used for representation, (2) what things are represented, and (3) how does the representation happen. So, in one way, Sophocles would be the same kind of a master-of-mimesis [mimêtês] as Homer, since both of them make-mimesis [mimelthai] of noble [spoudaioi] persons; in another way, Sophocles would be the same kind of a master-of-mimesis as Aristophanes, since both make a mimesis of persons in the act of doing [prattontes] things and performing-deeds [drân]. It is for this reason, some say, that these things are called 'dramas' [drámatai], since they [= Sophocles and Aristophanes] make-mimesis [mimelthai] of people who are performing-deeds [drân]. And it is for this reason this reason that the Dorians claim as their own both tragedy and comedy (you see, the [Dorian] people of Megara claim comedy—both those [Megarians] here [in Greece proper], who say that it originated in the era of their democracy, and those [Megarians] from Sicily, since the poet [poiêtês] Epicharmus, who is much earlier than Chionides and Magnes, was from there—and certain Dorians in the Peloponnesus claim tragedy [as well as comedy]), and they consider the words [for tragedy and comedy] to be evidence [sêmeion]. They say that they call their outlying settlements [perioikis plural] kômai, but that the Athenians [call them] dêmoi, and they assume that kômidoi or 'performers-of-comedy' were so called not from kômazein, 'to revel', but because they wandered from 1448b settlement [kômê] to settlement [= kata kômâs], dishonorably excluded from the city [astu]. And they say that the Dorian word for poieîn or 'to do' is drân, while the corresponding Athenian word is prattein. With regard to speaking about the distinctions [diaphorai] to be made about how many kinds of mimesis [mimêsis] there are, let these things [as I have just spoken them] be spoken.

Notes

[1] When ‘Homer’ makes mimesis of himself, he is speaking as the character of ‘Homer’ the narrator. But when he makes mimesis of characters who figure in the action of what he narrates, then he is speaking as those characters. Then he becomes transformed into 'some other thing', and that 'some other thing' is whatever character is speaking when quoted, as it were, by 'Homer'. In Aristotle's view of mimesis, when characters in the narrative are represented as acting and even speaking in their own right, they are representing their own characters just as Homer is representing his own character when he speaks as a narrator. [[GN 2016.01.28.]]

Tags: Aristotle, Commentary, Poetics

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