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

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January 28, 2016   By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy   Comments off   Edit This

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.
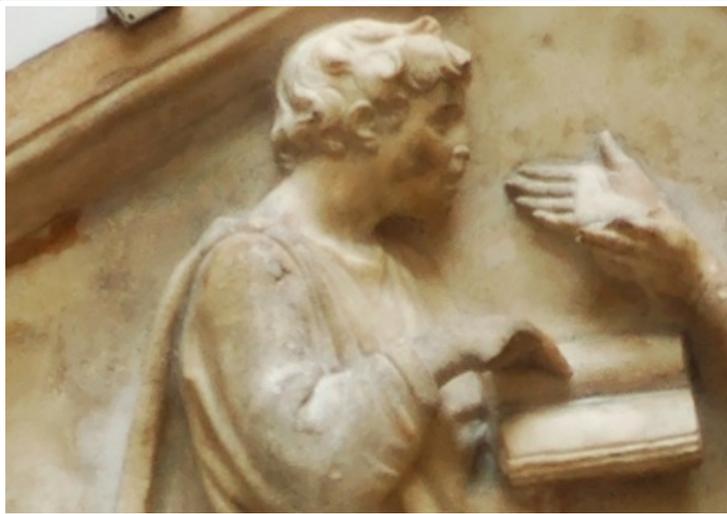
Detail of marble panel featuring Plato and Aristotle, or Philosophy. From the north side, lower basement of the bell tower of Florence, Italy. Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. Image by Luca della Robbia [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Introduction

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Aristotle's Poetics Chapter 3

Ἔτι δὲ τούτων τρίτη διαφορὰ τὸ ὡς ἕκαστα τούτων $_{1448a.20}$ μιμήσαιτο ἄν τις. καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μιμεῖσθαι ἔστιν ὁτὲ μὲν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, ἢ ἕτερόν τι γιγνόμενον ὥσπερ Ὅμηρος ποιεῖ ἢ ὡς τὸν αὐτὸν καὶ μὴ μεταβάλλοντα, ἢ πάντας ὡς πράττοντας καὶ ἐνεργοῦντας τοὺς μιμουμένους. ἐν τρισὶ δὴ ταύταις διαφοραῖς ἡ μίμησίς ἐστιν, $_{1448a.25}$ ὡς εἴπομεν κατ' ἀρχάς, ἐν οἷς τε <καὶ ἃ> καὶ ὥς. ὥστε τῇ μὲν ὁ αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη μιμητὴς Ὁμήρῳ Σοφοκλῆς, μιμοῦνται γὰρ ἄμφω σπουδαίους, τῇ δὲ Ἀριστοφάνει, πράττοντας γὰρ μιμοῦνται καὶ δρῶντας ἄμφω. ὅθεν καὶ δράματα καλεῖσθαί τινες αὐτά φασιν, ὅτι μιμοῦνται δρῶντας. διὸ καὶ $_{1448a.30}$ ἀντιποιοῦνται τῆς τε τραγῳδίας καὶ τῆς κωμῳδίας οἱ Δωριεῖς (τῆς μὲν γὰρ κωμῳδίας οἱ Μεγαρεῖς οἵ τε ἐνταῦθα ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς παρ' αὐτοῖς δημοκρατίας γενομένης καὶ οἱ ἐκ Σικελίας, ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἦν Ἐπίχαρμος ὁ ποιητὴς πολλῷ πρότερος ὢν Χιωνίδου καὶ Μάγνητος· καὶ τῆς τραγῳδίας ἔνιοι $_{1448a.35}$ τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ) ποιούμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα σημεῖον· αὐτοὶ μὲν γὰρ κώμας τὰς περιοικίδας καλεῖν φασιν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ δήμους, ὡς κωμῳδοὺς οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ κωμάζειν λεχθέντας ἀλλὰ τῇ κατὰ κώμας πλάνῃ ἀτιμαζομένους ἐκ τοῦ ἄστεως· $_{1448b.1}$ καὶ τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτοὶ μὲν δρᾶν, Ἀθηναίους δὲ πράττειν προσαγορεύειν. περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν διαφορῶν καὶ πόσαι καὶ τίνες τῆς μιμήσεως εἰρήσθω ταῦτα.

$_{1448a}$ Besides these things, there is a third difference [diaphorā], which is, the actual way in which one makes-mimesis [mīmeîsthai] of each and every thing. So, you see, it is possible to make-mimesis [mīmeîsthai] 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

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who are in the act of doing things [prattein] and engaging-in-the action [energeîn] as they thus make-their own -mimesis [mīmeîsthai] of themselves.[1] So, now we see that there are these three differences [diaphorai] that constitute mimesis [mīmēsis], 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 [mīmētēs] as Homer, since both of them make-mimesis [mīmeîsthai] 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' [drāmata], since they [= Sophocles and Aristophanes] make-mimesis [mīmeîsthai] 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 [poiētēs] 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 [sēmeion]. They say that they call their outlying settlements [perioikis plural] kōmai, but that the Athenians [call them] dēmoi, and they assume that kōmōidoi or 'performers-of-comedy' were so called not from kōmazein, 'to revel', but because they wandered from 1448b settlement [kōmē] to settlement [= kata kōmās], 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 [mīmēsis] 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.]]

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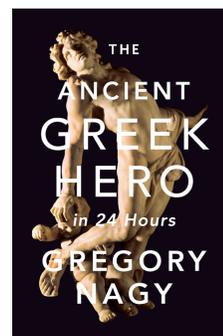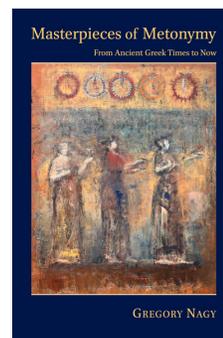
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