Kate Kretler
kretler@stanford.edu

Aristotle on Karkinos' Amphiaraus: The Uncanny Feedback Loop of Action
Virtual CAMWS, May 2020

Aristotle, *Poetics* 1455a21-34 (text as in Lucas 1968):

Δεῖ δὲ τοὺς μύθους συνιστάναι καὶ τῇ λέξει συναπεργάζεσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα πρὸ ὀμμάτων τιθέμενον· οὕτω γὰρ ἂν ἐναργέστατα ὁρῶν ὥσπερ παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς γιγνόμενος τοῖς πραττομένοις εὑρίσκοι τὸ πρέπον καὶ ἥκιστα ἂν λανθάνοι τὰ ὑπεναντία. σημεῖον δὲ τούτου ὃ ἐπετιμᾶτο Καρκίνῳ. ὁ γὰρ Ἀμφιάραος ἐξ ἱεροῦ ἀνήει, ὃ μὴ ὁρῶντα ἐλάνθανεν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς σκηνῆς ἐξέπεσεν δυσχερανάντων τοῦτο τῶν θεατῶν. ὅσα δὲ δυνατὸν καὶ τοῖς σχήμασιν συναπεργαζόμενον· πιθανώτατοι γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς φύσεως οἱ ἐν τοῖς πάθεσίν εἰσιν, καὶ χειμαίνει ὁ χειμαζόμενος καὶ χαλεπαίνει ὁ ὀργιζόμενος ἀληθινώτατα. διὸ εὐφυοῦς ἡ ποιητική ἐστιν ἢ μανικοῦ· τούτων γὰρ οἱ μὲν εὔπλαστοι οἱ δὲ ἐκστατικοί εἰσιν.

It is necessary to construct plots and to work them out with diction as much as possible setting them before the eyes. In this way, seeing things *enargestata* just as if becoming present at them—the things as they are being done[1]—one would discover what is appropriate (τὸ πρέπον) and least miss contradictions. A sign of this is what they blamed Karkinos for. For Amphiaraos was returning from the shrine, which he, not seeing it,[2] failed to notice, but on the stage it flopped because the spectators were annoyed (δυσχερανάντων) at this. As far as possible, [one should compose] working it out with gestures (σχήμασιν) too: for those who are in the emotions are most convincing—out of the same nature, and he storm-tosses who is being storm-tossed, and he is wroth (or "angers") who is being provoked most truly. So poetry is of a genius or a madman: of these the former are easily shaped (εὔπλαστοι) and the latter are ἐκστατικοί.

---

[1] Note the tense; cf. 1453b.

[2] Or, with μή generalizing, "which got by anyone who wasn't looking at it."

Bibliography:

Davidson, John. 2003. "Carcinus and the Temple: A Problem in the Athenian Theater." *Classical Philology* 98: 109–22.

Davis, Michael. 1999. *The Poetry of Philosophy: On Aristotle's Poetics*. South Bend, Ind: St. Augustine's Press.

Else, Gerald. 1957. *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*. Cambridge, MA.

———. 1967. *Aristotle: Poetics*. Ann Arbor, MI.

Halliwell, Stephen. 1987. *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary*. Chapel Hill, NC.

Halliwell, Stephen, et al, ed. 1995. *Poetics*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Kretler, Katherine. 2018. "Tapping the Wellsprings of Action: Aristotle's Birth of Tragedy as a Mimesis of Poetic Praxis." In *Thinking the Greeks: A Volume in Honour of James M. Redfield*, 70–90.

———. 2020. *One Man Show: Poetics and Presence in the Iliad and Odyssey*. Center for Hellenic Studies.

Lucas, D. W. 1968. *Aristotle: Poetics*. Oxford.

McNeill, David. 2005. *Gesture and Thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Peterson, Sandra. 1992. "Apparent Circularity in Aristotle's Account of Right Action in the *Nicomachean Ethics*." *Apeiron* 25 (2).