DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 883 CS 507 324

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TITLE A Critical View of Television through the Eyes of Classical Drama.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Indianapolis, IN, April 4-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classical Literature; Criticism; *Drama; Evaluation Methods; *Greek Literature; Higher Education; Learning Processes; Programing (Broadcast); Teaching Methods; *Television; *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS *Television Criticism

ABSTRACT

Unlike the criticism of the literary arts and the spoken word, rhetoric, television criticism is in its infancy. The styles suggested for television criticism have primarily been drawn from modern drama, literature and semiotics. Today, television critics of the scholarly sort are looking at a variety of styles to see if they can tell their students more about the medium of television (cinematic criticism, content analysis, linguistics, phenomenalism, and phenomenology). However, in order to comprehend television, the critics need not concern themselves completely with modern approaches to television criticism; instead, it may prove just as beneficial to reexamine the classical Greek legacy, starting with Homer and concluding with the rise of Rome. The Hellenic heritage has been incorporated into every aspect of Western thought. In America, speech communication and English seem to have benefited the most from this connection. Television, because of its technological armor, appears to have been impregnable by any form of criticism outside this era. Classical dramatic criticism can be recommended as a viable style to criticize television because of its influence from the dawn of Western Civilization to the present. The philosophers Plato and Aristotle can be placed in juxtaposition as thesis and antithesis, followed by the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and concluding with the comedian Aristophanes. Afterwards, the classical Greek model can be applied to television programming, particularly that of the theatrical genre. In this manner, television can benefit from classical dramatic criticism. (Fourteen references are attached.) (Author/MG)

A Critical View of Television Through the Eyes of Classical Drama

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A paper presented to the Central States Speech Association (CSSA) Convention April 4-6, 1985, Indianapolis Hyatt-Regency Hotel

Running head: A CRITICAL VIEW OF TELEVISION

Dedication

To Olen Butler, Professor of Drama at St. Louis University, with much respect and admiration.

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Abstract

Unlike the criticism of the literary arts and the spoken word, rhetoric, television criticism is in its infancy. The styles suggested for television criticism have primarily been drawn from modern drama, literature and semiotics. Today, television critics of the scholarly sort are looking at a variety of styles to see if they can tell us more about the medium of television, e. g., cinematic criticism, content analysis, linguistics, phenomenalism and phenomenology, etc. However, in order to comprehend television, the critics need not concern themselves completely with modern approaches to television criticism; instead, it may prove just as beneficial to re-examine the classical Greek legacy, starting with Homer and concluding with the rise of Rome. The Hellenic heritage has been incorporated into every aspect of Western thought. In America, speech communication and English seem to have benefitted the most from this connection. Television, because of its technological armor, appears to have been impregnable by any form of criticism outside this era. Therefore, this paper recommends classical dramatic criticism as a viable style to criticize television because of its influence from the dawn of Western Civilization to the present. The philosophers Plato and Aristotle will be placed in juxtaposition as thesis and antithesis, followed by the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and concluding

with the comedian Aristophanes. Afterwards, the classical Greek model will be applied to television programming, particularly that of the theatrical genre. In this manner, television can, at last, benefit from classical dramatic criticism.

Methodology

This work employs a descriptive methodology where identifying, comparing and contrasting similarities and differences, drawing relationships, stating rules and classifying, act as the constructs.

This material is currently being used by the Speech Communication Department at Eastern Illinois University in the graduate course entitled SPC 5330: Media Criticism. It is a good example of a new application for an old truth that has withstood the test of time.

A Critical View of Television
Through the Eyes of Classical Drama

Introduction

The legacy of classical dramatic literature and criticism, as presented by the ancient Greeks, has permeated every facet of Western thought. Its critical absence in comtemporary television, except for sporadic Greek plays that appear on Educational Television (ETV), seems incomprehensible. Television as technology continues to outdistance its cultural counterpart programming, even though much progress has occurred since Newton Minnow's 1961 "Vast Wasteland" speech ("Tuning in the Tube," 1985).[1] Television suffers from both a lack of scholarly criticism and a lack of "stylology" (Oseguera, 1984).[2] Moreover, the criticism applied to television today reflects primarily modern dramatic, literary, and semiotic invention. Therefore, this paper seeks to prove that classical dramatic criticism can act as a viable style in critiquing television drama. The present work is of a descriptive nature that moves from identification to classification.

Origins of Philosophy

Although the more famous Greek philosophers appear toward the end of the great tragedian and comedian period, it serves our interests best here to discuss them first for purposes of structural harmony.

Platonic Idealism (427-347)

Plato's view of the universe is an ontological argument that he presents in a variety of works. The Ion and the Republic represent the heart of Plato's idealism. In the Ion (390 BC) (Smith and Parks, 1967), Plato says, "All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed" by the gods (p. 5). He reiterates this idea toward the end of this work when he declares "...the god would seem to indicate to us and not allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human, or the work of man, but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods by whom they are severely possessed" (p. 6). Plato, thus, places the poet in a very specific category. Plato is not renouncing poetry (p. xvi);[3] he is saying simply that the poets on their own merit are incapable of achieving true art based on reality. During a discussion between Socrates and Glaucon in the Republic, Glaucon asks if one may infer that all poets beginning with Homer are only imitators; they copy images of things, but never reach the truth. Socrates replies, "Quite so" (p. 14). Earlier, Plato, through Socrates, expounds on the plight of the artist. The real artist who knows what he is imitating, he relates, will be more interested in realities than in imitations. In Plato's eyes, the

poet is an image-maker who knows nothing of true existence. From what has been stated thus far, Plato says that Homer, as the poet's poet, is not in a position to educate and improve mankind, because he does not possess the knowledge of the philosopher; he is, instead, a mere imitator of a false object (p. 13).

The philosopher recognizes that nature is a copy of the ideal universe that, for Plato, exists in time and place. The poet who imitates nature is making a copy of a copy of reality. The artist is thus thrice removed from reality—Plato's ideal: the Republic. Therefore, the artist working without philosophical sense and logic cannot discern between that which is real and that which is phenomenon.

Aristotelian Subjectivity (384-322)

As the antithesis to Plato, Aristotle feels compelled to defend the poet's position in the world. No philosopher can evade Plato's ontological statements concerning reality, without succinctly formulating his own philosophy and its relationship to the Master. Plato's academy and Aristotle's peripatetic school are immersed in the problem of reality. As Plato's student, Aristotle understands his master's position concerning metaphysics. After Plato's death, Aristotle presents his own view of reality. His view is diametrically opposed to Plato's. Where Plato appears to have banished the poet from the Republic, Aristotle elevates the poet to creator and teacher.

In the Poetics, according to Professor Butcher, "'Imitation', in the sense in which Aristotle applies the word to poetry, is thus seen to be equivalent to 'producing' or 'creating according to a true idea,' which forms part of the definition of art in general" (Smith and Parks, pp. 26-27). Aristotle explains that there is an ideal form itself present in each individual phenomenon, but incompletely or imperfectly manifested. We view these forms and they impress us "as a sensuous appearance on the mind of the artist." The artist's task is to give the object a more complete expression, "to bring to light the ideal which is only half revealed in the world of reality" (p. 27).

Aristotle defends poetry further, when he articulates that the mathematical sciences are not unrelated to the beautiful (Copleston, 1962, p. 100).[4] Artists as creators complete nature's unfinished work. Each object is rendered more complete and beautiful. The artist working alone does not attempt to distort reality; rather, the completion of that reality emanating from the object as phenomenon, and as interpreted by our senses, achieves a fuller and truer realization, through the artist's efforts. Aristotle does not regard the "beautiful" as the merely "pleasant," or that which titillates our senses. According to Frederick Copleston, S. J., Aristotle in the Rhetoric states "the beautiful is that good which is pleasant because it is good." Copleston continues that for

Aristotle there is no real distinction between the beautiful and the moral; in the metaphysics, however, the good and the beautiful are different (the good always implies conduct, while the beautiful may be found in motionless things, etc.) (p. 100). Finally, Aristotle replies that beauty is a matter of size and order, or consists in arrangement, in size and order: a cosmological event (p. 101).

Aristotle relates that tragedy makes its characters better, whereas comedy makes them worse than present-day man. For example, Homer's characters are more honorable than we are; Plato, conversely, believes otherwise. Aristotle places greater responsibility on the poet than he is willing to confer on the historian. The poet, writing about philosophic and graver concerns, makes statements about the nature of universals, whereas those concerns of the historian are singular. In fact, Aristotle emphasizes the point when he declares, "It is much better for the poet to describe what is probable but impossible than what is possible but improbable"—poetry's universal character (p. 102). He elaborates, "A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious (σπουδαίας) and also as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis (κάθαρσις) of

such emotions" (p. 104).

Origins of Drama

The three tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are poets of the 5th century democracy, and each represents the three phases of life, growth, and achievement, as well as the decline of ancient Greek society. Aeschylus represents the growth and expansion of Greek power under several despots. He was a child when, under the laws of Cleisthenes, the city became democratized. He fought at Marathon that helped to assure freedom from the barbarian and to insure that the despotism would not be re-established, and he survived the constitutional changes that made Pericles supreme. His generation is reflected in the poetry of Sophocles. After Pericles' death, Athens was humbled at the feet of Sparta, but not before it demonstrated tragic heroism in the face of adversity. Euripides, the poet of the final age, is very much like his predecessors—democratic (Sheppard, 1973, pp. 1-2).

Although no historical date can be assigned to the origin of drama, the constitutional tendencies within the respective societies in antiquity determined the existence of drama. Drama existed in a variety of forms. Because man was not able to conceptualize the idea of God, art was utilized to stimulate the senses and thus make the invisible visible (Donaldson, 1973, pp. 3-4). The polytheistic Greeks, likewise, used their arts to venerate the gods. Drama

became the most salient feature of religious expression during the season of religious festivals. "Drama at Athens was practically confined to two religious festivals, when it was performed six hours or so for several days; the audience consisted of a large proportion of the entire citizen body, and it attended the theatre at all the events in the period of the greatness of Athens, not merely in the hope of being entertained (Lucas, 1952, p. 1).[5]

A hilly country like Greece almost precludes any staged theatre that is not terraced. This invention is still in use today because it permits the audience to view the spectacle of the drama with minimal obstruction, while at the same time shielding the actor and company from the elements. In the old temple of Dionysus, a schema of its theatrical configuration reminds us of any number of American theatres, e. g., the St. Louis Municipal Opera (outdoor) and Minneapolis' Guthrie Theatre (indoor) (Ferguson, 1972, pp. 5 and 12).

Aeschylus (525-456)

Competing dramatists presented three tragedies and a satyr play,[6] at the Great Dionysia festival in Athens. It was customary for each playwright to present his works with a single theme; after Aeschylus' time, however, this practice changed. Sophocles, for example, wrote a trilogy on the story of Telephus and Euripides wrote a group of plays about the legends of Troy. Nevertheless, according to D. W. Lucas, we do not know if a close connection exists between them.

Aeschylus, himself, did not always follow the practice; the Persae has no direct relationship with the other plays produced at the same time (p. 58).

Another distinction to consider in Greek tragedy is the element of time. Time, it has been said, is simply a concept of the human mind; yet, a theme is manifested as action which itself does not take place in a vacuum; hence, the three are inextricably bound: theme and action in time. Before the 5th century, practically speaking, the idea of time is not given much consideration. Later, Pindar presents time as pride and place. The poets that follow him continue evolving the concept of time in their respective works, but each of them uses it differently (DeRomilly, 1968, pp. 3-4).[7]

Aeschylus saw many changes during his lifetime. He took great pride, as suggested earlier, in having fought against the Persians on two occasions to defend his city. He saw the rise of Athens and its subsequent domination over the other Greek cities. Indeed, according to Athenaeus, "he dedicated his work to time." His trust in time is manifested in his tragedies. Time and justice are equated. Time conveys moral reflection, to form a "real" doctrine that underlines the structure of his plays (DeRomilly, p. 59). Thus, time becomes the best teacher. The lessons we learn may or may not be severe. Where applicable, time elicits divine punishment (p. 60).

The story pattern in Aeschylus' lyric drama, as will be shown

later, differs from the other Greek poets. In the Oresteia, there are: a female viper who mates and kills her husband; young vipers who kill their mother; a sickness that is hidden, waiting to break out; grief of memory; the escape of and the pursuit of dreams; the amorous mishandling; wrongdoing and rankling; and the overthrow of idols. These situations of image, Richard Lattimore (1964) tells us, project the given story of any legend, the play as such where plot is minimal. In The Suppliant Maidens the action is a miming out of the dominant image scheme: flight; pursuit; refuge: the helpless animal, calf or dove; the raving pursuer: wolf, hawk; the strong protector (p. 57).

In the Poetics Aristotle points out that character, although very important in Greek tragedy, is secondary to theme and plot. Imagery pertains more to the latter than to the former. We may have a fully developed character, yet without a distinct plot or imagery to guide us, we are easily misdirected. The actor through his interpretation conveys both story line and characterization. Actors as individuals speak either for themselves or for others. The Greek chorus was a group of actors who essentially spoke for the playwright, but this convention also changed in the works of Sophocles and Euripides. Most notably the Greek chorus became diminished when these poets introduced additional actors. Aeschylus is significant because he takes Thespis' actor and develops his role,

characterization and significance within the tragedy.[8]

Sophocles (494-406)

Sophocles was born about thirty years after Aeschylus. His generation saw Athenian victories that brought booty from abroad and stability to their government. The old aristocratic families, of ccurse, maintained control, Greek society, at that time, was composed of three echelons; the aristocracy, the servants, and Greek citizenry. Greek thought demonstrated itself both in oratory and poetry. With no immediate threats from abroad and tranquility at home, Greece began to expand its ideas, reaching new heights of eloquence; nowhere is this brilliance manifested more during this period than in the works of Sophocles. He is probably best remembered for the Oedipus Tyrannus, the Antigone, the Electra, the Oedipus Coloneus, and the Ajax. In the Antigone, Sophacles underlines his morals but not as firmly as in the Ajax (Lucas, p. 125). These two plays represent a departure from earlier plays previously mentioned because they are more didactic. In the Ajax the hero is guilty of the sin of heroes: hybris. In his glory and self-esteem he forgets that he is a mere mortal man and not a god (p. 119). In the Antigone no gods appear in person, but their manipulation is evident in the punishment bestowed on Creon. The seer Teiresias is a spokesperson for the gods as Odysseus is in the Ajax (p. 125).[9]

In Sophocles' works, the concept of time is not reflected as a means of justice; rather, it becomes the cause of instability and liability in human life. Sophocles understands the idea of divine justice and the consequences thereof. For example, he does not attribute the event which comes and destroys man to a just or unjust power. He says, instead, it was God's will. The long delays of divine justice are given less attention than the sudden intrusions of God's will in human life. Even when punishment is mentioned, the impending threat is replaced by quickness and contrast (DeRomilly, p. 88).

The lyrical element in Sophocles suggests rather than states (Lattimore, p. 57). The clear voice of Antigone, for example, speaks out defiantly against Creon:

ANTIGONE: Creon, what more do you want than my death?

CREON: Nothing.
That gives me everything.

ANTIGONE: Then I beg you: kill me.
This talking is a great weariness: your words
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine
Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:
I should have praise and honor for what I have done.
All these men here would praise me
Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.

(Bitterly.)

Ah the good fortune of kings,

Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

—Antigone, Scene II

(Reinert, 1964, pp. 12-13)

The last two lines, here, demonstrate her singleminded determination, as opposed to the crowds of silent voices, too weak to speak out: lyrical contrast.

Euripides (479-406)

Euripides is the last of the great, ancient Greek, tragic poets. He is no less brilliant than Sophocles, but he is considerably more outspoken. After his death, Euripides' popularity soars; during the 4th century his works were presented and enjoyed far more than all of the other tragic poets put together (Lucas, p. 136). Because of his popularity, more of his works have survived. For example, of the 92 plays he wrote, 78 were known to the scholars of Alexandria, and 18 still survive today. During the 2nd century AD selections were made from the classical works to determine which would pass from antiquity to the present. Ten of Euripides' works were selected compared to seven each of the other tragic poets.[10] By some coincidence, nine additional plays survived that formed a section of the complete addition of the work of Euripides compiled by the Alexandrians. These plays are: Helen, Electra, Heracles, Heracleidae,

Cyclops, Ion, Supplices, Iphigenia in Tauris, and Iphigenia in Aulis (pp. 156-7).[11] We may conclude that Euripides' plays also represent a more random selection, because half of them come to us by chance. Lucus, however, believes that if we possessed an equal number of the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, they would still group themselves together based on their common characteristics. We may, he continues, be in doubt about how to accept a particular point in one of their plays, but generally speaking we know where the poet stands. Specifically, the foregoing applies more to Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripides is altogether different. "The ancients called him the philosopher of the stage." He, through insight and imagination, sees the attitudes of others as though they were his own, but he commits himself to none (p. 157).

Euripides is more of a realist than his counterparts. Where they tend to view people as they "ought" to be, he views people as they "are." His earlier plays are more concerned with psychological problems. Later plays appear to be more complicated, with exciting plots that provided both distraction and escape from the depressing present and the threatening future (pp. 159-160).

The element of time in Euripides has its roots in Aeschylus and Sophocles, and corollaries are evident in his work, e. g., the Bacchae, and Heracles, respectively. In Heracles, the element of time is associated with truth. "But truth no longer means

the inequality of man: truth is a matter of plain facts" (DeRomilly, pp. 114-117).

Aristophanes (448-380)

Aristophanes is considered the greatest of the surviving, ancient Greek, comedic poets. Eleven of his plays are the only examples of his works that are available today. There exists, however, a large body of fragments of varying lengths that represents the work of his predecessors a d contemporaries, e.g., two near-complete plays by Menander. As P. D. Arnott (1967) has concisely stated, "If the work of a whole period is to be represented by one man, we could hardly have a better" (p. 133).

Comedy comes from the Greek word "Komos," as tragedy "Tragos"; comedy means the song of the gay revelers (Bieber, 1939, p. 65). In the Poetics, Aristotle relates comedy developed from improvisations, where leaders of phallic ceremonies and those who recited phallic songs performed. Comedies were usually acted out during the summer when villagers gathered together to celebrate a good harvest. As with tragedy, special tribute was given to the god Dionysus, present during the various plays in the figure of an image that stood in the theatre (Arnott, p. 30). In the best Greek plays, tragedy and comedy, the chorus was essential. In comedy, oftentimes, the name of the play was derived from the chorus; for example, the chorus was whatever the poet imagined—clouds, birds, storks, cities, wasps,

and the like. In comedy the chorus was not bound by rigid convention and was free to address individuals by name, or the audience at large. Over time, as with tragedy, the importance of the chorus diminished (p. 29).

Aristophanes was not always successful in competition: "He won only four first prizes, three second, and one third" (Arnott, p. 133). As a poet of comedy, he was in an excellent position to criticize not only the city of Athens, its people and enemies, but he could also poke fun at other poets, usually tragic, both living and dead. Euripides was very often a favorite target. Aristophanes found his cleverness and wit fascinating. "His tragedies had a theatrical brilliance and gift for perverse argument that the comic poet appreciated..." The Clouds was a broad burlesque of Socrates and his school. Arnott maintains that the conservative side of Aristophanes opposed what he considered destructive in the philosophy of Euripides. In the Frogs, Euripides' songs, prologues, and characterization are mercilessly dismembered. Sometimes, Euripides enters disguised in various characters from his plays, as with a sustained burlesque of tragic scenes and conventions in Aristophanes' Thesmophoriazusae. In this play Euripides attempts to save his relative Mnesilochus, masquerading as a female spy. The women are outraged because Euripides has belittled them in his plays. He and Mnesilochus act scenes from his tragedies in an attempt to evade

their captors (p. 135).

Marguerite Bieber tells us that in order to understand the extant comedies of Aristophanes, we must remember that the dialogue scenes come from the inartistic Doric farce (chorus scenes previously explained). She declares "The origin of the different elements explains the faults of his works; the uncouth character, the indecency of many of his jokes, and the loose way in which the different parts hang together. Despite these faults, however, the comedy of Aristophanes is one of the greatest gifts which Greek culture has bestowed upon us" (p. 83). Arnott differs from Bieber in describing the Greeks of Aristophanes' day: "They entertained each other with comic antics, horseplay and buffoonery, much of which moderns would find grossly obscene, but for the simple villagers was natural and harmless, springing from the circumstances in which they lived—fertility, birth and regeneration... the humor of the Greeks was the spontaneous self-expression of a fun-loving people" (p. 26).

With the defeat of Athens, Aristophanes' work changed. Even when the new democracy was restored it was still dangerous to criticize the existing regime. According to Arnott, Aristophanes confined himself to safe topics, e. g. Women in Parliament, 391 and Wealth, 388. These impersonal, unpolitical plays were still amusing but lacked the force of his earlier works. In these last two plays,

at least in style, we see a foreshadowing of the new comedy of Menander.

The Greek Paradigm

Plato is the thesis and Aristotle is the antithesis. Aeschylus and Sophocles arriving first promulgate the idealism to which Plato later aspires and then philosophizes. Euripides, likewise, more concerned with the affairs of common individuals, advances this subjectivity before the arrival of Aristotle, thus providing him with a basis for his philosophy. In the Republic of Plato we have a perfect universe, but the poet can enter only if he is inspired by the gods; otherwise, the poet is three times removed. Aristotle, however, gives the poet the power to create a universe from an unfinished one—the present. This schism has continued through the ages. The Republic and the Poetics were not intended as a formal treatise for thespians; nevertheless, the metaphysical arguments constructed in each provide a succinct philosophy for the artist.

Aristotle is more specific when he states that plot, character, thought, language, and spectacle define the playwright's prioritized creative list. He emphasizes the importance of action or time over characterization. Plato's extrinsic doctrine of utility challenges all philosophies. Aristotle's reply is viewed in his intrinsic doctrine of subjectivity. In order for a work of art to have value and worth, Plato relates that it must have utility.

It must be didactic. Aristotle, conversely, states that a work of art has value and import within the frame—on its own merit.

Aeschylus and Sophocles reflect the traditional values of the Greek society in which they lived; they both seek to protect and promote the morality in Greek myth as displayed in their tragic heroes. This conservative attitude is one that Plato appreciates even though he is unwilling to give the artists credit for their endeavors. Euripides is unafraid to break with tradition and concentrates on the lives of the everyday Athenians. We are never entirely certain about where he stands except that he projects humankind "as they are" rather than "as they ought to be." Aristotle is more closely aligned with Euripides because he is concerned with the subjective nature of humanity. Aristotle bestows creative powers on the artist to complete God's (nature's) work on earth.

Finally, the element of time changes with each succeeding poet: Aeschylus is perplexed by the slowness with which divine justice moves. Sophocles echoes this same sentiment, but is unwilling to attribute either a positive or negative value to the source of divine justice; it is simply God's will. Euripides is less concerned with the delay of divine justice and in his works it is no sooner mentioned than it appears. Theme, plot, action, and time are, in actuality, one and the same. Aristotle recognizes

the importance of action and places it first: A director directs an actor's action. An actor, thus, acts out an action. Today, action within the play can be enumerated as: inciting incident, point of attack, complication/conflict, rising and falling action, or further complication/conflict, crisis or climax, anti-climax, and denouement or conflict resolution. When viewed from the character's point of view, action can be interpreted as pollution, guilt, purification and redemption.[12]

Aristophanes stands alone as the major comedic poet of his time. His works satirize everyone and everything. Euripides becomes his favorite target. He admires, almost reveres, the poet-philosopher, but he cannot countenance his philosophy. He is attracted by Euripides' inventive genius, his brilliant style. Tragedies by nature are more enduring because they treat traditional universal ideals, whereas comedy is more content to poke fun at everyday occurrences and the personalities of the time: That Aristophanes' comedy still entertains today, given the limitations of comedy, is testimony to his own genius. Aristophanes' works as criticism, themselves, fall predictably between Aeschylus and Sophocles on the one hand, and Euripides on the other. He appears to be more of a traditionalist, taking into account his vicious attacks of Euripides, particularly in Thesmophoriazusae.

Each of the philosophers and poets, both tragic and comedic,

serve as models by which the scholar or practitioner, i. e., teacher, actor, director, can better comprehend the legacy of classical drama and its application in the modern world, especially the world of television.

Application

Modern Drama employs a substantial amount of the Classical Dramatic Greek concepts, e. g., the Greek notion of pollution, guilt, purification, and redemption; and, the evident structural elements, from inciting incident to denouement. Again, these are modern terms applied to classical thought/writings. The single, most important element, and that incorporates the foregoing, is time.

Time, as action, theme, and plot is manifested as life. Life becomes dramatic when ensuing conflict necessitates rectification or conflict resolution. The element of time allows humankind the opportunity to make amends for past sins. The theme of any work evolves naturally from plot: the activity of an individual(s) within a certain time frame. The arts both reflect and project human activity: our raison d'etre. Activity suggests that something is being accomplished, and this accomplishment follows two philosophies: activity as utility: Platonic; and, activity as for activity's sake: Aristotelian.

In contemporary television we observe activity taking place

in time. They are, in effect, the same, but capable of being measured separately. Time is real and psychological (Eisenstein, 1949).[13] Television, as video or film, projects images almost surreptitiously before our eyes. Aristotle points out that a work of art must be complete within a certain time frame. Television is very predictable within the respective images it communicates to us in a variety of program genres. Television maintains Aristotle's aesthetic principles by making certain the various programs it presents are small enough,[14] or meted out over a specific appointed time, in order to be viewed by its audience. Thus, images on television practically speaking are literally framed for us, but the action within the frame varies considerably among the dozen or more genres that now appear on the screen.

When we become so immersed in a television show that we lose our sense of time and place, we have passed into the creative world of the artist: we have taken a step beyond: psychological time. When the programming we view on television parallels the daily events in our lives and informs us about critical issues necessary to our survival, we are attuned to real time. Prime time television dramas reflect the former and soap operas and news programs, for different reasons, mirror the latter. The tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles present figures bigger than life—tragic heroes. As heroes pass through time they exonerate themselves in one form or

another. Time holds them up for our critical inspection and approval. These poets, then, present humankind as it ought to be. Euripides views everyday people passing through time and comments on them not as they ought to be, but as they are. Television draws from both the idealist and the realist perspectives, as depicted by the artistic works of the classic poets and as didacticized by the Greek philosophers; these two tendencies circumnavigate television's entirety.

Therefore, when critiquing television, the television critic may consider time from the Greek perspective. Television programs from this perspective are viewed with an emphasis on action rather than character: character is secondary significance. Time is quantitative and qualitative: real and psychological. Theme and plot occur as a consequence of human activity through time. Individuals demonstrate themselves to be idealistic or realistic, based on their performance as they move from action to action, from action to conflict, from conflict to conflict resolution in a given period of time. In this sense the character of an individual is seen as having worth and importance. Without time, of course, the human race is unable to solve its problems. Television today conveys Greek art and philosophy by what it does. The television critic, who understands the parallelism of the new and the old universes moving, as it were, together in time,

comprehends that each era must work out for itself its own destiny based on that which is real and that which is beautiful. Television moves the present universe closer to the ancient one, when it creates images that bear strong resemblances to that which humankind needs in order to survive: fact, actuality, reality, documentary, news, instruction, purpose, and that which humankind requires to uplift his/her soul: the pleasing, the serene, the placid, the convenient, the esoteric, the good, and the beautiful. These two streams of conscious and unconscious thought enable the critic to understand what is right about television. As the critic critiques television, the action and the characters together, when viewed from the Greek experience, will convey their true essence. The critic's responsibility is to bring to bear all that (s)he knows concerning art and philosophy as it applies to television. I can think of no better place to begin than at the beginning. In this respect the Greek legacy affords us much hope and inspiration that we can inculcate, in our thoughts, as we struggle to define our present lives as communicated through the art of television.

There is no better remedy to soothe the tired soul than laughter; in this arena, Aristophanes stands alone. Tragedy without comedy does not represent the entire condition of humanity. The Aristophanic, comic images on television make life more pleasant. The critic weighs tragedy with comedy to arrive at a fuller

realization of the artist's intent. Like Aristophanes, the critic must be unafraid to speak out boldly, in the interest of truth, to comment on life.

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Tuning in the tube (1985 February 28), Times-Courier (Charleston, IL), p. A2.

Footnotes

[1]Former FCC Chairman, Newton Minnow, recently stated "In the past 23 years I feel we've started to illuminate the wasteland and to use this medium as its creators dreamed it would be used." He concludes, "More people learn—more ideas, more values—through television."

[2]"Stylology" is a word I have created to describe the study of style, especially as an approach to television criticism, just as methodology refers to the study of method. A researcher employs method; method builds upon method, moving along on the vertical axis. Conversely, a critic employs style; style follows style on a horizontal axis.

[3]"Poetry is taken to mean the literary art in general; the two branches of drama and the epic, being the most highly developed forms among the Greeks, are the centers of attention." Poetry concerns itself with dialogue specifically, i. e., tragedy and comedy (plays); whereas, prose as criticism is derived from oratory or public speaking in Greek society.

[4]Plato, on the other hand, informs us that the arts of measuring, numbering, and weighing come to the rescue of human understanding. He states further, the better part of the soul is like to be that which trusts measuring and calculating. Thus, the artist is unable to measure accurately his/her work when compared and contrasted to

the work of others because the artist lacks the scientist's constructs of precision.

[5]We must remember that this world was almost destitute for books and preachers. Furthermore, the Athenian tragic poets were constrained by a tradition that was rarely violated; they drew their plots from a great body of myth and legend, concerned with the gods and men of the heroic age.

[6]A satyr play is a Greek comic play (burlesque) performed with satyrs (half-men and half-goats) in the chorus.

[7]DeRomilly relates that the Greeks did not have a clear idea of time. "They did not speak of it much—in Homer the word is never the subject of a verb; in Hesiod it does not appear; and, if we leave aside orphic poetry, which requires some discussion, it is mentioned only occasionally in ancient philosophers."

[8]Most scholars believe that Thespis invented the actor who, in turn, spoke independently of the chorus: around the year 534.

[9]Lucas is careful to state that Hegel, or his interpreters, have clouded the issue by taking the Antigone as an example of two partial rights fused in a higher synthesis.

[10]The Rhesus is probably the work of another poet; therefore there are 18 rather than 19 surviving works of Euripides.

[11]If Euripides' plays are written in Greek script, they will fall into a partially alphabetical arrangement in groups, according to

the first letter that seems to reflect a feature of the collected edition.

[12]While attending tha Pasadena Playhouse College of Theatre Arts 1957-60, I was introduced to the terms pollution, guilt, purification, and redemption in Greek theatre; at St. Louis University 1970-73, Professor Olen Butler provided me with a dramaturgical approach to critiquing plays, from inciting incident to denouement.

[13]Eisenstein's essay discusses metric and rhythmic elements of montage. Metric is given to mean "real" time, whereas rhythmic means "psychological" time. Psychological time differs from real time because it incorporates action "within the frame."

[14]Small is taken to mean the subject matter within the time frame is presented in a balanced and harmonious fashion. It does not mean short enough. A work can be short but incomplete. Aristotle says a work can be so large or so small that it escapes the audience's ability to grasp its meaning.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express, once again, my sincerest thanks to my friend Maggie Leyden for her secretarial assistance and patience.