

# Rhetorical devices in the acharnians



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Rhetoric has been used throughout history, including the Classical era. In fact, it was often celebrated in Ancient Greece, where rhetoric was often seen as a skill, and even an art form. Since then, it has evolved and modified to what is now different standards in different languages. However, similarities between the style of writing of ancient literatures and that of modern works can be drawn. When an ancient work is translated, the translator may choose specific words to capture the themes and the overall flow of the writing. One example of this is Alan H. Sommerstein's translation of Aristophanes' play, "The Acharnians."

"The Acharnians" is one of Aristophanes' earliest plays to survive. Although it is believed that he produced this play with Callistratus to win one of many first place awards in comedy plays, Aristophanes is accepted as the author. Throughout his life, he won many awards for his plays, often causing powerful enemies, like a government official named Cleon, since his plays often mock Athenian society and politics. "The Acharnians" is not an exception. In "The Acharnians," Sommerstein uses rhetorical devices to recreate Aristophanes' distinct style of writing that not only appeals to the audience, but also portrays Aristophanes' sarcastic tones and views on Athenian society.

One literary device that is used throughout the play is rhyme. In fact, rhyming is the first literary device that he employs in the first scene. In Dikaiopolis' monolog, Sommerstein uses words that end in "ic" in the end of multiple sentences. For example, he uses the words pleasurable, ecstatic, traumatic, and tragic in lines five through ten. By including rhyme in the passage, Sommerstein is able to retain the audience's attention. The rhymes

create a sense of rhythm to the text, so instead of just reading a block of text, certain parts are emphasized, making the monologue sound like it is spoken when read.

Another way in which rhyme is used in the play to create a sense of rhythm is in all of the chants and songs. Distinct rhyming patterns are used when different characters are giving their speeches or singing their songs. This is first seen when the leader of the Acharian mob is chanting to encourage the mob to chase down Dikaiopolis for trying to make peace with the Spartans. The leader has an AABB rhyme pattern in his speech. In between lines 204 and 207, each sentence is ended with words that follow the AABB pattern. The words used are found, ground, man, and can. However, when the chorus, or mob, responds, the rhyme pattern switches to ABCB DEFE. The rhyming words are placed at the end of each sentence, but the pattern is separated by buffer words because each sentence is split between two lines. In lines 208 through 215, the rhyming words are scene, been, coal, soul, the words on lines 209, 211, 213, and 215, respectively. This change in rhyming pattern creates two different rhythms for the leader and mob. This can be interpreted as a method of showing the difference in intelligence between the two, because when Dikaiopolis sings a song to respond to the mob, his verses are in the AABB pattern. Between lines 264 and 274, this rhyme pattern is used, ending up with the full pattern of AABBCCDDEEF. This different in rhyme pattern can be seen as a sign of different intellectual thoughts because Dikaiopolis is one of the few characters that is actually described as semi- intelligent and not corrupt. Therefore, by varying the

rhythms and rhyme patterns that different characters speak in, the differences between their traits are also highlighted.

Another rhetorical device that is present in the play is polysyndeton, which is the use of multiple, unnecessary conjunctions. An example of this is in the opening scene, when Dikaiopolis is describing his state, while waiting for the Athenian officials to arrive at the meeting. Multiple “ and’s” and “ I’ll’s” are used in this section to show his boredom and the absurdity of the official’s tardiness. This is shown when he states “ I sit down, and after a bit, when I find no one else is coming, I sigh and yawn and stretch and fart and then I don’t know what to do, and then doodle.... and all the time I’m gazing at the countryside...” (Lines 29-33). Dikaiopolis’ frustration is also shown in this section, when he thinks of what he would do if the meeting does not address the problem of war. He claims “ I’ll shout, I’ll heckle, I’ll abuse, I’ll...” (Line 38). Polysyndeton was used in the play to portray the dissatisfaction of Dikaiopolis and highlight the inadequate actions and behavior of the government officials.

Dikaiopolis’ resentment towards the Athenian government officials mirrors that of Aristophanes. In fact, there are multiple allusions in the play that tie Dikaiopolis with Aristophanes, with most of the allusions ridiculing the politician, Cleon. Although Cleon is first mentioned in line six, he is later mentioned for unfairly accusing Dikaiopolis of slandering the city in the presence of foreigners (Lines 502- 504). Aristophanes does not expand on this point, a large part because Ancient Grecians of that time probably knew about how Cleon brought Aristophanes to court and accused him of the exact same crime. By alluding to this exact event, Aristophanes is able to tie him

to Dikaiopolis, and basically declare them as the same person. This is also supported by the allusion to Euripides, a tragic playwright. In this passage, Dikaiopolis is asking Euripides for props to make him look like a beggar.

Euripides was another famous playwright in this time period, and by including him as a character in the play, Aristophanes is able to make the play relevant to the time period. By alluding to certain events and figures, the audience would know that the play was about the actual time period in which they were in, which was around the time of the Peloponnesian wars.

Besides the relevance of the time period, Aristophanes also stresses the importance of the different locations in the play. Sommerstein translates this by using similes and metaphors in the dialogue between Dikaiopolis and the chorus. One example of this is in line twenty three, when Dikaiopolis refers to the mob's thirst for violence as "black embers of your wrath." In this metaphor, the wrath is compared to a fire while the black embers is their desire for revenge. It is important to notice the use of "black embers" because the mob consists of Acharnians, and their land is known for coal. Their land was once destroyed by the Spartans, which is why they were originally upset that Dikaiopolis made peace with the Spartans. Dikaiopolis later uses their ties with coal to convince them to listen to him instead of killing him on the spot. A simile that Sommerstein uses to refer to Dikaiopolis' home is in line 350, when he compares temper to sour grapes. Although Athenians are not usually associated with grapes, Dikaiopolis worshipped Dionysus, who is the God of wine. It is important to specify the different locations and areas because the ultimate result of Dikaiopolis' actions is the freedom to trade and to avoid conflict with the Spartans, who

were in the north. Sommerstein shows the differences between the locations through similes and metaphors.

Although the different locations are important, it is also necessary to see that the culture of the different areas are very similar, concerning the gods and mythology. “The Acharnians” is a play that is written with a heavy use of colloquial language and references to Ancient Greek mythology and information of that time period. For example, in line 64, Dikaiopolis exclaims “Holy Ecbatana!” to express astonishment and outrage at the claims the diplomats were making. This is an example of translated colloquial language because Ecbatana was an important ancient city in what is now Western Iran. This would mean that Ecbatana was in the Persian Empire. Other examples of colloquial language are the numerous times Heracles was mentioned. Heracles is an Ancient Greek demigod who performed numerous tasks for his cousin Eurystheus under Hera’s orders. In the play, he becomes a figure ingrained in the vernacular. For example, in line 95, Dikaiopolis says “Heracles and all the gods, man, you look.....” In line 808, he says “Mighty Heracles!” to express his astonishment about the starving Megarian girls. In line 860, Heracles is mentioned again, this time by a Theban. Dikaiopolis says his name once more in line 1016; he responded “Heracles save us.” when confronted with a distressed man on the streets. The numerous mentions of Heracles’ name show how ingrained he is to the vernacular and colloquial language used in this play.

Although the emphasis on specific words and Sommerstein’s decisions when translating largely affect how the play is read and interpreted, Aristophanes’ satirical style of writing is clearly shown. Not only are specific parts

humorous, but the end result of all of the characters is ironic. This is shown in the foil that Aristophanes creates between Dikaiopolis and Lamachus, the general. Lamachus first appears in line 568, when he is called upon to deal with Dikaiopolis, who was defending his decision to make peace with the Spartans. However, instead of persecuting him, Lamachus ended up being an example of a corrupt politician and general who was reaping the benefits of the war. However, in the end of the play, after Dikaiopolis has already resumed trade with all of Greece, Lamachus is called for war while Dikaiopolis is called for a party. Lamachus is then mocked since Dikaiopolis would repeat his commands, but with more favorable actions. For example, when Lamachus tells his servant “ bring me out my ration-bag,” Dikaiopolis tells his servant “ Bring me out my dinner box.” H continues mimicking him to show how he ended up in a better position than Lamachus, who was in the government. This irony is repeated once again in the very last scene when Lamachus returns, wounded from the war, while Dikaiopolis is drunk, happy, and full. This shows how Aristophanes is a satirical writer because he pointed out the corruption and greed of the Athenian government, and had their own actions backfire on themselves.

“ The Acharnians” is a play that clearly shows Aristophanes’ stance on the Athenian government. Sommerstein is able to portray this as well as the story by using multiple literary devices when translating the passage. Rhyming is used to create a rhythm as well as distinguish traits between certain characters. Polysyndeton is used to express the inadequacies of the government. Allusions and colloquial language was used to establish the time period and culture while similes and metaphors were used to refer to

different locations. Aristophanes satirical style of writing is also shown through the plot and results of the play. Sommerstein is able to capture Aristophanes' style of writing and his tie as Dikaiopolis in this translation of "The Acharnians" by using rhetorical devices that may have developed from the Ancient Greek civilization, and maybe even have been influenced by Aristophanes' writings.