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THE FUNCTION OF THE EURIPIDES SCENE IN ARISTOPHANES' *ACHARNIANS*

By R. M. HARRIOTT

Starkie wrote of this scene (*Ach.* 393–489) that it was 'perhaps the most successful piece of Aristophanic burlesque in existence'.[1] Recently Dearden has written that the rag-borrowing scene exists only for the sake of the Euripidean parody.[2] 'Euripides is introduced into the play (it becomes apparent) to provide Dicaeopolis with rags in which he can plead his case before the Acharnians – though before he actually speaks to them he finds it necessary to apologize for these very rags (498). The whole scene is an obvious and elaborate parody of the spirit of Euripides' plays and in particular of his realism in dressing his heroes in rags and it can hardly be claimed that providing the rags is the main object: they are, rather, the means of satirizing elements of his tragedies.' I agree that Aristophanes is making fun of Euripides here, of his parentage and personality, his tragic style and dramatic technique, his presentation of a hero who is crippled or blinded and dressed in rags.[3] But there is more to be said for, and about, the scene than that it equips Dicaeopolis and mocks Euripides.

The *Acharnians* begins with Dicaeopolis impatiently waiting for the Assembly to convene, hours late. In the pre-parabasis scenes impatience at delay, or at delaying tactics, is an emotion expressed by Dicaeopolis, by Euripides, and above all, by the chorus of Acharnian charcoal burners; delay itself has a structural function in this first half of the play. The Acharnians have to restrain their anger during the celebration of the Rural Dionysia (241–79) and again when Dicaeopolis seizes his hostage; they are kept waiting once more while he delivers the 'chopping-block' speech (366–84) and during the long scene with Euripides. The postponed defence finally begins at 496 (with ten lines that are introductory); Dicaeopolis even then cannot enjoy and demonstrate the benefits of peace until he has dealt with Lamachus' intervention, in a scene which forms the climax of the action so far. This process of retardation, of expectation disappointed, is not irritating to the reader or to the spectator because the delaying devices are surprising and novel: to give just one example, after Dicaeopolis has volunteered to speak 'with his head on the block' and has actually fetched a block from his house, he decides that he needs to dress himself as befits a wretched defendant; we expect him to retire briefly to his house again and emerge in shabby clothes, but no, he declares that he must visit Euripides (394). In the result however the scene with Euripides is not

just a surprising diversion but an important stage in an action which is concluded in the scene with the *strategos*, Lamachus (572–625).

Within the Euripides scene too, delay and impatience have their place, and the scene is longer than we might expect, although not longer than turns out to be appropriate for its purpose. Euripides' entry (410) is delayed by the standard short scene with a doorkeeper and by his own reluctance to interrupt his work; the request for 'pitiful apparel' (415) is not granted at once; to the basic requirements Dicaeopolis adds, item by item, as many more as Euripides' patience will stand.[4] Part of the effectiveness of the scene lies in the changing attitudes of the two characters and the development of tension between them (and of course in the scoring of points against Euripidean tragedy)[5] and on first reading these are the dominant effects. Looking at the scene in the context of Dicaeopolis' conflict with the Acharnians we shall find other elements worth noting. Dicaeopolis begins by asking Euripides for 'pitiful apparel', the rags from 'the old play' since, he says, he has to make a big speech to the chorus[6] and failure carries the death penalty (416–17). Thirteen lines later it emerges that the rags[7] the comic hero wants are those of a beggar and cripple, and Euripides identifies the correct tragic hero, Telephus, in the words used in his own play at the moment when Telephus' disguise was penetrated (*οἶδ' ἄνδρα Μυσὸν Τήλεφον*, 430). Not just any 'pitiful apparel' then, but the rags worn to disguise the identity of the wounded king. Dicaeopolis now asks for 'the things that go with the rags',[8] and first a felt cap, saying 'To-day I must seem to be a beggar; I must be, but not appear to be, who I am. The spectators must know who I am,[9] but the members of the chorus must stand there like idiots and be clobbered by my sayings' (440–44, the first two lines from the *Telephus*, fr. 698 N^2). Change of identity is a means to overcome the chorus. Thirdly Dicaeopolis begs for, and gets, a beggar's staff, already feeling full of sayings.[10] The hat and staff are beggar's equipment inasmuch as beggars are travellers; the 'rags' will be worn as a cloak: these three items equip, and disguise, Dicaeopolis as a wandering beggar. But because his new appearance produces a new person Dicaeopolis now proceeds to act the beggar; he had gone to Euripides partly as a suppliant, a man in danger of his life; as he remains, importunate, ingratiating, and then cheeky, he has truly turned into a beggar. First he asks for containers for the proceeds of his new occupation, basket, cup, and jug;[11] next for food (of the poorest kind); no doubt he would continue and demand drink. But Euripides, at first sympathetic to his subtle plans, had begun to want to rid himself of the beggar at 449; as the scene proceeds Euripides takes on tragic hauteur in response to Dicaeopolis' own role-playing and finally at 479, he has had more

than enough: 'The fellow is insolent; bolt up the palace portals.' The *eccyclema* is withdrawn, the scene over.

What is Aristophanes' purpose in making Dicaeopolis want to be a beggar? Remembering his original intention of establishing himself as an object of compassion we might suppose that as a beggar he would be particularly pitiful. This is unlikely. The evidence in this play and elsewhere suggests that beggars were objects of contempt and derision. Why? Because the beggar was an 'outsider', a man without the support of *philoi*, contravening the law against idleness, not part of the system of reciprocal obligations on which society was based. The popular attitude is clearly shown in the passage of Aristophanes' *Plutus* in which Penia, Poverty personified, proudly disclaims identity with, or even close resemblance to, Beggary. The poor man *works*, and can live, if frugally (*Plut.* 549 ff.).[12]

It is true to say that Dicaeopolis becomes a beggar in order to resemble or enact Euripides' Telephus but this offers only a partial explanation of the rôle. The debt that *Acharnians* owes to the *Telephus*[13] is unmistakable, consisting as it does not only in quotation and misquotation, dramatic small change as it were, but in plot, situation, and motif. In the scenes I am discussing, three important elements originated in the *Telephus*: seizing a hostage, disguise as a beggar, and speaking in support of your hearers' enemies; without these elements *Acharnians* would be a different play. The essential information for understanding the importance of Telephus is given not in this play but in the passage of abuse which precedes the formal debate between Right and Wrong in the *Clouds*; Right says that his adversary, now successful, was formerly a beggar munching (not scraps but) sayings and declaring that he was Telephus.[14] In this gibe we see the connection made between the beggar's despicable way of life, sustained by words alone, and a false declaration of identity.

It is hard to think of a hero disguised as a beggar without remembering Homer's Odysseus. At *Odyssey* 13.397 Athene promises to make the hero unrecognizable; unrecognizable he remains, except on those occasions when he chooses to reveal his identity or to permit it to be discovered. He is taken for a beggar and treated as a beggar, contemptuously treated by the suitors, the maidservants and the 'real' beggar Irus. The disguise, as well as concealing his sturdy physique, allows him at one time to remain anonymous, for no-one cares to discover the precise identity of a nobody, and at another to tell a false tale of past misfortunes, assuming another false identity.[15] It also, of course, enables him to gain food and lodging, and even, from Eumaeus, a cloak (*Od.* 14.457–522). While disguised, he can spy out the land. In Euripides' tragedy, Telephus' disguise is penetrated by another:

in the *Odyssey*, and in the *Acharnians*, the hero himself reveals his true identity. In the *Odyssey* the self-identifications are subject to retardations and postponements, in scenes testing the attitudes of others to the hero;[16] in the *Acharnians*, the same process occurs in brief. Dicaeopolis' ingenuity, versatility, and independence are characteristics he shares with Odysseus. As beggar he combines features of Telephus and of Odysseus.

As Dicaeopolis borrows from Euripides he acquires eloquence (447) 'drinking up' Euripides (484).[17] It is surprising then that when he finally makes his defence the speech is not particularly Euripidean (except for a few quotations from the *Telephus* and phrases in elevated style). If one reads, say, Jason's 'defence' in the *Medea* (547–75) for purposes of comparison, the differences between the two kinds of rhetoric are striking. Dicaeopolis follows Euripidean predecessors in speaking eloquently for the 'wrong' side, but the manner in which he does this is Aristophanic in its serio-comic eloquence and his speech reflects the comic poet's understanding of human nature and human affairs.[18] The method used is narrative and descriptive, the argument largely implicit, the material unexpected.[19] What he actually talks about is the causes of wars (and his speech has been of more interest to historians studying the causes of the Peloponnesian War than to literary critics).[20] He begins bluntly 'I absolutely hate the Lacedaemonians'. He goes on to say that some Athenians, not, and he repeats it, not Athens as a whole, made trouble for the Megarians. The first incidents were trivial. Not so the second provocation. This time the Megarians retaliated and more than retaliated. As a result all Greece was engulfed in war. As a result, Pericles issued the Megarian decree. As a result, the Megarians asked the Lacedaemonians to intercede with Athens. Athens was obdurate. As a result, the clash of shields.[21] So far Aristophanes has demonstrated beyond doubt the phenomenon for which the modern cliché is escalation. Now he borrows from rhetoric (540): 'Someone will say, it shouldn't have happened. Well then, tell me what should have happened?' Now Aristophanes reverses the situation: suppose it had been the Lacedaemonians who had begun the trouble, would you all have remained quietly at home? By no means. The Athenians, he implies, would have prepared for war. 'He implies': the implication is contained in a picture, an impression, of a city preparing for war, conveyed by what is, in essence, a comic list of sights, sounds, and actions. Then comes the final surprise when we are switched from contemporary Athens to Euripidean tragedy again, quoted by Dicaeopolis: 'That's what you would have done. Telephus – do we think (he would have acted differently)? If so, we're fools.' (555–6).

At this point, we expect the verdict, but the Acharnians who constitute the 'jury' are not unanimous; half of them, still hostile, abuse Dicaeopolis as beggar and sycophant, and call the contemporary general, Lamachus, and all warriors to their aid, in a passage recalling tragedy (and divine invocations). Lamachus answers the call for help in a scene, the last before the parabasis, which reveals the full purpose of the visit to Euripides. Lamachus, unlike the audience and the Acharnians, does not know that the beggar is Dicaeopolis. He sees an unknown man dressed in rags and hears that he has insulted the city. Lamachus has been characterized from the first mention as hero and warrior *par excellence*: he looks lightnings and is gorgon-crested (574–5). He is a compound figure, representative of the heroic ethos, a Homeric or Aeschylean warrior-prince, but also, later in the scene, he boasts that he is a democratically-elected general.[22] What will happen in this confrontation of the noble and the nonentity? Will Lamachus and Dicaeopolis fight a heroic duel? Or will Lamachus put Dicaeopolis under guard, the fate of the Kinsman in a similar situation in the *Thesmophoriazusae*? In the event, the beggar stands up to the general and puts him down by means that are typical of Old Comedy and unheroic (although perhaps suggested by those Homeric battle-scenes in which taunts precede or follow armed conflict). Dicaeopolis abases himself before this plumed hero (plumes are one of the recurrent minor motifs of this comedy), begs forgiveness for having spoken, faints with fear of the armour (compare Astyanax' terror of Hector's helmet at *Iliad* 6.466–70) – and vomits into the upturned shield, with the aid of the helmet-feather (587). Finally he mocks Lamachus obscenely. Throughout the confrontation the phrase πτωχὸς ὤν recurs. First uttered by Dicaeopolis as he opened his defence (497), the words are turned against him by the hostile semi-chorus: 'You have the effrontery to talk to us like this, πτωχὸς ὤν, you, a beggar?' (558). Next Lamachus, on similar lines: 'You dare to say these things, *you*, πτωχὸς ὤν?' (578) Dicaeopolis replies: 'Lamachus, hero, forgive me if I made a speech, πτωχὸς ὤν.' The final exchange occurs at 593–5:

Lam: You address a general, πτωχὸς ὤν?
Dic: Am I a beggar? (ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι πτωχός;)
Lam: Well, who are you?
Dic: Who am I? (*Removing his cloak.*) A good and useful citizen ... (πολίτης χρηστός)

A modern reader can miss the importance of this declaration, easily emphasized in performance once the necessity for emphasis is understood. Dicaeopolis has been regarded by Lamachus as despicable *qua* beggar. He reveals himself as worthy of the respect due to a full Athenian citizen (a distinction the audience will appreciate) and begins

to show the chorus the difference between appearance and reality. Dicaeopolis had appeared to be a beggar, while in truth a patriot. Lamachus appears to be a patriotic, energetic, and zealous general, but he is now shown to be representative of a money-loving, place-seeking, military aristocracy. Dicaeopolis has deliberately assumed a disguise; Lamachus' true nature and motives are disguised from others, and perhaps from himself.[23] Those Acharnians who continued to oppose Dicaeopolis will now be made to see that they and others like them bear the hardships of war while young aristocrats enrich themselves in luxurious foreign postings. At last the Acharnians are silenced although Lamachus is still determined to fight the Spartans. Dicaeopolis is now ready to set up a market, open to all Greeks, save Lamachus (625). Peace will be shown to be worthwhile.

NOTES

1. *The Acharnians of Aristophanes* ed. W. J. M. Starkie, intro. p. xxxiii.

2. C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes*, (London, 1976), p. 55.

3. The 'rags' are discussed below, note 7.

4. In *Ach.* the listing, and the actual accumulation, of objects is noteworthy: e.g. (listing) 1089–93, (accumulation) 1097–1142.

5. Comment on individual points of parody is almost entirely excluded in order to concentrate on the other elements in the scene.

6. Dicaeopolis when speaking to Euripides refers to 'the chorus' (416) and 'the choreutae' (443) not to Acharnians, perhaps partly as one theatrical professional to another.

7. The much discussed question of the 'rags' has two aspects, the practical problem of what actually was worn on the stage by fallen heroes (by Xerxes in the *Persians* of Aeschylus, by Philoctetes, by Telephus) and the reason for the mockery of Euripides. This scene shows that Euripides was ridiculed mainly because of the number of his plays with 'ragged heroes' (seven are named here); disapproval (if any) will be based on the association between 'rags' and trickery effected by disguise (see further below p. 4 and note 15), this association made by 'Aeschylus' at *Frogs* 1064–5. This scene also shows that what Dicaeopolis borrowed was a piece of cloth, lying folded in a heap of similar pieces; it was tattered, and when he held it up, Dicaeopolis could enlarge a slit, look through it and pray to Zeus 'who sees through everything' (435). The cloth was next draped round him (between 436 and 437) as an all-concealing cloak, which could be flung back as necessary to allow freedom of action, and which was whipped off in a second at the moment of self-declaration (after the first word, ὅστις, in 595). Such a garment has the advantage that it conceals the wearer thoroughly (and would cover the ornate tragic *chiton*) and that its wearer need not look ludicrous in the company of those dressed in tragic finery.

In this scene the words for the clothes are interesting; Dicaeopolis usually says 'rags', once σπαργάνα, referring to Telephus and the swaddling clothes associated with the exposed infant. Euripides adds λακίδες and πεπλώματα (which are Aeschylean) and τρύχη to the more ordinary terms.

8. Starkie finds the plural peculiar, not realizing that cloak, hat, and staff formed a regular trio, the mention of the staff (used for support and defence) postponed here by the explanatory lines 440 f.

9. A comic reference, again as one theatrical practitioner to another, to the device, common in tragedy, whereby the audience knows more than character(s) in the play.

10. 'Sayings', ῥήματα, here means both beggar's patter and Euripidean quotation: D. has combined both styles in the preceding line (446). On the use of diminutives see the following note.

11. Dicaeopolis actually uses diminutives here (as elsewhere in the scene), part contemptuously, part in beggar's wheedling tones: 'Give me an itsy-bitsy (i.e. rotten old) basket then'.

For the objects mentioned see B. A. Sparkes, *JHS* 95 (1975), 122 f.

12. Cf. Sophocles fr 752 N^2 and Plato *Rep.* 552D (which suggests an association between beggars and criminality).

13. For Euripides' *Telephus* see E. Handley and J. Rea, *BICS* Supplement v, 1957.

14. *Clouds* 921–2, with Dover's notes.

15. For Odysseus Homer uses the word ἀλήτης (e.g. *Od.* 17.483) which is related to the comic abusive word ἀλαζών. The 'tricky' aspect of Odysseus, much criticized in the fifth century, is like that of the *alazon*, often a vagrant, who seeks to impose on people by boasting and 'putting on an act'.

16. B. Fenik, *Studies in the Odyssey*, (*Hermes* Einzelschriften, Band 30, 1974) discusses postponements and retardations in the self-revelations of Odysseus.

17. Cf. 447; on each occasion the verb used suggests, like the *Clouds* passage quoted above, p. 4, that the beggar nourishes himself with words.

18. See A. M. Dale, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 288.

19. The preparation for the speech began (303–14) with the view that the Lacedaemonians were not solely responsible for the war and that they too had been wronged; the phrase 'on behalf of the Lacedaemonians' occurs at 356, 369, 482; the idea that the hero is speaking on a capital charge is dominant in the Euripides scene; an actual defence of the 'private peace treaty' is provided by the action of the second half of the play. An analysis of the speech shows that the first four lines express Dicaeopolis' hatred of the Laconians; fifteen lines are given to the Athenians' actions against Megara and their result, four to Pericles' reaction. The Spartans are then at last mentioned as recipients of Megara's pleas for help.

The speech is also unexpected in that Dicaeopolis, 'wretchedly dressed', does not appeal for pity; the only personal note in the speech proper is the initial expression of hatred.

For the proem see below, note 23.

20. 'Literary' interest in the speech has tended to concentrate on the parody of Herodotus and of Euripides, which is incidental to the main function of providing a 'defence' for a 'traitor' which will be sufficiently anti-Spartan without supporting the proponents of continued war.

21. 'As a result': the connection between one act and the next is underlined by initial ἐντεῦθεν (or the like) at 526, 528, 530, 535, 539.

22. Cf. his 'Homeric' arming-scene (1097–1142), *BICS* 26 (1979), p. 95.

23. We recall that in the opening scene Dicaeopolis had 'seen through' pretence of various kinds (63, 87, 109, 114, 135, 151). His awareness that others are easily deceived, particularly by praise and offers of 'friendship' is stated in the 'chopping-block' speech. It is interesting that what he says there about the susceptibility of rustics to flattery is balanced by criticism of old men as keen to convict accused persons; in context these remarks can be seen as alluding to the Acharnians, but in the next line Aristophanes refers to his prosecution by Cleon the previous year and this forces us to reconsider the bearing of the preceding comments. It seems likely that the three 'parabatic' passages of this play need to be taken closely together (370–82, 496–507, 628–64) and seen as an extension of Aristophanes' defence against Cleon, a defence made problematical by the characteristics of such as the Acharnians. If so 'Comedy too knows what is right' (500) presents Comedy as a character on a political and legal stage.