Collin College

Genre Jaunt:
Utilizing the Platonic Method of Discourse
and Aristotle’s Analysis of Dramatic Art [Poetics]
towards Modern Literary Analysis

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“The mighty words of the proud are paid in full with might blows of fate, and at long last those blows will teach us wisdom” (Sophocles 1314).

With that, the play comes to a close. The story finishes, literature momentarily resigned, and the characters are brought back to wait among the darkness for the next chance to speak life into their assigned words.

The leader of the chorus prepares to start, morals in need of explaining and prescribing. However, before the play can restart and begin again, two fellow members of the chorus approach him.

“Choragus,” one of the chorus members says, the member he recognizes as furthest on the right. “Aristeros and I were wondering: if we exist in a World of Literature, does that mean things other than our plays exist?”

“But, of course,” Choragus responds, nodding curtly.

Aristeros, furthest on the left, presses closer. “Then can we see what their choruses are like?”

Choragus shakes his head. “Other forms of literature do not have a chorus like we do.”

“No, they don’t, not by being told, at least,” Choragus explains. “It is up to them to determine the meaning.”

“Then,” Aristeros begins, “can we go explore other literature? That way we, as chorus members, can help the audience interpret any potentially complex meaning.”
Choragus nods. “Of course.” And, with a snap, the blackness of waiting vanishes, and the three chorus members find themselves surrounded by tall shelves filled with what appears to be various types of food in all sorts of containers and vesicles. “This,” Choragus states, “is A&P.”

“What’s that?” Dexios questions. “This is unlike anything I’ve ever seen before!”

“That’s because it’s from another era, a separate time period from your own entirely,” Choragus explains. “We’re currently in the 60s.”

“The 360s?” Dexios and Aristeros ask. Aristeros counts quickly on his fingertips before adding, “roughly 80 years from our time (Schilb 1274)?”

“No, the 1960s (Schilb 600), so quite ahead of us,” Choragus corrects. He turns his fellow chorus members around in the aisle, towards a long line of checkouts. “Now pay close attention, this is where you’ll find the meaning of the story.”

A blonde girl, with two other girls by her side, are dressed in bathing suits and nothing else. Behind the checkout counter, a boy similar to their age, and beside both groups stands a man who reeks of authority. He scolds the girls, telling them to return with they’re decent. The blonde girl stands taller, straighter, her bottom lip pouted out when she replies: “We are decent” (Updike 604).

“Did you catch that?” Choragus whispers to the two other as the blonde girl and her friends pay for their purchase—Kingfish Fancy Herring Snacks in Pure Sour Cream (Updike 603)—then leave, quickly followed by the boy saying, “I quit” (Updike 604).

“Well, that was idiotic,” Aristeros mutters, crossing his arms with apparent disgust on his face. “Why would he do that?”

“Perhaps he’s standing up for those girls?” Dexios poses.
Aristeros scoffs as he and Dexios are pushed forward by Choragus, and the three follow the boy out of the store like unseen phantoms. Outside, the girls are nowhere to be seen, just a screaming mother and children and their car. The boy seems grim, as if a sudden revelation has befallen him. From nowhere, a voice echoes through the air, “… I felt how hard the world would be for me hereafter” (Updike 605).

“What was that?” Dexios asks.

“The last line of the story and the final thought of the protagonist,” Choragus explains. “Now, it’s up to you two. What’s the moral of this piece of literature?”

“Why just us?” Aristeros questions. “Aren’t you the leader of the chorus?”

“While that may be true,” Choragus acknowledges, “this was your idea. I brought you here because it’s a different media than what we’re accustomed to analyzing. Now, what would you say is the moral?”

The two look around the scene, seemingly frozen in time once the last line was spoken. “Well,” Dexios begins, “that man inside was judging the girls’ character based on just their appearances, but he didn’t know them at all.”

“And when he the girl claimed that she and her friends were decent (Updike 604), I don’t think she meant just about how she and her friends were dressed,” Aristeros adds.

“Then, based on these deductions…” Choragus prompts.

The two members share a knowing look before Dexios speaks, her voice solid and sure. “We the chorus believe the moral of this story to be as follows: one must not judge others based
solely on their appearance, but wait until a deeper understanding has been garnered though multiple interactions in order to pass a more complete and honest judgement.”

Choragus smiles. “Excellent.” And with that, another snap. The outside of the store disappears to black before it’s exchanged with another view: tile and cramped walls and the sickly clean smell of lemon and bleach. Stuffed inside a single stall together, a freshly cleaned toilet behind them, the members of the chorus gaze out into the rest of the bathroom.

“Why are we here?” Aristeros asks, disgust dripping from his tone as he pries himself from the group and spills out into the open area.

“Because it is similar in ways to the last piece of literature,” Choragus explains. “This is ‘Singapore.’ Now pay attention.”

A woman is standing by herself in the middle of the bathroom, staring into another stall. Suddenly, a female voice echoes through scene, much like the boy’s at the end of the previous piece. “In Singapore, in the airport, a darkness was ripped from my eyes” (Oliver 129). Dexios joins Aristeros, and together they crane their necks to follow the woman’s gaze. Inside another stall is another woman, cleaning the toilet and surrounding area.

The original woman’s voice continues to echo, talking of birds and happy places (Oliver 129). It talks of the cleaning lady, and how the woman wants her to rise above this job. The final line rings clear throughout the space before the scene once again freezes, “I mean the way this poem is filled with trees, and with birds” (Oliver 130).

“But we’re inside!” Aristeros explains, looking wildly around. “What birds? What trees?”
“Perhaps,” Dexios starts, “it means something more. Remember how it started? That a darkness was ripped from her eyes (Oliver 129)? Maybe she means the lady cleaning. Maybe she never thought that places such as this needed cleaning.”

“And what? That it just supernaturally cleaned itself?” Aristeros scoffs.

Choragus joins the two. “Some people don’t think about things such as this,” he explains, “the idea of dirty or filthy jobs being done by people just like themselves. Sometimes, it takes a face-to-face confrontation for them to become aware.”

“So, why did you bring us here then?” Dexios asks.

“Because it is similar to the last piece of literature we evaluated,” Choragus explains. Then, with a smile, he adds, “Can you tell me how?”

The two chorus members purse their lips, thinking on the situation, taking in all the words, watching the scene. “Is it a type of judgement?” Aristeros asks, looking up at the leader. “You said people need an obvious situation to realize something, so could this woman have judged cleaners even though she had never met one before?”

“And that’s where the trees and birds come in!” Dexios adds, a sudden excitement in her tone. “This woman didn’t think beauty could be in such a place, and yet she sees it right in front of her eyes. She relates it to a happy place, but I think she’s describing the beauty of the woman in a not beautiful place.”

“So, what would the morals be?” Choragus asks.

This time, Dexios speaks. “We the chorus believe the moral of this story to be as follows: one must become aware of their surroundings in any situation, regardless of how tasteful it is
originally perceived, as well as the things one takes for granted, in order to see the beauty in places and actions typically scorned for being filthy.”

Choragus’s smile returns. “Wonderful.” Another snap, another flash of darkness. However, instead of an image forming, it remained dark. Aristeros opened his mouth to poise a question, as to where they were and why, when a male voice filled them empty void.

“My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (Shakespeare 1).

“Well, that’s rude,” Dexios murmurs. The voice continues to describe his mistress in unflattering means: her lips, skin and blush, and hair in unflattering terms, as well as breath that smells, the way she talks, all spoken of in a distasteful way (Shakespeare 1). Finally, an image of the mistress has filled the void, fit by a fancy frame, as the final lines rings, “And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare as any she belied with false compare” (Shakespeare 1).

“Well, he sure is in love with her,” Aristeros mocked, rolling his eyes. “Why would you describe your beloved that way? Why are we here?”

“This is another form of poetry, albeit different in ways from the last one,” Choragus explains.

Dexios nods. “I think the moral of this piece of literature is really obvious, based on the final couplet and how it relates to the rest of the verses. It doesn’t need over thinking.”

“How so?” Aristros asks. “All he did was mock her. I fail to see the romance.”

“But, at the end, none of her atrocities mattered to him,” Dexios points out. “That’s why it’s simple; he calls his love rare because of it.” Turning to Choragus, she states, “We the chorus
believe the moral of this story to be as follows: true, real love is blind. It does not matter what one looks like, but rather it is the condition and the character of their heart that is most important.”

“Splendid,” Choragus replies with a grin, then another snap. Suddenly, the couple finds themselves aside a stage similar to their own, yet vastly different. In the middle, a sandbox slopes towards the audience. A woman and a man are discussing something, while a younger man is standing on stage by the back of sandbox, waving his arms up and down in an exercise of calisthenics. “This is another play,” Choragus explains, “similar in ways to our own. Pay close attention, or you might miss it.”

The woman on stage points towards the chorus members, and Dexios and Aristeros attempt to shrunk back further among the darkness of off stage. “You! Out there! You can come in now” (Albee 2). From behind the members, a musician enters the stage, situating himself in a seat of his own. Then, after some discussion, the woman and man disappear off stage, grabbing an elderly woman by her armpits and proceeding to dump her into the sandbox, where she yells incoherently as the woman instructs the musician to stop (Albee 2-3).

“What have I done to the gods for them to bestowed this upon me…” Aristeros seems faint, swallowing languidly. Dexios watches with a wide-eyed expression.

The woman and man go to sit on a set of chairs opposite the musician on the far side of the stage. The man asks if they should talk, and the woman replies that he can, if he can think of anything new (Albee 3). The old woman in the sandbox begins to bang a toy shovel against a pail, still yelling (Albee 3), and Aristeros shrinks back into Choragus a little further.

The play stumbles on: the musician performs again, the old woman continues to act wildly in the sandbox, eventually turning towards the audience to complain and snaps at the musician to
cease playing before talking to the young man (Albee 3). Night soon comes, and the play continues, filled with absurdities neither of the chorus members could dream about, from self-aware comments to the old woman attempting to cover herself completely with the tiny toy shovel to the young man revealed to be the angel of death, with the musician continually playing (Albee 4-6).

“For once, words fail me,” Aristeros states, shaking his head as if to clear the .

“Choragus, why did you bring us here?” Dexios asks, confused. “That was nonsense. A bunch of illogical statements and actions thrown together with a haphazard set. What’s the point?”

“Would it help, perhaps, if I gave you contextual reference?” Choragus asks, and when the two chorus members nod their head, he continues. “This play is part of a literary genre called the theater of the absurd, and it emerged after great times of tribulation and war (Albee 1”).

“So it’s intentionally absurd?” Aristeros questions. “Now, I am sure I’ve witnessed it all.”

“While the morals and meanings of this story isn’t as obvious as the last story,” Choragus offers, “they are still there. What do you interpret them to be?”

“Well,” Dexios begins, “you said it occurred after great wars? Maybe everyone was tired of being too serious all the time and needed an outlet.”

“An outlet into the inane?” Aristeros mocks, then his eyes light up, an realization apparent. He turns to Dexios, who nods, before turning back towards Choragus. “We the chorus believe the moral of this story to be as follows: after times of great trials and wars, humanity strives to seek to ‘let go,’ which may lead them into the absurd at times. Life is about balance, and it endeavors perpetually to achieve its equilibrium.”
Choragus nods. “Perfect.” Another snap and, finally, the chorus members have returned to their own darkness. Around them are familiar faces, and their own story echoes amongst the void. The story where they don’t have to think about the morals, for they already know them inherently. Choragus turns to the others. “So, that was merely a small sampling of other types of short literature. What did you think?”

“While it was interesting, learned a lot, I think we’re best fitted for our dramas,” Dexios decides.

“I agree,” Aristeros nods. “Helping the audience understand the meaning and define the morals for them is our duty, but our the dramas are where we belong and, therefore, where we should stay.”

“There were so many types and different ways to show morals and meanings, I couldn’t imagine having to do all of them!” Dexios shakes, as if the idea of constantly hopping around various pieces of literature frightens her.

“Then shall we return to our own play?” Choragus asks as the first lines of the play echo through the void, announcing it’s time to restart the story again.

Dexios and Aristeros nod in tandem. “We shall.”
Works Cited


Oliver, Mary. “Singapore.”

Sophocles. *Antigone*.

Updike, John. “A&P.”