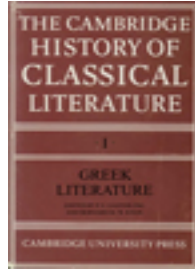


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12

COMEDY

I. INTRODUCTION

'It was produced in the archonship of Euthynus at the Lenaea by Callistratus. Result, first; second, Cratinus with *Kheimazomenoi* (not preserved); third, Eupolis with *Noumeniai*.' So runs the record for our earliest surviving comedy, the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes, and it refers to an occasion in the year we call 425 B.C.¹ At that time Aristophanes and Eupolis were near the beginning of their careers, young men in their twenties; Cratinus had won his first victory at the festivals some thirty years before, and Aristophanes, on the way up, could portray his distinguished rival as a figure from literary history, now a neglected old has-been with a drink problem.² It happens that the first date in that literary history is some thirty years earlier still, in a year reckoned to be 486 B.C., when a competition for comedies was instituted at Athens as an official event at the Dionysia, and the winner was one Chionides, a man remembered by posterity for little else.

If Chionides and Magnes are the names to mention from the first generation of writers of Athenian Old Comedy, as they are for Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1448a34), then Cratinus and Crates represent the second generation; Eupolis and Aristophanes are of the third and last. What we know about Old Comedy still depends, in overwhelmingly large measure, on the selection of eleven plays by Aristophanes which survive in medieval copies together with an inheritance of interpretative commentary, a corpus of marginal scholia which has offered a perennial invitation to scholarly interest and may have been of decisive importance in keeping the text alive through times when so much other literature was lost.³ As to the rest: papyrus fragments of plays or commentaries recovered by modern excavation, inscriptional records of productions, remains of theatres, works of art representing masks, actors, and choruses, quotations from lost plays and numerous statements of widely varying date and value about plays

¹ Ar. *Ach.* hyp. 1 Coulon: nothing else is known about either of the competing plays mentioned, and it has been suggested that 'not preserved' originally applied to both.

² Ar. *Knights* 526–36.

³ See above, chapter 1, pp. 34f.

and their authors – all this catalogue of material contributes to the construction of a fuller and more balanced account than can be given from Aristophanes alone, but it is still an account with a strong Aristophanic bias. We cannot help seeing the rest in terms of similarities to Aristophanes and (more cautiously) differences from him; and it is good to have that in mind from the first. Menander is another part of the story. His first plays were produced more than sixty years after Aristophanes' last, when the mode of comedy, like so much else in the Athenian world, had been transformed. Yet a reference to Menander and the New Comedy is in place here because the very substantial accessions of text from papyri published in the twentieth century must be admitted to have some effect on our views of comedy's earlier age. The new discoveries suggest new comparisons and contrasts, but they also remind us, if we care to look back to the time before their making, how great can be the differences between whole, partial and fragmentary knowledge.

For all their variety of theme and incident, Aristophanes' plays have a common basic pattern: a revolutionary idea, a way to change a situation which the hero will not tolerate, is carried against opposition and pursued through some of its consequences, which are good for some and bad for others. In *Acharnians*, for instance, a man who has had enough of wartime life in Athens makes a personal treaty with Sparta and sticks to it through all accusations of traitorous behaviour to enjoy his monopoly of the benefits of peace – an open market for imports, feasting, celebration and the chance to go back home again to his farm. Or in *Plutus*: the hero takes charge of the blind god Wealth, and, despite opposition from Poverty, has Wealth's sight restored by a miraculous cure so that poor but honest men (like himself of course) can be prosperous. It is characteristic of this kind of comedy that the issues involved are those of the public world – peace against war, right and wrong distribution of wealth – and that those issues are simplified and made concrete by being transposed into the private world of individual people and their families. Among other things, the public world includes education, modern versus traditional, as in *Clouds*; and it includes the performing arts, especially tragedy, as in *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs* and elsewhere.

As the themes of the plays are varied, so are their characters. Some, like Heracles and Dionysus, are familiar figures from myth, and probably appealed to many in the audience as old stage favourites: 'Heracles cheated of his dinner' is mentioned as a stock routine of comedy in the *Wasps* (60). Others represent real people of present or past (the latter can be seen in, or summoned from, the Underworld); and it is a good question how true to life the 'real people' are or were ever supposed to be. The art of Aristophanic portraiture is well compared to that of a modern newspaper cartoonist; it exploits, and indeed helps to create,

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the popular image of public figures, and (again like the modern cartoonist) it will sometimes present a satirical hybrid between the real person and a second imaginary identity, as when Cleon in the *Knights* becomes a Paphlagonian slave in the household of Demos of Pnyx Hill, the sovereign people. Demos, like John Bull or Uncle Sam, is an imaginative summation of the qualities of a senior member of the electorate. Here he serves to remind us that the very common tendency of the ancient Greeks to personify concepts, whether verbally or visually, can in comedy take the form of bringing the personified entity on stage: thus Reconciliation (Diallage) is thought of by the chorus of Acharnians as a fine young girl, just the one to set up house with in the country (*Ach.* 989); while in *Lysistrata* she actually appears in a walk-on part to bring Athenians and Spartans together (1114ff.). From the viewpoint of later comedy, and hence that of much modern drama, the specially interesting group of Aristophanic characters is the large one of fictional ordinary (and not so ordinary) people in their everyday social or professional relationships, ranging from leading characters like Strepsiades in the *Clouds* down to such as the lodging-house keeper and her friend in the *Frogs* (549ff.). Strepsiades interests us here not as the comic hero who has adventures with Socrates, but rather in the role he is given at the start of the play, a man with a teenage son whose life-style he cannot support. If such people often seemed like familiar contemporaries to their audiences, there were still ways in which their special identity as stage characters and their remote origins as part of a ritual were recalled. Comic actors, like all others, wore masks; but there was also a traditional comic costume, with padded paunch and posterior and (for males) a leather phallus worn outside their tights which showed under short clothes and, according to Aristophanes, could be used to raise a laugh from the small boys.¹ This costume, which is documented from representations contemporary with Aristophanes, can be traced back in art to a time long before we have any texts, as can the tradition of choruses made up of creatures of the wild (animals, birds, insects, fish), an inheritance which Aristophanes himself associated with early comedy in the person of Magnes, and was to exploit inventively in his own plays.²

The variety of visual effect is something that the reader of Aristophanes learns to recapture in imagination; the appeal of the music and dancing is irreparably lost, though the pattern and language of the lyrics can still evoke a response; and in his portrait of Cratinus in the *Knights* Aristophanes recalls two songs from the old master which were popular hits and became all the rage at parties (529ff.). From lyric writing to dialogue at a casual and unaffected level of everyday speech, the fifth-century comic poet has a whole vocabulary of

¹ *Clouds* 539: the phallus, like the padding (*Frogs* 200), could be referred to and used for comic by-play or taken for granted and ignored; on jokes for the boys, cf. Eupolis, *Prospaltioi* 244 K.

² Magnes: *Knights* 520ff. (see below, p. 364 with n. 2).

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different modes of expression at his command, and within them, like a modern comic entertainer, he can be both mimic and creator; he can produce laughter and suggest criticism. One main line of development in comedy, which can be seen in Aristophanes in the contrast between his latest plays, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus*, and the earlier ones, is the trend away from this highly colourful and 'poetic' writing to a much more uniform and naturalistic manner, to be perfected in the end by Menander. But for earlier comedy, the alternation between song and speech, between chorus and actors, is something vital and organic; and its nature cannot be properly appreciated without at least some consideration of the forms which that alternation takes.

2. STRUCTURAL PATTERNS IN OLD COMEDY

The simplest kind of pattern in Aristophanic comedy, and the one that is basic to its structure, is an alternation in the form A B A' B', where A and A' are lyrics in responson to each other, and B and B' are blocks of lines either for the speaking voice or to be recited to some form of accompaniment in the manner loosely called 'recitative': the technical term is *iambic syzygy* when lyrics interlace with the iambic trimeter of regular soliloquy and dialogue; it is *epirrhematic syzygy* where the longer tetrameter lines, anapaestic, trochaic and iambic, are concerned.¹ Not all of Aristophanes is written in syzygies: for instance, in prologues, before the chorus arrives, there are sequences of scenes without intervening lyrics; episodic composition, in scenes marked off by non-linking lyrics or none, is specially favoured late in the plays; and these sequences do sometimes have balancing elements, if only because some comic effects are enhanced by repetition. But the four-part syzygy pattern is basic; it can be varied in order, prolonged, and variously embellished; a great volume of critical work centres on attempts to define and explain its different manifestations in relation to the content and dramatic design of the plays, and in particular to project backwards from those features which seem most genuinely traditional towards a proto-form of comedy or comic revel. This whole line of enquiry stems largely from research into the origins and development of Attic comedy by Zieliński (1885); some important successors are Mazon (1904), Pickard-Cambridge (*DTC*: 1927, rev. 1962), Gelzer (1960), Händel (1963) and Sifakis (1971). Discussion can usefully begin from the choral parabasis, a characteristic feature of the fifth-century plays of Aristophanes which is absent from the two surviving fourth-century plays, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus*.

In full form, the choral parabasis has seven parts. It consists of an epirrhematic

¹ 'Recitative' means, in layman's language, something between speech and song; but, given that there was such a mode of delivery, it still is unclear how far this was varied, e.g. for different kinds of tetrameters or different styles within one kind: see for a brief discussion *DFA* 156ff., esp. 164.

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syzygy prefaced by a block of lines in a long metre, commonly anapaestic tetrameter, with their own matching introduction and conclusion. The whole pattern can thus be written A B C D E D' E'; but there are various ways in which it can be reduced, and it always is reduced when it is used for a second parabasis within one play. In the main parabasis of *Knights* (498–610) the correspondence between form and content is particularly close. In the syzygy, the two lyrics, D D', are miniature hymns, in which the chorus of knights invokes first Poseidon, then Athena; the two epirrhemes, E E', are each 16 lines of trochaic tetrameters (both the metre and the length, sixteen lines or twenty, both multiples of four, are canonical); the first subject is praise of the traditional valour and virtues of the knights, the second a euphoric account of their horses' novel and recent success in a landing of cavalry on an enemy shore. In this wartime play (424 B.C.) part of the appeal is the topical one to popular sentiment, but the chorus can be a comic chorus as well as representing the cavalry and the upper-class Athenians who served in it, and the victory they specially hope for is victory in the festival (591–4). In any case the dramatic action of the play is in suspense. The break with what has gone before is marked, here as elsewhere, in the short opening section we have called A, which sees the departing hero off the stage with a wish of good luck, and invites the audience to 'pay attention to our anapaests' (B C). The dramatic identity of the knights is not quite forgotten, for (507ff.): 'if any of the comic dramatists of old had tried to make us come forward (*parabainein*) to face the theatre and speak lines, he wouldn't have got his way easily' – but now, they continue, the poet deserves support as a brave outspoken man with whom they have enemies in common. Essentially, however, the lines are an advertisement for Aristophanes and an appeal for a favourable reception (end of B into C) which is hung on the peg of a defence: this is the first play, after a dramatic début three years ago, that Aristophanes has produced in his own name.¹ The *apologia* includes, among other things, Aristophanes' celebrated description of Cratinus and other comic poets which has been mentioned above already.

The reference to 'our anapaests' and the use of the term *parabainein* which we have just noted would of themselves suggest what is abundantly confirmed by the extant plays and recognizable fragments: namely that for the third generation of writers of Old Comedy and their audiences a parabasis such as we have described was an established component of a play, with certain familiar conventions. But the balance between convention and innovation was not always evenly poised, and there are some ways in which we can see it shift. The first five plays, *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, *Peace*, were successively

¹ Aristophanes was not alone in having some of his plays produced by others, and he went on doing so (e.g. *Frogs*). We do not know why this was done, but can accept that rivals and critics might carp: see *DFA* 84–6, with Plato *Com.* 99–100 K and *P.Oxy.* 2737 fr. 1 ii 10ff. (= *CGFP** 56, 44ff.).

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produced in the years 425–421, *Clouds* and *Peace* at the Dionysia and the others at the Lenaea. Of these, *Acharnians*, *Knights* and *Wasps* have a full parabasis, but in *Peace* there is one without epirrhemes (i.e. A B C D D'); in *Clouds*, where the other plays have their anapaests, the surviving revised version offers a single block of lines in another variety of parabasis metre, the Eupolidean (i.e. B for B C). Each time, with interesting consistency, the anapaests or their equivalent present a kind of literary discourse, an *apologia* for the poet, which can be spoken in the first person as if by him as well as in the way exemplified above from *Knights*; though in *Acharnians* (628f.) Aristophanes has the chorus claim that he has not previously seen fit to advertise himself. We can note here with the complete plays the evidence of a commentary on a lost play (? *Anagyros*) first published in 1968, which gives some quotations in sequence from anapaests and from the lyrics and trochaic tetrameters of a syzygy.¹ The four complete plays from the later fifth century are *Birds* (414 Dion.), *Lysistrata* (411, (?) Len.), *Thesmophoriazusae* (411, (?) Dion.) and *Frogs* (405 Len.). Of these, only *Birds* has the full form of parabasis; in *Thesmophoriazusae* the syzygy is reduced to a single epirrheme (E for D E D' E'); in *Frogs* there is simply a syzygy; in *Lysistrata* (614–705) there is a carefully balanced structure including two pairs of ten-line epirrhemes which looks like a special variant for a play with a chorus representing twelve men plus twelve women in two opposed halves.² The *apologia*, which was so prominent earlier, has now gone, even where, as in *Birds* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, there are the anapaests to accommodate it. Also absent from *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs* is the second parabasis, which, though shorter and more variable in form, is a regular feature of the earlier plays, granted that *Acharnians* is a special case.³ We noted at the outset that *Ecclesiazusae* (produced in 393 or 392) and *Plutus* (388) have no parabasis at all.

The parabasis is sometimes thought of as a kind of fossil, a survival from remote origins in a ritual, which has preserved and somehow transmitted to other parts of the play as they evolved the patterning which its own precise balance marks so clearly. What we see in Aristophanes is then the end of a long story: this component of the play, which is exclusively choral and does nothing to further the dramatic action, is in decline as the interest in organized dramatic action grows and the role of the chorus diminishes. It is easier to subscribe to the second part of this view than to the first, though one should still beware of supposing that the process of decline was necessarily as tidy as the limited set of data we have makes it look. In fact there is another well-established claimant,

¹ *P.Oxy.* 2737 (see p. 359 n. 1 above).

² We know of other plays in which the chorus was similarly divided, as between rich and poor in Eupolis, *Marikas* (421 B.C.), but not enough survives to show the shape of their parabases: see Webster in *DTC* 160; and for *Marikas* (*P.Oxy.* 2741) *CGFP* no. 95, 29n.

³ The choral performance at *Ach.* 971–99 can perhaps be seen as a hybrid between a second parabasis and the sort of ode which would be regular at such a place: Sifakis (1971) 35.

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some say a still stronger one, to be an archetypal element of comedy. This is the formal debate, for which the name *agon*, like much other technical terminology, is a legacy of the nineteenth century. In its canonical form, the *agon* has balancing epirrhemes in tetrameters in which the two principals present their arguments (E); each of these runs into a conclusion, like the anapaests of the parabasis, for which the traditional name is *pnigos* 'choker' (P); each again is prefixed by a matching exhortation (*katakeleusmos*) from the chorus (K); each half of the debate, so constituted, has one of a pair of lyric odes (O), and the whole sequence is rounded off by a concluding section, like that of the anapaests of the parabasis, namely the *sphragis* or 'seal' (S). Thus the basic alternation of ode and epirrheme is elaborated to the form O K E P O' K' E' P' S. If we now recall the simplified statement of the basic pattern of a play which served us for a moment above, 'a revolutionary idea . . . is carried against opposition', then we can say that an *agon* in the first half of the play tends to accommodate the main dramatic issue. But from the first Aristophanes is master of the pattern, not its slave.

In *Acharnians*, the revolutionary idea of a personal peace treaty with Sparta arouses powerful opposition, and might have been expected to offer a suitable theme for an epirrhematic *agon* in full form, but it does not: Dicaeopolis' main defence of his actions, when we reach it, is a speech in iambic trimeters based on the famous long speech by Telephus in Euripides' lost play *Telephus* of 438 B.C., and the whole unit (490–625), which is sometimes called a quasi-*agon*, is in form a simple four-part syzygy, with two matching choral parts in dochmiac metre and a further iambic scene roughly in balance with that of the speech. Then *Knights* has two epirrhematic *agons*, one before the main parabasis and one after; *Clouds* has two, both in the latter part of the play; in *Peace* 'there is not, strictly speaking, an *agon* as regards either matter or form', and so on.¹ But however the definitions are drawn, the pattern verifiably persists, and is still recognizable in the fourth-century plays when reduced to half of itself or less: *Ecclesiazusae* 571–709 shows the form O K E P; and *Plutus* 487–618, the role of the chorus still further reduced, has simply K E P for the debate between Chremylus, in favour of restoring sight to Wealth, and the figure of Poverty. In spite of all the variations, such a structure in a regular simple form could be imagined as the core of a primitive drama for chorus and actors, and as the growth point for the symmetries and balances which are seen elsewhere in the plays. The problem with this exercise in imagination, even though the patterns found in Aristophanes can be traced to some extent in fragments, is given by the two generations of plays which are lost; and Dover, writing in 1954, put the point crisply when he said 'we cannot extrapolate from Aristophanes'.² But if the search for patterns of proto-drama must at present remain a speculative one, the study of relationships between form and content in the surviving plays can

¹ *DTC* 200.

² In *FYAT* 139.

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be more rewarding, for the patterns are under pressure not only from the demands of subject matter within particular parts of plays, but from the trend towards an organized plot composed in the units we call 'acts' and away from a participating chorus. That trend we can to some extent follow by way of Aristophanes' later work to the *Dyskolos* of Menander and other plays of New Comedy. But there are still the missing generations in between.

3. THE EARLIEST COMIC DRAMA

If ever we recovered a series of comedies dating back to 486 B.C., it would still be an interesting question how much further the history of comedy could or should be pursued. What was the essential change which made the revel-songs of *komodoi* into comedy, and when did it occur? Aristotle confronted the problem, and much modern discussion takes off from the few remarks of his on early comedy which appear in the surviving part of the *Poetics*.

According to Aristotle, stages in the evolution of tragedy were marked by innovations associated with particular people (for example, Sophocles and the use of a third actor); but for comedy the innovators were generally unknown 'since in the beginning it was not taken seriously'.¹ The official recognition of comedy at Athens came 'quite late' (this is our date of 486 B.C.) and by then, when the names of the first comic poets are recorded, it had already 'certain formal characteristics'; before then, performances were by volunteers. Comedy, like tragedy, originated in improvisation.² The pattern of 'improvisation' Aristotle had in mind seems to be the one common to the Hellenic and many other cultures, with leader and responding chorus or group: the leader initiates the occasion and may 'improvise' or compose orally; the response of the group is previously composed or otherwise predictable; and there may, of course, be more than one leader and more than one group. Such a pattern can be illustrated from the lament for Hector in the *Iliad* (24.719ff.) where there are singers (*aoidoi*) to lead the lament; the women and then finally the whole people responding, while in turn Andromache, Hecuba and Helen intervene with speeches expressing their personal grief. Whether rightly or not, Aristotle saw the genesis of tragedy in 'the leaders of the dithyramb'; for comedy he thought of the leaders of the phallic songs (*phallika*) 'which still survive as institutions in many Greek cities'. But the claim to have originated comic drama came from more than one quarter. The mainland Megarians, notes Aristotle, claimed that comedy arose with them in the time of their democracy (i.e. in the period following the expulsion of the tyranny in the early sixth century); the Megarians of

¹ This paragraph quotes from chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the *Poetics*: here 1449a37ff., with 18f. on Sophocles, and continuing from 1449b1.

² 1449a9ff.

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Megara Hyblaea in Sicily also put in a claim, on the ground that Epicharmus, who was 'much earlier than Chionides and Magnes' came from there; and there were some dubious etymological arguments about 'drama' and 'comedy' in support.¹ Not surprisingly, when he looked back from the comedy of his own time, Aristotle found the element of invective and personal abuse a striking feature of early comedy, which he seems to have thought of as the natural successor in this respect to the development represented by Archilochus and other writers of abusive personal poetry.² The start of a movement away from that concept of comic writing is the one development on which he is precise: 'plot-composition came first from Sicily; of the Athenians, Crates was the first to move away from the iambic convention and write plots with subjects of general [and not particular] reference'.³

When he derives comedy from *phallika* such as were known in his own day, Aristotle is in some way using surviving primitives to confirm an evolutionary hypothesis. Descriptions of performances by *phallophoroi*, *ithyphalloi* and others compiled by scholars of the Hellenistic age can be taken to indicate what he had in mind.⁴ These traditional ceremonies, which have their parallels in other cultures, offer a number of points of contact with fully developed comedy: for instance, the performers are sometimes masked, and there can be a prominent element of invective and abuse which, as we have just noted, was something which struck Aristotle as characteristic of early comedy. What Aristotle found wanting, and what we lack also, is any record of the stages of development that may have intervened; and this is still true even if we make the most of the links between comedy and the hypothetical proto-comedy at the expense of their differences, and discount as far as possible the point that, by the time Aristotle and his successors made their observations, there was ample opportunity for the ostensibly primitive performances to have absorbed elements from formal comedy at a developed stage.⁵ In short, Aristotle's derivation of comedy is a hypothesis which is interesting and possibly correct, but he does not offer, and we cannot adequately supply, the means by which it might be verified.

We do not know how far Aristotle, if pressed, would have extended a definition of *phallika*; but the picture we can form of *komoï* that are possibly related to comedy is of increasing interest and diversity as the evidence of vase

¹ 1448a29-b2.

² 1449a2ff.: in other words, comedy became the natural medium for those who would earlier have been writers of iambs. See also 1451b10ff. and *Eth.Nic.* 1128a16-31.

³ 1449b5ff.: in mentioning Sicily, Aristotle no doubt had Epicharmus and Phormis in mind, whether or not their names were originally intended to be cited in some way.

⁴ The principal texts are from Sosibius (c. 300 B.C.: *FGH* 595 F 7) and Semus of Delos (2nd cent. B.C.: *FGH* 396 F 24); these are quoted by Athenaeus 14, 621d-f, 622a-d, and translated and discussed with others in *DTC* 132-47.

⁵ See *DTC* 132-47 with special reference to Webster's contributions to the revised version.

paintings and other works of art is exploited by intensive study and enhanced by new discoveries. Among the earliest to be quoted and the best known are the Attic vases which offer a line of ancestry for the theriomorphic choruses of Aristophanes and others: Sifakis (1971) includes an admirable discussion of previous interpretations. Examples are an amphora in Berlin (F 1830) and an oenochoe in the British Museum (B 509), both dated 500/480 B.C., which show a piper with two chorusmen dressed as cocks: the first one has them wrapped in mantles, and perhaps marching on, while on the second they are in a running dance-step. Another amphora in Berlin (F 1697) is dated as early as the mid-sixth century, and has a piper with three young beardless men in armour on the backs of three bearded men with horse masks and horse tails: Athenian knights, a century and a quarter before Aristophanes used them as a comic chorus.¹ Unfortunately (and this is generally true of the monuments which concern us here) there is nothing to show what occasion the representations recall, or with what cult it was connected. The vase with the knights was painted long before our date (486 B.C.) for the official recognition of comedy at the Dionysia, but could perhaps represent a performance there by the 'volunteers' mentioned by Aristotle. The two pictures of bird-dancers may be earlier than or just later than 486, but whether they are regular comic chorusmen, 'volunteers', or something else, they were painted in the lifetime of the first generation of Attic comic poets, and may therefore give a fair idea of the appearance of the chorus in the *Ornithes* of Magnes, whose flappings are mentioned by Aristophanes, the future author of plays called *Birds* and *Storks*.² Music, movement and colour were obvious elements to exploit in choruses of this kind, and the *Birds* is an outstanding example of what could be done. Such choruses could, like any others, have generated a patterned structure of composition by alternation with a leader; being very markedly special beings (even aristocratic young men on horseback) they might be expected to have something special to say to introduce themselves and dilate on their relationship – past, present or future – to the spectators; but something more is needed before a pattern of dramatic action appears.

Another important group of monuments consists of vases with padded or exaggeratedly fat (and sometimes phallic) dancers whose costume seems to relate them on the one hand to the human characters of classical Attic comedy in their conventional stage dress and on the other hand to satyrs and other semi-feral companions of Dionysus. Prominent among these are the Corinthian *komos*-

¹ These three vases are nos. 27, 26 and 23 in the List of Monuments in *DTC* 300ff.; they are illustrated in that book and often elsewhere, as in Sifakis (1971) plates i, vi, vii–viii; Bieber (1961) figs. 124, 123, 126; cf. Trendall and Webster (1971) under 1, 12 and 1, 9.

² Ar. *Knights* 520ff.: the other choruses referred to are *Barbitistai* 'Lyre-players', *Lydians*, *Psenes* 'Gall-flies' and *Batrachoi* 'Frogs'; the 'lyre-players' could be musical satyrs, the *Ornithes* (pace Aristophanes) could as well mean 'Cocks' as 'Birds', and in this instance chronology does not rule out the idea that the two vases actually commemorate the play. Cf. Muscarella (1974) no. 49, a terracotta statuette possibly recalling Aristophanes' *Birds*.

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vases which are the subject of a special study by Seeberg (1971); they are the source of some scenes that have often been discussed, since a very influential article by Körte (1893), for the sake of the evidence they may give for early Dorian dramatic dances and hence for the claims by some Dorians to have originated comedy itself. Of special interest here are the elements of story or plot that have been recognized. An amphoriskos in Athens (NM 664), dated 600/575 B.C., shares with other vases a representation of the Return of Hephaestus: Hephaestus had imprisoned Hera by his magic, and now Dionysus and companions bring him home, fuddled with wine on a mule, to release her; two 'padded dancer' figures are present.¹ A fine (but notoriously puzzling) column-krater of the same period in the Louvre (E 632) has two scenes which are possibly to be read in sequence: in one, alongside a dancing padded figure with a companion who pipes for him, two figures named Eunoi ('Kindly') and Ophelandros ('Helpmate') are carrying off a krater, watched by a third figure with two sticks, whose name is Omrikos ('Rainer' or 'Umbrian' or what?); while in the other scene two male figures are imprisoned next to a stack of kraters, and a female seems to be bringing them food.² The story of the Return of Hephaestus, a popular myth, can be seen as an ancestor, perhaps even as a prototype, of adventures like Dionysus' quest in Hades in Aristophanes' *Frogs*; it is known from Epicharmus, one of the first generation of comedy writers.³ Eunoi and Ophelandros are persuasively interpreted as satyr-like followers of Dionysus in an escapade of stealing wine and then suffering for it (Omrikos is recorded as a title of Dionysus at Halicarnassus); or they have been taken as thieving slaves; or as part of the preparations for a party; and the story of crime and punishment (if that is what it is) is compared with that of the 'men stealing produce' which (we are told) was a theme of a traditional form of folk-drama in Sparta acted by players called *deikeliktai*.⁴ But the party that leads from simple celebration to boisterousness, violence and then redress is a recurrent topic of comedy from Epicharmus onwards;⁵ and the transforming effects of wine may be the link between the two scenes of an Attic black-figured cup of 530/510 B.C. in Thebes (BE 64.342), which was first published in 1971. This skyphos has on both sides a frieze of old men with large heads, well taken as representing masks, and long white hair and beard; both times they are accompanied by a piper, but

¹ Seeberg (1971) no. 227a (with 227b–c and 228); *DTC* no. 38 and fig. 5 (with nos. 39 and 47; and Attic versions, nos. 8 and 11); Bieber (1961) fig. 130; Trendall and Webster (1971) 1, 4.

² Seeberg (1971) no. 226; *DTC* no. 41; Bieber (1961) fig. 132; Trendall and Webster (1971) 1, 6.

³ *Komastai* or *Hephaistos*: an entry in Photius confirms the subject that the title suggests, but the fragments (84–6 Kai, 47–9 Ol) add little: see further Webster (1959) 62–4 and in *DTC* 171–3, 265; *CGFP* under no. 85.

⁴ The source is Sosibius, as cited above, p. 363 n. 4.

⁵ Epicharmus 148 Kai, 175 Ol; Ar. *Wasps* 1253–5; and later Eubulus, *Semele* or *Dionysus* 94 K; Alexis, *Odysseus hypainon* 156 K.

the first set stride or dance along in a decorous way, wearing large *himatia* and leaning on big sticks with white or woollen caps to them; the second set are standing on their heads waving their legs to the music, like Hippocleides half a century before, who did this in front of his prospective father-in-law, and 'danced away his marriage';¹ one recalls also Philocleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, and his progress from respectable (if obsessive) juryman to uninhibited reveller (1253–5; 1299ff.).

If the useful result of investigating the structure of fifth-century comedy proves to be the recognition of basic and potentially productive patterns rather than the extraction of a single archetypal proto-form, the study of pre-literary *komoî* may likewise be better directed towards those elements of myth and motif which we can see were productive rather than to a search for origins and development in an Aristotelian sense. Yet one of the most interesting circumstances (it may be) is revealed by Aristotle's remark that comedy 'was not taken seriously' from the first, and gained official recognition at Athens relatively late. There may have been many centuries of pre-history in which cult-ceremonies made no recognizable move in the direction of drama. Judged by the test of results, the most significant moves in that direction were made in sixth-century Attica, though one sees that cross-influences between different cities' institutions could easily occur, and rival claims easily arise over matters that often can have admitted no very precise definition. In time, tragedy and satyr play gained the measure of identity that organized festival competition presupposes; comedy could take, in response to them, a no-holds-barred attitude to conventions, and perhaps carried already, in the variety of forms its early constitution accommodated, the capacity to adapt and transform in the ways it so strikingly did. The mainstream became Attic, and possibly always had been.

As to the Megarians (returning to Aristotle for a moment) not much dependable information survives, but we can at least confirm that there was a local comic tradition from occasional – and of course condescending – references in Attic writers.² The claim from the Megarian side that comedy developed there in the time of their democracy seems to be asserting that comedy in the 'iambic' tradition was a Megarian invention. That claim is matched by, and possibly responsible for, the setting up of a founder of Attic comedy called Susarion, from Icaria (like Thespis, the founder of tragedy), and of a date, duly recorded in the third-century Parian chronicle, for the first comic performance (the date fell somewhere between 581 and 560 B.C.: the part of the inscription which gave it is now lost); nor are we astounded to find a tradition that Susarion was a

¹ Trendall and Webster (1971) 1, 13, referring *inter alia* to Hdt. 6.129 for Hippocleides and to Pollux 4.104 for a Laconian dance of *hypogypones*, old men with sticks.

² 'Laughter stolen from Megara', of stock routines, *Ar. Wasps* 57 (422 B.C.); other allusions by contemporaries in Eupolis 244 K (referred to above, p. 357 n. 1) and Myrtilus, *Titanopanes* 1 K; earlier, Ecphantides 2 K.

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Megarian anyway.¹ What core of truth there is in all this will probably never be known. If there had been any substantial amount of information about sixth-century comic artists in the Athens of Aristotle's day, it is hard to credit that what we gather from him about the dispute over priorities would take the form it does; but the pointers to the earlier sixth century are interesting in view of the independent evidence from the *kómoi* of the vases, which must have been organized by someone, 'volunteer' or whoever. Epicharmus, though we know much less of him than we should like, is of a different order of reality; and if Plato and Theocritus can rank him as the supreme writer of comedy and as its inventor, then the citizens of the Sicilian Megara, which claimed him as a favourite son, were not simply men labouring under delusions of local loyalty.² It is to Epicharmus and the west that we should now briefly turn our attention, before further exploration of the Attic mainstream.

4. EPICCHARMUS AND OTHERS

Syracuse was a Corinthian colony; Corinthian influence has been seen in sixth-century representations of dancers produced in Sicily;³ and there are reports from Hellenistic sources of *kómoi* in the west similar to those of the Greek homelands and like them of indeterminable antiquity.⁴ The early colonists could have been expected to transport and foster institutions from their mother-cities; but growth is often different under another sky. Epicharmus, by repute, lived to be 90 or more; he was perhaps born, as some think, as early as the mid-sixth century; in later ages, and possibly from his own lifetime onwards, he acquired a remarkable reputation as guide, philosopher and friend to everyman from the miscellaneous didactic poetry that circulated under his name. If we believe that he really was 'much earlier' than the Athenians Chionides and Magnes, we may wish to think of him as active at a date before 500 B.C.;⁵ but for our purposes, he comes most clearly into focus as a comic writer in the Syracuse of Hieron I in the 470s, in a circle whose distinguished visitors included the lyric poets Simonides, Bacchylides and Pindar, and the tragedian Aeschylus, who wrote his *Aetnaeae* in honour of the foundation of a new city of Aetna and also gave the *Persae* its Sicilian première. In writings of this time Epicharmus

¹ Parian chronicle: *IG* x11.5, 444 ep. 39 = *FGrH* 239 A 39, quoted with other relevant texts in West (1972) 147–8; cf. West (1974) 183f.

² Plato, *Thrt.* 152e; Theocritus, *Ep.* 18, an inscription for a statue set up in Syracuse.

³ *DTC* nos. 67–8; cf. Payne (1931) 124.

⁴ For *phlyakes* as the south Italian equivalent of the Spartan *deikeliktai* etc., see Semus of Delos (quoted above, p. 363 n. 4); and cf. *schol. in Theocr. vetera*, p. 2 Wendel, on a *komos* to Artemis Lyaea at Syracuse: *DTC* 135ff., with text p. 296.

⁵ The three ways of escape from Aristotle's 'much earlier' (*Poetics* 1448a33: see above) are that it is corrupt, interpolated, or an exaggeration, and each has found advocates: perhaps most of the data are satisfied if E. was born about 530 and became known in the decade before the first (as opposed to the second) Persian War.

and Pindar both allude to one of Hieron's incursions into mainland Italo-Greek affairs, when he set himself up in 477 B.C. as the protector of the western Locrians;¹ Aeschylus met with the comic poet's mockery over a favourite word of his; but it is (unfortunately) no more than a possible conjecture from the title that Epicharmus' *Persians* is connected with its Aeschylean namesake.² References elsewhere to the iambic writings of Aristoxenus of Selinus and to the choliambic poet Ananius suggest that Epicharmus and at least some of those for whom he wrote were well enough acquainted with poetry in the 'iambic tradition'; but the abusive political topicalities of a Cratinus were not for him, and, one supposes, hardly could have been in the ambience of Hieron's court.³

Individual play-titles, when we have virtually no text, may only serve to remind us of what we should like to know and do not; but when studied collectively they can show something of the trend of a dramatist's interests. In lists and from quotations, we have some 40 titles of plays by Epicharmus (biographical sources give figures of 35, 40 and 52; but there is no saying in any case what proportion survived of those he wrote); of these, about half indicate subjects from myth, like the *Komastai* or *Hephaistos* which has been mentioned already in connexion with the Return of Hephaestus as a subject of sixth-century vase-painting. *Komastai* or *Hephaistos* and at least two other titles (*Bakchai*, *Dionysoi*) suggest themes from adventures of Dionysus; others who provided subjects for several plays each are Heracles and Odysseus, the hero of strength and the hero of resource. The context often seems to have been given by the story of a confrontation with a special trial, giant or monster, as for instance in *Heracles and the girdle* (of the Amazon Queen, or another?), *Odysseus the deserter* (in the army before Troy), *Bousiris* (Heracles and the king of Egypt who proposed to sacrifice him), *Cyclops*, *Sirens*; and similarly with other heroes, as in *Amykos* (Castor, Pollux and the pugilist king of the Bebrycians); *Pyrrha* or *Prometheus* (the Flood); *Skiron* (starring Theseus, presumably) and *Sphinx*. The take-off point can be a particular treatment in more serious poetry (and no doubt was, more often than we are sure): the Sirens sing to Odysseus' crew in a parody of a Homeric hexameter; but then, from a scrap of dialogue which survives, the temptation they offer is the typically comic one of feasts with a variety of delicious seafood.⁴ The contrast between heroic occasion and unheroic behaviour is seen again in *Odysseus the deserter*, which has been thought

¹ Pindar, *Pyth.* 2.18ff., with Schol. *ad Pyth.* 1.98 (= Epich. 98 Kai, 121 Ol); it is anyone's guess if the play in question, *Nasoi* 'The Islands' also alluded to the Syracusans' attempt to colonize Pithecusae/Ischia after their famous naval victory over the Etruscans in 474 (Strabo 5.4.9; Livy 8.22.6).

² Schol. *ad Aesch. Eum.* 626 (= Epich. 214 Kai, 194 Ol); for Aeschylus' *Persae* in its Sicilian context, cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.71–80, an ode written for Hieron's chariot victory of 470.

³ Aristoxenus: *Logos kai Logina* 88 Kai, 112 Ol. Ananius: *Hebas gamos* 58 Kai, 22 Ol; note Pindar, *Pyth.* 2.54ff. on Archilochus; and for the abuse in *Megaris* (90 Kai, 114 Ol) cf. *Wasps* 1308ff.

⁴ *Seirenes* 123–4 Kai, 70–1 Ol; *Odyssey* 12.184ff.

to take off from the story of Diomedes and Odysseus in *Iliad* 10; it has two characters, probably these two, in a scene where Odysseus seems to be preparing some kind of cover story for an operation that had gone by no means according to plan; in another snatch of text, a Trojan apparently says he has been accused of traffic with the Greeks because he accidentally lost a neighbour's piglet, and one can look ahead to Aristophanes' debunking of the emotions which cause war in the *Acharnians*, with his fiction of the contraband puppy that launches three hundred ships.¹ One of Heracles' gifts to the comedian was his legendary appetite for food and drink. There is a vivid description of him at the table in *Bousiris*, guzzling, champing, snorting and wagging his ears (21 Kai, 8 Ol); his wedding feast in *Hebas gamos* (revised as *Mousai*) called forth a virtuoso narrative, which, to judge from the surviving excerpts, must have catalogued a good number of the edible creatures of the Mediterranean as well as other delicacies.² But the flavour of the writing is not easy to catch, whether from short excerpts or gappy papyrus fragments; there is no evidence for the shape and structure of the plays, and no sign of the metrical variety of fifth-century Attic comedy; if the source which reports that two plays were written wholly in one metre really had whole plays and not abridgements, we have to think of a very different use of actors and chorus.³ That said, there are in the non-mythological as well as in the mythological plays a number of motifs which had interesting developments elsewhere, and it could be among plays of this group above all that Aristotle found a trend towards the kind of comedy whose beginnings in Athens he associated with Crates. Perhaps the most often quoted is a figure with many descendants in fourth-century comedy and its derivatives, the professional sponger or parasite, from *Hope or Wealth* (35 Kai, 103 Ol) – a man who will dine anywhere given an invitation (or not), who flatters and sides with his host at every opportunity, eats and drinks well, and then goes home alone through dark and mud, facing a mugging, to a bed with no bedclothes.

Some other titles are of special interest because they point in two directions, both to Attic drama and to the much less well-documented tradition of the literary mime, which extends from Sophron (whose early years in Syracuse probably overlapped with Epicharmus' old age) to those Hellenistic writers whose work may have been specially influenced by Sophron, among them Theocritus and Herodas. Epicharmus' *Thearoi* 'Visitors to Delphi' (79 Kai, 109 Ol) has a description of dedications to Apollo which recalls Euripides'

¹ *Odysseus automolos* 99–100 Kai, 50–1 Ol, augmented in 1959 by text from *P.Oxy.* 2429, *CGFP* no. 84; *Ar. Ach.* 541ff.

² *Hebas gamos/Mousai* 41–75 Kai, 11–40 Ol; among unidentified fragments of Doric comedy is one which may be *Bousiris*: *P.Heid.* 181, *CGFP* no. 223.

³ Hephaestion, *De metris* 26.10, on *Epinikios* and *Choreuontes*, wholly in anapaestic tetrameters. Some deny that Epicharmus had a chorus at all, probably unrealistically, given some of his plural play-titles; if he had, neither its size nor the distinction between actors and chorus need have been the same as in Attic comedy.

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chorus in the *Ion* (184ff.) and Herodas' ladies in a temple of Asclepius in the fourth Mimiamb; to the same family belong Theocritus 15, the ladies at the Adonia, as well as lost works by Aeschylus (*Theoroi* or *Isthmiastae*), Sophron (*Tai thamenai ta Isthm'ia*) and a late comic poet Euphron (*Theoroi*, 7 K). Another literary family with representatives in Epicharmus is the dialogue or debate, as of *Land and sea* (23–32 Kai, 93–102 Ol) and *Logos kai Logina* 'His argument and hers' which immediately recalls the two *Logoi* in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Right Argument and Wrong, as the other recalls a mime-title of Sophron's 'The Fisherman and the rustic'.¹

There were other writers of comic plays in the Doric dialect besides Epicharmus: we have slight records and remains of Phormis, mentioned as a contemporary, and Deinolochus, of a younger generation. It is fairly easy, and sometimes of significant interest, to mark out common ground between these writers and Attic drama, much harder to be sure how far common developments speak for influence in one direction or the other. The plain story is that in the course of the fifth century, Attic drama became overwhelmingly dominant, and the Athenian festivals set the standard; where local and dialect drama survived, it was not to compete with established tragedy and comedy, but essentially to fill the gap in popular entertainment that full-dress plays left open. Some few names survive of people whose developments or recreations of these local traditions were thought worth remembering; among them is that of Rhinthon of Syracuse (or of Tarentum?) writing about 300 B.C. and blending, apparently, the literary tradition of tragic burlesque with that of the local festival performers whom the Italian Greeks called *phlyakes*.² Once Athenian comedy turned away from its involvement with the life of contemporary Athens and became universal (a movement which, as we have seen, Aristotle traced to Sicily), western Greeks could join others from all quarters in writing in the Attic mode, whether in Athens or elsewhere; but that is basically the story of the age after Aristophanes.

5. MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKING

Near the end of their journey through the Underworld in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus and Xanthias hear a mysterious noise, and then see a most remarkable creature, large, frightening, and all shapes at once: now a cow, now a mule, now a beautiful woman; but then suddenly dog-like with a face lit by fire;

¹ On this kind of dialogue see Coffey (1976) 29f. Drama and non-dramatic discourse can be very much alike in it, as in a papyrus fragment which has been thought of both as a speech by a comic doctor in a play by Epicharmus and as part of a (?pseudo-)Epicharmean treatise, perhaps *Chiron*, spoken by the centaur Chiron himself: *P.Sak. inv.* 71/2 GP 6 5673, first published by Turner (1976) 48ff.

² See above, p. 367 n. 4. Rhinthon is later than the last of the so-called 'phlyax vases' which document performances of Attic and of local comedy in southern Italy from the late fifth century through the first three quarters of the fourth: see Trendall (1967) 9ff.

'it must be Empusa', says Dionysus (293); and it has, finally, one leg of bronze and the other of cow-dung. 'The cow-dung', notes Radermacher in his commentary, 'is probably comic invention.'

Comedy can be very interesting for the fragments it preserves of old myths and popular beliefs; and here indeed is a primitive-looking apparition, a sinister compound of animal and human, like a thing from a child's nightmare or a folk-tale. The opposite point, that comedy refashions and recreates its mythical material, is one that is rightly stressed in a valuable study by Hofmann (1976) of myth in comedy with special reference to Aristophanes' *Birds*; and this applies to a story of the creation like the one told in the *Birds* or to the gods and heroes and their adventures at large in just the way that it does to such a detail as the leg of an Underworld bogey.¹ If it is hard to define precisely what we mean by myth, it is not easy either to form a view of the various ways in which myth (in one sense or another) inspired the comic imagination. The possible importance of that source of inspiration has been indicated already by our rough reckoning that about half of Epicharmus' plays had themes from myth. When we come to stress, as we now must, the variety of use that comedy makes of mythological subject matter, Empusa and some kindred figures can open up the topic in a way that may be instructive.

With mythical material, as with anything else in comedy, the control to interpretation given by context is a vital complement to what can be learnt by static analysis and comparison. Empusa in her context in *Frogs* is part of a sequence designed to give the impression of a magical mystery tour through Hades. The leg of cow-dung (let us agree) is probably comic invention; it adds momentarily to the laughter. But whatever else, Empusa has two elements, sexual attractiveness and terror, which are present and emphasized precisely because Dionysus is to react to them: these emotions here and elsewhere in the play are part of the comic portrait (for the god of the *Frogs*, in matters of sex and courage, is a good step nearer those followers of his, the satyrs, than is the god of Euripides' *Bacchae*); and the traditional Empusa figure, with the emphases given by context and comic refashioning, plays its minor part in bringing this out. Later on in the *Frogs*, there is another interesting apparition, namely the dream from Hades which comes to the Girl in Distress in Aeschylus' parody of a Euripidean solo lyric (1331ff.). This is that well-remembered child of black Night, with a shiversome dreadful face, black-corpse-clad, looking bloody murder, and equipped with a soul that is no soul and big nails. From Rau, Barlow and others one can follow in detail the working of the parody and assess its validity as a reflection of Euripides' lyric style;² our point here is simply that this time Aristophanes has put a monster together which is something more than

¹ Hofmann (1976) 161ff.; and 177–96 on the creation story in *Ar. Birds* 685ff.

² Rau (1967) 132f.; Barlow (1971) 44f.

a denizen of the Underworld: it is part of a demonstration piece in musical and dramatic criticism. Similar components are found in the imagery of political attack. At *Knights* 75ff. Cleon is a relatively plain kind of monster, a giant, all-seeing, with one leg in Pylos and the other in the Assembly, as well as other parts in places chosen to suggest theft, venality and moral turpitude; but at *Peace* 751ff. Aristophanes looks back in anger, and imagines himself having attacked, in the spirit of a Heracles, a creature with a whole gallery of un-amiable characteristics, some of them borrowed from Hesiod's Typhoeus (*Theogony* 820ff.): there is a horrible smell; instead of snake-locks, the tongues of a hundred flatterers surround its head; it has snapping dog-teeth, a voice like a toxic torrent, and so on. In this final example, an element of story or action is just perceptible if we reflect that Aristophanes casts himself in the role of Heracles performing a labour. The unlovely portrait is perhaps something that gave Aristophanes special satisfaction: it is repeated in *Peace* almost word-for-word from *Wasps* (1029ff.).

Of course, more elevated figures still from the mythological pantheon can be pressed into service. For instance, Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* recalls from comedy not only Pericles and Aspasia being satirized as Heracles and Omphale, or Heracles and Deianira, but quotes from Cratinus' *Cheirones* a bogus Theogony in lyric, in which Stasis and Cronos unite to produce the supreme tyrant, Pericles Lord of the Dome (his head, not the sky), and Katapygosyne (Lady Lewdity) bears Aspasia to be his Hera.¹ More elaborately still, in the *Dionysalexandros*, Cratinus involves Dionysus in a comedy of mistaken identity over the Judgement of Paris and the Trojan War and (we are told) 'Pericles is satirized very cleverly by indirect means as having brought the war on the Athenians'.² Perhaps these are enough instances to carry the point that the fifth-century Athenian's inheritance of myth and folk-tale could be exploited in comedy for anything from a passing allusion to a whole sequence of action or plot, and that sometimes complicated sets of overtones could be conveyed. Cratinus' lyric Theogony is being satirical about mythical genealogies and at the same time about certain personal qualities of Pericles and Aspasia, but he also chooses to present it in a manner which debunks the elevation of the high mode of choral lyric. The adventure story of the *Dionysalexandros* is amusing at one level because it makes a romp (and sometimes a decidedly down-to-earth romp) of a story of gods and heroes; but it also gives a kind of framework for reflecting on and criticizing contemporary politics which we can legitimately set alongside the framework from everyday life which Aristophanes provides for his fantasy of Demos and the politicians in the *Knights*.

¹ Plut. *Per.* 3 and 24 (Crat. *Cheirones* 240–1 K): Cratinus called Pericles *kephalegeretas* after *nephelegereta*, the Homeric epithet for Zeus Cloudgatherer.

² *P.Oxy.* 663, col. ii fin. = *CGFP* no. 70: see below, pp. 378, 383f.

MYTHS AND MYTH-MAKING

What kinship (if any clearly traceable one) may exist between the comic poet's mode of creating figures like Demos or Right Argument and the process which created figures of myth is a question which needs to be opened here rather than discussed. The special case of mythological comedy which does need our attention is that of myth as reflected in tragedy, and conveyed to the comic stage by derivative and allusive treatments for which there are many varieties and names (travesty, parody, burlesque, quotation, imitation and so on). The full influence of early tragedy on early comedy is not likely to be well assessed without more texts of both than we have; but parody and tragic allusion in Aristophanes have been very carefully studied;¹ we have noted already in discussing structure that Aristophanes' interest in the *Telephus* of Euripides has certain possible implications for the composition of the *Acharnians*, and (little though we still know of the *Telephus*) there is something more to add if one also relates the sequence of incidents in that play to the *Thesmophoriazusae*.² Wholesale burlesque of tragedy, especially the thrilling kind of Euripides, is something that begins in the fifth century and is extremely popular in the first half of the fourth; unfortunately, our only complete specimen of this genre is the putative original of Plautus, *Amphitruo*, perhaps to be dated about 330 B.C. What we can sometimes trace is the way in which, in time, comedy absorbs from tragedy some of what might be called the grammar of dramatic composition: a motif or a piece of technique is taken over by way of parody or burlesque, and comes to stay as part of the comic dramatists' stock-in-trade. An example might be the recognition scene in Aristophanes' *Knights*, full of pointed parody, in contrast with that of Menander's *Perikeiromene*, where the fainter hints of a poetic tone are hardly more than a reminder to the audience that life is sometimes like literature.³

The words 'myth-making' in the heading to this section were put there to call attention to the point that, though comedy borrows so much of its mythical material, it often transmutes what it takes. There is, of course, quite another sense in which comedy can be said to make myths, and that will escape no one who has considered what the effect of Aristophanes' portraiture has been on the impression posterity has of Socrates, Cleon and Euripides. Further thought on the nature of these portraits must enter into our discussion of some other kinds of comedy; the entry of mythical elements into all of them will make it plain that any tight classification is out of the question.

¹ Rau (1967) with bibliography 220–3.

² Handley and Rea (1957), Rau (1967) 19–50, Webster (1967) 43–8.

³ Ar. *Knights* 1232–52, with Rau (1967) 170–3; Menander, *Pk.* 349ff. (779ff. Sandbach), with *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 126–8 and 41–2; and see below, pp. 385, 395, 420f.

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6. POLITICAL COMEDY

The *Acharnians* opens with a scene in which Aristophanes faces the audience for a few moments with a man who, like themselves, is waiting for something to happen. He is thinking over, as perhaps they are, some past experiences of music and drama at the festivals. He specially liked 'the five talents that Cleon disgorged' (6). It is a guess (but a good one) that this is a reference to a recent comedy, probably Aristophanes' own play *Babylonians*, produced the year before. He will return to the topic of that play. What the man is waiting for, it soon appears, is an assembly of the people; but 'the Pnyx here is empty' (20) and he is the only one on time.¹ What he wants is a formal motion on peace with Sparta; all he gets is Reception of Delegates and Reports – or that would have been all, but for the fact that he is an Aristophanic hero, and there is one Amphi-theus there, whose pedigree from Demeter (no less) plus a contribution of eight drachmas travelling expenses, makes possible a miraculous journey to Sparta and the personal peace-treaty, the hero's revolutionary idea, from which the rest of the action springs. The mixture of fantasy and realism is about to become more diverting still. There is violent opposition from the men of Acharnae, who form the chorus; their hatred of the enemy is sharpened by what they have lost themselves in the invasions of Attica, and our hero must defend himself. To do this, he borrows, in the way we have already noted, from the role of Euripides' hero Telephus, the king of Mysia who came to Agamemnon's palace in disguise, and found himself defending the Trojans against Greek demands for invasion and revenge.² But twice, briefly, yet another identity appears, that of the playwright, speaking with the actor's voice: 'And I know what happened to me with Cleon because of last year's play, when he dragged me into the Council and slandered me practically to death. . . ' (377); 'Cleon will not slander me now for abusing the city in front of foreigners: this is the Lenaea, and we are on our own' (502ff.). This sequence of incidents illustrates as well as any single example can the diversity of elements which make up ancient political comedy. It was, as we gather, an exciting game for a good young player.³ It is one where the play, at our distance of time, is not at all easy to follow.

We are far from knowing the full story of Cleon's action against Aristophanes. But it shows well enough that in fifth-century Athens, as in other societies which have taken pride in being free, there was still tension, sometimes aggravated into conflict, between those who pushed their freedom to its utter limits

¹ Line 20, as quoted here, gives the scene; the man's name, Dicaeopolis, becomes known much later (406).

² See above, pp. 361 and 373; and below, pp. 384f.

³ This view assumes that Aristophanes personally was the object of Cleon's attack; the actor is then speaking for the writer (but need not have been Aristophanes himself); the matter is disputed because the play was officially in the name of Callistratus (above, p. 355; p. 359 with n. 1).

and those who, for various reasons, sought to draw those limits tighter. In or about 442 B.C., when Aristophanes was no more than a child, comic productions at the Lenaea gained the official status they had already had at the Dionysia for some forty-five years.¹ This must reflect some measure of growing public enthusiasm for comedy, even if we allow for the consideration that productions of tragedy were similarly recognized at the same time or soon after. The other side is given by the record of a decree of the year of the archonship of Morychides (440/439 B.C.: schol. *ad Ar. Ach.* 67) 'against attacking people by name in comedy'. One would like to know much more about the terms and effects of this measure, and not least who was supposed to be protected by it; it was repealed in the third year after its passing. 'They do not allow comic attacks and abuse directed against the People', says a critic of the Athenian democracy writing not far from this time, 'or they might suffer abuse themselves; but against individuals they encourage this.'² In the affair of the *Babylonians*, Cleon must have been able to argue that the production of Aristophanes' play had been contrary to public interest; and Aristophanes, for his part, can hardly have found the proceedings before the Council a pleasant experience. Yet within the year he was at work on the *Knights*, with Cleon cast as a rascally slave, with Demos, the Sovereign People, as a gullible old master (even if he is transformed at the end) and with an unflattering description of a debate in the Council thrown in for good measure.³ The *Knights* won first prize. Within weeks, the villain of the piece was voted into office as one of the ten generals.

Plainly, in favourable circumstances, both comic poet and politician had a capacity to bounce back from blows which might have been expected to floor them. What happened when popular support was less sustaining is harder to say. What (for instance) did attacks in comedy contribute to the discredit and suspension from office of Pericles in 430?⁴ How influential was opposition to the comedy of personal attack (in particular laws against it) in the movement away from that kind of comedy in the later fifth century and the early fourth?⁵ The problem with such questions is not only the limited amount of contemporary evidence that bears on them; it is that the nature of comedy's image-making is in itself so infinitely varied. Plato, at all events, was someone who understood and did not underrate the comic poet's capacity to make his images live on in the mind, whether for evil effect or not. In the *Apology* (18b-d, 19c) Socrates

¹ *IG* 11² 2325; *DFA* 113 with 40f.

² Pseudo-Xenophon, *Ath. Pol.* 2.18.

³ *Knights* in progress, cf. *Ach.* 301; debate in the Council, *Knights* 624ff.; see also *Wasps* 1284ff. with MacDowell (1971) *ad loc.*

⁴ See Schwarze (1971) with Gomme (1956) on Thucydides 2.65.4 and de Ste Croix (1972) 231ff.

⁵ Horace (*A.P.* 282ff.) and others treat the transformation of comedy by legislation as a fact of literary history; yet the only legislation we know of for sure is the decree of 440-439 B.C. already mentioned; and its effect was transitory.

presents the *Clouds* as a prime example of the man-in-the-street's idea of him as an unscrupulous intellectual quack; and it could well be that the play fostered the prejudice which was to prove so powerful a weapon in his accusers' hands. Then in the *Symposium* (221b) Alcibiades is praising Socrates' behaviour as a member of a defeated and retreating army, and Plato (this time with a more benevolent recollection of Aristophanes) has him allude to a description, again in the *Clouds*, of Socrates stalking through the streets of Athens with an air of superiority to his surroundings, his eyes scanning the scene.

As to political policies, in the *Frogs*, written twenty years after the clash with Cleon, the chorus is still claiming the right to offer the state good advice (686ff.). Through his chorus, Aristophanes there advocates the restoration of full citizen rights to the disenfranchised and the dismissal of low-class politicians in favour of leaders with some of the traditional values and virtues. This does not perhaps at first sight seem like particularly stirring stuff; but one ancient scholar is quoted for the statement that the play was so much admired for its parabasis that it was actually given a repeat performance.¹ Whether or not that was so, the parabasis in which the advice was given begins with a spiteful allusion to a contemporary politician who could be taken, and was no doubt intended to be taken, as a type-specimen of the species that Aristophanes holds up for disapproval. The politician is Cleophon, with his voice like a Thracian barbarian's (675ff.); and it was the same man who gave his name to the play which came third to the *Frogs* in the festival competition, the *Cleophon* of Plato, the comic poet who was Aristophanes' slightly older contemporary. The years of war and revolution which have intervened since Aristophanes' youth still leave it possible, in 405 B.C., for politics to enter into comedy and even to be a foreground subject of it.

Wars with Sparta and her allies in fact went on almost continuously through Aristophanes' early life, from his 'teens to his forties; and in modern times, when war and fear of war have affected people universally, his expression of some of man's basic longings for peace is something which has had a special appeal. Yet if we slip into thinking of plays such as *Acharnians*, *Peace* and *Lysistrata* as if they were part of a political campaign, there is a danger of overlooking something more basic about the way in which Aristophanic comedy operates. The pains and problems of the complex, intractable world of political reality are transformed by Aristophanes into a simpler and more colourful world where they will yield to a man's wishes if he has pluck and luck enough. That is not to say that the portrait of a contemporary situation can simply take leave of reality. There would be no fun in a new fantastic solution to the real world's problems if the real world itself seemed to be being left behind. The comic poet can be an acute observer, and may be motivated by strong (and not necessarily system-

¹ Dicaearchus in *Ar. Frogs* hyp. 1 (= fr. 84 Wehrli).

atized) views of his own. But his selection of detail and his presentation of issues and arguments need only answer to the demands he sets himself within the medium of a comic play designed to amuse a large audience and capture the public imagination; he need not respond to the different demands which would be made of a documentary reporter or a propagandist.¹

Wars bring death, mutilation and misery; but comedy does not dwell on these things. Its portrait of the effects of war, much like that in some wartime plays of later ages, is more of the ordinary man's frustrations, discomforts and longing for a better life. The painful depths remain unplumbed, just as the heights of courage or patriotic devotion are not scaled. But ordinary everyday things, on which most people focus for most of their lives, have more evocative power than is commonly admitted; and it would be wrong, if we return again for an example to the opening of the *Acharnians*, to see no more than an amusing allusive monologue in the words of the man who, as he says, hates the city and longs for the place where he belongs, his home in the country where he could produce basic necessities and not have to buy them from traders in the streets (33–5). The theme of peace and plenty and rustic bliss is a recurrent one in this play and the *Peace*, as well as in the fragments of *Georgoi* (so one would expect from a play with a chorus of farmers); and after several years of war, the audience can hardly have needed much prompting to respond to it.² But Aristophanes is often much more direct. 'How can you say you love the People?' Cleon is asked in the *Knights*, '— when for seven years now you've seen them living in barrels and turrets and places for vultures to nest in, and you don't care: you've got them shut up and you're taking all the honey'; and still (the accusation continues) you scorn and reject proposals for peace when we get them.³ The 'No Peace, no Sex' campaign, the brilliant idea by which the women in the *Lysistrata* end the war, is a theme which allows Aristophanes to give something of a woman's-eye viewpoint. There is the wife who wants news (510ff.): 'Often enough, at home, we'd hear how you men had gone wrong over something big; and we'd smile and ask with a sinking feeling inside "What was it you decided to add to the treaty in the Assembly today?" "What's that to you?" he'd say, "Shut up!" And I did.' Then later (591ff.) Lysistrata points out that though she and the other wives miss their men in wartime, it is worse for the girls growing old without a husband. 'But don't men grow old too?' she is asked. 'Not the same thing at all. A man can come back from the war with grey hair, and he's married to a young girl in no time; but women are so soon past their best...' Naturally there were other sides to the picture of war: the young cavalymen

¹ The point is well put by Gomme (1938) 102f.; on A.'s political outlook in general, see de Ste Croix (1972) 355–71.

² See for instance *Ach.* 247–79, 665ff., 989ff. (p. 357 above); *Georgoi* frs. 107, 109, 110 K; *Peace* 556ff., 571ff., 1140ff.

³ *Ar. Knights* 792–6; for background see Thuc. 2.16–17, 52.2; 4.15–23, 41.4.

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who form the chorus of *Knights* present themselves with plenty of panache; Dionysus recruited to the fleet can be drilled by Phormio like the rawest of raw recruits; early in the war, Pericles can be accused by a comic poet of downright cowardice for not living up to his brave oratory.¹ But basically, war and comedy did not agree with each other; and if the Aristophanes of *Peace* and *Lysistrata* sometimes seems over-sentimental in his vision of the warring states working together for peace and rejoicing together when they get it, there is still no reason to deny him a core of sincere pacifist feeling beneath all that.

One thing which the comic poet shares with the common man is a realistic, not to say earthy, attitude to the motives on which people act, especially eminent people. Thus in the passage of *Knights* referred to above, it is not enough simply to charge Cleon with not caring about overcrowding in Athens; it is insinuated by the metaphor of taking honey from the bees that he is somehow using the situation to line his pockets as well. Bribery and corruption, with whatever truth or degree of truth, are constantly said to have been at work whenever a person or a policy earns strong dislike; personal idiosyncrasies, especially social and sexual behaviour, are freely admitted to a kind of relevance by association. Pericles 'the Olympian' and his Aspasia, as we have noted, lent themselves readily to translation into a number of mythological roles.² The insinuation in Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* that Pericles somehow, like Paris, plunged the world into war from self-interest, for the sake of a woman, is akin to, and may in part have inspired, the notion in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* that the root cause of the whole embroilment was three brothel-girls, one kidnapped Megarian and two from Aspasia's house taken in retaliation: that was why the Olympian stirred up a certain local commercial friction with his Megarian decree worded like a drinking song (*Ach.* 515ff.). Looking back in the *Peace*, in a passage which has been called a 'malicious and quite unnecessary sideswipe at Pericles', Aristophanes has Hermes say that the trouble began with the trial of Phidias (he was accused of fraud over gold supplied for the making of the statue of Athena for the Parthenon); and then Pericles stirred up the flames of war to make a smoke screen for himself and avoid any similar attacks.³ Fortunes change: inside ten years, in the *Demoi*, Eupolis is resurrecting Pericles as one of the great statesmen of the past who will scrutinize Athens' present condition and advise her.

The scope of ancient political comedy is wide. It ranges from passing

¹ *Ar. Knights* 498–610 (above, p. 359); Dionysus joins Phormio's fleet in Eupolis, *Taxiarchoi* (25off. K, with *P.Oxy.* 2740 = *CGFP* 98; and cf. pp. 383ff. below; Pericles as 'King of the Satyrs', Hermippus, *Moirai* 46 K, cf. Schwarze (1971) 101–9.

² See above, p. 372 with n. 1.

³ *Peace* 605ff.; the quotation is from de Ste Croix (1972) 371; for attacks on Pericles' friends, see Gomme (1956) on Thuc. 2.65.4.

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allusions to contemporary people and events as far as the embodiment of a whole political situation in a play; and that situation can be transformed just as well into a setting from myth as it can into one of everyday life. But further, since the field of Athenian public affairs that might be called political is so extensive, a discussion of political comedy could take illustrations from many more passages and deal with many more topics than have been selected here – not least passages concerning the management of state finances and the administration of justice. In those areas, political comedy, especially as seen in the *Wasps*, shades over into what is more conveniently called social comedy. As to their political attitudes, comic poets, as critics of the present, are very easily labelled by turns as conservatives and as idealists; for they most naturally contrast what is bad now with what was good then or what would be good if. . . For Aristophanes, in so far as we can recognize the man beneath the work, there seems no reason to deny either label; yet for someone of Cratinus' generation, he was a smart young man, tarred with the same brush of intellectualism as Euripides.¹ One feature of the representation of public affairs in comedy, whatever selection we make, is so prominent in its importance both for a historical and for a literary approach that it deserves a final word of stress. That feature is the element of creative imagination or fantasy which dominates the design of a play, however true to the real world details and individual incidents or characters may be; for one good part of the effect of the well-conceived play is to offer an escape from that world into a fictional one where dreams (or at least some of them) come true.² It is that aspect of comic invention which must be our next main concern.

7. ADVENTURE AND FANTASY

The *Birds* of Aristophanes begins with the entry of two men who are on a journey. Popular fiction is fond of far away places; and fifth-century Greek comedy is no exception. The very idea that people are travelling, be it far or near, is one that can be relied upon to make reader or audience take notice. Three other plays of the eleven, *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Frogs* and *Plutus*, all begin with two people going somewhere. In *Birds* (as indeed in *Peace*) the journey is to the world above the earth; in *Frogs*, as in the *Demoi* of Eupolis and in other plays known only from fragments, a part of the action takes place in Hades. The dramatist enacts an escape from the world about us by physical transposition of the action into another.

The *Birds* missed the first prize in 414 B.C., but won second. One wonders if anyone asked Aristophanes, in the course of the celebrations, how he arrived at

¹ Cratinus 307 K kills two birds with one stone by coining the verb *Euripidaristophanizein*.

² This point is well taken by Connor (1971) 180f.

the idea that two people should leave Athens in search of peace and quiet and end up founding a new city in the sky, Nephelokokkygia – that Cloudcuckooland whose name has entered the English language as that of a specially insubstantial kind of Utopia. Perhaps he could have told his questioner, perhaps not: creating is one thing, reconstructing the process another. For readers of a remote age, there are still more hazards in the way; yet there is still some point in reflecting on certain of the elements in the creation and how they relate to each other, even if we do not presume to be drawing an Aristophanic mental map.

Why birds for a chorus? *Ornithes* was not a novel title; and Aristophanes had known as much for ten years and more (*Knights* 522: above, p. 364 with n. 2). But the non-human chorus, which we have taken (and Aristophanes himself may have taken) as a survival from a very primitive type of comedy, is something that still held its place in the later fifth century precisely because it continued to offer possibilities to the imagination. Not least, such a chorus, by challenging or inviting the audience to identify with it, offers a kind of transposition, not necessarily in physical space (though moving to the bird-world in the sky does this) but at any rate into a new non-conventional and perhaps purely escapist system of values. 'If you will follow our way' the argument tends to run 'you will have all these good things which you do not now have.' Accordingly, Aristophanes' chorus of birds, after more elaborate claims on the attention of mankind, which include asserting their role in the Creation,¹ at last come on to some very concrete benefits of being winged: with wings, a man could go home from the theatre for lunch and return; he could fly off and ease himself in comfort; or he could fit in a visit to another man's wife while her husband was safe in his front seat (785–96). Two variants of the same motif can be noted in passing. At *Clouds* 1115–30, the chorus of Clouds addresses the judges, promising them good weather if they favour the play, and bad if not (in the event they did not);² and in a fragment of the *Theria* of Crates the animals which gave the play its name are to be found arguing the benefits of men eating radishes and fish: this was in fact one of a series of plays with fantasies on the 'Land of Cockaigne' theme – free and effortless food, whether in an idealized past or somewhere else over the rainbow.³

One can of course have a fantastic plot without running to a non-human chorus, just as one can have a strikingly decorative chorus without imitating the creations of nature. But the choice of birds as a chorus gave Aristophanes some very special opportunities, visual and musical, and one can see from the text how eagerly he grasped both. It is a main function of the first two hundred lines of the play to build up to an elaborate sequence of song and choral

¹ See Hofmann (1976) quoted above, p. 371 with n. 1.

² The play came third, and Aristophanes did not conceal his disappointment (hyp. vi Coulon with 524f.); for the form of this appeal, cf. *Birds* 1101ff.

³ On this theme see Baldry (1953).

parade.¹ The bird motif is present from the first, and in a form typical of the way in which Aristophanes creates stage spectacle from language. *Ornis* means both 'bird' and, by extension, 'omen'. Ordinary men might be expected to have an omen for their journey, but Aristophanes' two heroes have the literal thing, a bird each from the market. Their errand is to a bird-man, Tereus, the legendary king who became the hoopoe. Before they meet him, there is a preliminary routine with a bird-servant;² then dialogue with the Hoopoe leads to the idea of founding a new bird city, and the birds are to be called together to be persuaded. Music and song are natural to the occasion. The Hoopoe first calls to his mate, Procne, the nightingale, in an attractive little lyric (209ff.), to which the response is nightingale song in the form of a solo by the piper; and then he summons at large birds of field and garden, of mountain, marsh and sea (227ff.). The words ingeniously slip from bird-call to human speech and back again; the metrical structure hints, but hints clearly, at a virtuoso song and dance with changing mode and movements as each group of birds is summoned.³ At last, when the birds do arrive, there are individual decorative costumes to excite comments and wonder. There were other plays in which members of the chorus had individual identities (Eupolis' play *Poleis*, for example, appears to have had a chorus of individually named cities, frs. 231–3 K), but it is hard to see that there can have been a better opportunity for show. Certainly for later ages the *Birds* represents the musical side of ancient comedy at its spectacular peak.

Less tangible, perhaps, but still significant as a constituent of the play, is the set of ideas which relate to air and the elevated setting in the sky. 'Elevated', *meteoros*, is a word which prompted one of Aristophanes' best-known visual jokes of all, when in the *Clouds* he presents Socrates elevating himself literally in a basket so that he can raise his mind (figuratively) to higher things and mix his thought with the air which (he asserts) is its like (227ff.); similarly, words for 'fly' and 'take wing' (as at *Clouds* 319) can refer to intellectual excitement as well as literal elevation. The relationship between *Clouds* and *Birds* in the use of this complex of imagery has been perceptively recognized;⁴ and it is well represented in the long sequence with the men who want wings from the new bird city. Cinesias, the dithyrambic poet, wants wings to fly and collect material for preludes from the clouds, preludes full of air, snowflakes and heavenly chiaroscuro (1383ff.). An informer, who is the next applicant, is given a discourse on the power of words to make men's minds 'take wing' (1437ff.). There is a way in which the whole play can be seen as an imaginative take-off from reality into a world of air in which a man with nerve and a good gift of

¹ Gelzer (1976) gives a well-balanced discussion of the early part of *Birds*.

² Like master, like man: so with Euripides' servant at *Ach.* 395ff. and Agathon's at *Thest.* 39ff.

³ Fraenkel (1950); Dale (1959). ⁴ Gelzer (1956) esp. 79ff.

arguing can have things all his own way and end by bringing even the Olympian gods to make terms. Gilbert Murray (1933), for whom *Birds* is a type-example of a 'play of escape', gives a good sketch of the trials and tensions of Athenian home and foreign affairs at the time of the play, from which an escape would no doubt have been welcome. There were many things of pressing concern to contemporary Athenians which do not strike the surface in *Birds*. On the other hand, as Murray rightly emphasizes, there are still stinging references to some of Aristophanes' pet political hates – Cleonymus, Peisandros, Dieitrephe, Cleisthenes. Typically of the technique of political comedy, these men are mercilessly attacked for their real or exaggerated personal foibles, a godsend to the modern political cartoonist just as to the ancient comic poet: a fat figure, lack of a beard when most men wore one, the classic cowardice of throwing away one's shield in a retreat that has become a rout.

There is, for all that, in *Birds* as in other fifth-century comedy, another kind of engagement with reality which has a special role in relation to plays with fantastic situations. Somehow, it seems, the dream is only delectable if the real world keeps rearing its head. So if (as happens at 1035ff.) a professional drafter of decrees visits Cloudcuckooland, his offerings – which, be it noted, are in prose¹ – are not only amusing as a reflection of the ways of political legislators: we recognize the invasion of the real world into the clouds as having a function akin to those vividly realistic elements we sometimes meet in pleasant dreams. The mission of Poseidon, Heracles and a foreign god to negotiate a deal with the birds has both elements of fantasy and elements of satire against established (in so far as it can be called established) Olympian religion. But what is also interesting, not least with the perspective given by our knowledge of later developments in comedy, is the degree of character contrast between three individuals engaged in the same action: Poseidon, consciously senior; Heracles, tough and simple, ruled by appetite and mood; foreign god, the racially underprivileged element, with (among his other problems) broken Greek. At the beginning of the scene (1565ff.) an extra dimension is given by the fact that Our Hero, whom the gods have come to visit, is far too preoccupied with cookery (grilling birds, condemned rebels against the ornithocracy) to notice his visitors; as negotiations develop, points of Attic law (including a quotation from Solon, 1661ff.) come into the argument: these realistic details point up the fantasy, the satire and the component (in so far as we recognize it) of social commentary.

Of the play that was placed first over *Birds*, the *Komastai* 'Revellers' of Ameipsias, we know no more than that one fact. Third came a play of which just enough is known to make us wish, as so often, that we had more: namely, the *Monotropos* 'Solitary' of Phrynichus. 'I am called solitary –' (so runs a quotation, fr. 18 K) 'I live the life of Timon: no wife, no slaves, sharp temper,

¹ So is the law quoted at 1661ff., and the prayer at *Thes.* 295ff.

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unapproachable, mirthless, speechless, my own man entirely.' Here was another way of escape – misanthropy, the conscious rejection of one's fellow men and their ways. A few years earlier, at the Lenaeon festival of 420 B.C., Pherecrates had put on a play *Agrioi* 'Savages' whose chorus apparently gave a collective portrait of a similar sort, of life without its conventional values and encumbrances. Timon appears again as a type-example of misanthropy at *Birds* 1549, and once more when Aristophanes takes up the theme in 411 B.C. in a lyric of *Lysistrata* (805ff.). Two points concern us here. Timon of Athens, thanks above all to Lucian and Shakespeare, is better known as a fictional personality than as a real one; but real he apparently was, and he is worth remembering as an example of the way in which real people do lend parts of their identities to imaginative creations. What begins as satirical portraiture of an individual sometimes persists and contributes to the establishment of a dramatic type. It does not of course follow that Pherecrates or Phrynichus was interested in the ethical motivation of their respective misanthropes in the way that Menander was interested in the hero of his *Dyskolos* or *Misanthrope* a century later (indeed it is most improbable that either was). But if Timon is first of all useful as a reminder of one more way in which reality becomes fantasy, a kind of comedy which turns on one or more of its characters' social behaviour is well worth observing as one of the fifth-century developments which was to have a long future.

If 'fantasy' in this discussion has seemed to be a somewhat elastic term, there are ways in which 'adventure' could be stretched even further. Merely to encounter a body of (let us say) Ant-men, a chorus of Goats or Fish, makes for an adventure as typical of Old Comedy as it is untypical of life or literature in general. Yet there is one kind of adventure story which deserves special mention here, however brief. That is the kind which involves adventures of the god of drama himself, Dionysus, of which the type-example is *Frogs*; other plays with Dionysus by Aristophanes' principal rivals have already been referred to above, namely *Dionysalexandros* by Cratinus and *Taxiarchoi* by Eupolis.¹

Adventures of Dionysus are a theme common to tragedy, satyr play and comedy. From the point of view of comedy they have a particular interest, like that of the animal choruses, in representing what is very likely to be a primitive element with a very long history which still held its place in fifth-century competitions. A motif which is recurrent in Dionysus plays and which has a future in plots of adventure and mistaken identity, is that which can be conveniently called disguise (the precise application of this term to a god in one or more human roles is not something that need detain us here). In *Dionysalexandros*,

¹ *Dionysalexandros*, *P.Oxy.* 663, as cited above, p. 372 with n. 2, with quoted fragments 37ff. K; it is arguable that *P.Oxy.* 2806 (*CGFP* *76) is from the play's parabasis: Handley (1982a). *Taxiarchoi*, see p. 378 n. 1.

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Dionysus, for what reason we do not know, appears in the role of a shepherd on Mount Ida, no doubt a bungling novice, and finds himself standing in for Paris, judging the goddesses' beauty-contest, collecting Helen from Troy, vainly disguising himself as a ram and her as something else (perhaps a goose) in order to escape detection and revenge; then finally he is handed over to an imprisonment which – we are sure – he will escape. The chorus was of satyrs (though there may have been a subsidiary chorus of shepherds or herdsmen); the occasion of the play, for the sake of which we have referred to it already, was an elaborately contrived attack on Pericles. In *Taxiarchoi* (the chorus was presumably made up of officers of that rank), Dionysus is not a *soi-disant* shepherd, but a recruit to the fleet of Admiral Phormio, in which (among other things) he learns some drill and has a rowing lesson which Aristophanes very likely remembered when it came to the rowing scene of *Frogs*.¹

Frogs, like *Birds*, is a play with a very full measure of music and poetry; and that is by no means solely because it has a contest between tragedians as a major theme. Like *Birds* with its re-embodiment of the creation myth, it refashions for its Dionysiac adventure plot a set of popular images of the Underworld. As with *Ornithes*, Aristophanes knew *Batrachoi* as a very old title.² The *Frogs*' chorus, which is a splendid extra, gives place to the chorus of Initiates in the Mysteries for the elaborate sequence of processional hymns which is the choral parodos. Dionysus, first playing Heracles, then as literary critic, has an air of the happy amateur such as we seem to recognize in him when he plays shepherd or sailor. Looking back from later comedy, we can see how this early comic tradition of adventure with mythical background is very heavily overlaid by the type of myth-burlesque which derives primarily from tragedy, especially the later and more adventurous kind of Euripidean tragedy. That, together with the part of *Frogs* which means most to most people, the literary debate, will be among the topics which concern us next.

8. THE LIFE OF THE MIND

In 438 B.C., when Euripides produced the tetralogy of plays which includes *Telephus*, Aristophanes was still a boy. He may have seen the production on his first or an early visit to the theatre; but whether or not, thirteen years later in *Acharnians*, we find him using one of the high spots of the play, its hero's major speech, as a model for a speech by the hero of his comedy, and taking over much of the context as well. Another fourteen years pass: in 411, in *Thesmophoriazusae*, the whole sequence is remade for a quite different dramatic context. In *Frogs*, in 405, the famous play of a generation ago is still fair game; even in *Plutus*

¹ Cf. Wilson (1974); Harrison (1976) 137; Handley (1982 b).

² See p. 364 with n. 2.

(we are by now fifty years on) there is still an allusion either to *Telephus* or to Aristophanes' own reminiscence of it in *Knights*.¹

Many other illustrations could be chosen to show that Aristophanes' interest in forms of literature more elevated than the one he practised was not only early but lasting. But a point which the *Telephus* offers immediately is that being topical about politics and being topical about works of the creative mind can be two very different things from the viewpoint of the comic poet and his public. True, there are lasting political issues and there are matters which politicians are never allowed to forget; true also that some literary and intellectual movements are transitory. But in general the distinction suggested here seems to hold: in the life of the mind there is a certain timelessness, the creator living through his creation, and by most people strongly identified with it; this is something which it is useful to remember as a corrective to the simple idea of comedy as a mirror of the contemporary scene.

Literary allusions in Aristophanes range from Homeric epic to plays produced at the last dramatic festival. Commonest are allusions to the tragedians, and among them much the most prominent is Euripides, who is in fact a character in *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Frogs*. Here, as so often, we recognize Aristophanes as heir to a considerable comic tradition. The entertainment that comes from reinterpreting stories of the gods and heroes in new down-to-earth terms is, we find, effectively reinforced by a simultaneous downgrading into the new context of the poetic language of one or another of the previous versions of these stories. A similar verbal incongruity is created when the ordinary man in comedy rises above the everyday language which might have been appropriate to his situation and borrows elevation from a more highly-wrought poetic counterpart of the feelings he is to express. Under the terms allusion, parody and burlesque modern discussions of comedy include a whole galaxy of comic effects of this kind. Examples have been mentioned in other contexts above from early Doric comedy as written by Epicharmus as well as in Attic plays by Aristophanes' much older contemporary Cratinus.² Three more references to Cratinus will show that neither literary subject matter nor poets as characters were unexpected on the fifth-century stage. His *Archilochoi*, dated soon after 449 B.C., is a forerunner of the *Frogs* in the sense that it involved a contest between 'Archilochus and company' on the one hand and Homer, perhaps with Hesiod in support, on the other; the *Odysses*, a plural title of the same sort, brought on 'Odysseus and company' in a parody of the Cyclops story from the *Odyssey*; *Pytine* 'Wineflask', the play which won first prize over *Clouds* in 423, had Cratinus himself as a character, in contention between his wife Comedy and his mistress Liquor.

¹ *Plut.* 601, *Knights* 813 = Eur. fr. 713 TGF.

² Pp. 367ff., 372f.

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It is often asked whether there was any more than sheer entertainment in the comic writers' representations of poets and poetry. In one way, perhaps, the question is a reaction against the studious pursuit and discussion of allusions by commentators: can an audience of thousands, one wonders, have shared *en masse* the educated man's reaction to a literary hit? Surely not all of them: but modern experience of satirical revue shows that it is not necessary for all of the people to see all of the jokes all of the time. Laughter is infectious; satire can have several levels; and in theatrical performance voice and gesture, sometimes allied with costume and staging, can add significantly to the effect of the words. A good example, not least because we have the whole of the text being parodied, is the take-off of Euripides' *Helen* in *Thesmophoriazusae* 846–928. The basic situation is clear and broadly comic. Euripides' kinsman (Mnesilochus, as he is often called) has been caught dressed up as a woman acting as his agent at the Thesmophoria. In hope of a rescue he takes on roles from Euripidean adventure plays, first sending a message by a device from *Palamedes*, then turning to last year's productions, *Helen* and *Andromeda*, for Euripides to play the hero to his heroine in distress. When we come to detail, not only is the mock-tragic elevation of the two principals brought down to earth time and time again by the presence and interventions of a third party, an uncomprehending guard, but there are extra nuances of criticism, direct or implied. For instance, the long prologue speech of the *Helen* is transacted in 16 lines, including interruptions, with a wickedly precise selection of quotations; there are elements of visual and musical parody (855, at Proteus' tomb; 914f., lyrical moment of recognition); and there are minor quirks and distortions of language which would puzzle no one amid the general amusement, but add to the refinement of appreciation by those who knew their Euripides well.¹

The same multiplicity of appeal is surely to be recognized in the sequence of scenes which represents the peak of ancient literary comedy, the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides in the second half of *Frogs*. It is interesting that after the Dionysiac adventure story of the first half of the play, Aristophanes takes special care to build up to the agon between the poets (738–894, prefacing 895ff.); then immediately after their debate he sets out to anticipate, by sheer flattery of the audience, any lurking objection that the scenes of competition that follow will be too highbrow (1099–1118).² Even lacking the music, we can make something of the caricature of Aeschylean lyrics by Euripides, and of Euripidean by Aeschylus: the Aeschylean parody is full of heroes' names and recalls epic or early choral poetry with its trailing dactylic rhythms; the specimens of choral writing and solo in the manner of Euripides are presided over by a muse who appears in the role of a castanet dancer and are represented by

¹ For detailed discussion see Rau (1967) 53–65.

² Not only are they clever; they even read books: cf. above, p. 9 and Turner (1952) 22.

Aeschylus as trivial, modern and debased below the standards of true tragic art.¹ There is a level at which all this can be appreciated as sheer ragging. There is another, potentially more serious level of appreciation if we respond not only to the portrayal of the two contrasted styles but to the technical criticisms of the metric of the lyrics, both explicit (as at 1323) and implied. But there are two other levels at which both the contrast of lyrics operates and the whole literary debate of which it is part. The individual arguments, jokes and illustrations are part of an antithesis between traditional and modern in tragedy, as it might be a clash of generations; and they are part of a further antithesis between traditional and modern morality, a clash of ideals. It is no accident that in the *Daitales* 'Banqueters' of 427 B.C., Aristophanes' first production, the Good Son has been reared on Homer and the Bad Son on rhetoric, or that Phidippides in the *Clouds* gives his father such grief by condemning Simonides and Aeschylus, and reciting a speech of Euripides about incest between brother and sister (1371).² The doctrine, to put it in Aeschylus' words from the *Frogs* (1054f.) is that 'little children have a schoolmaster to teach them; but the youth have the poets'. The idea that literature is to do with education is one that still causes deeply engaged argument; and it may well be that the *Frogs* was a force in its first formulation and eventual diffusion.³

If we ask what part the personalities of the two debating poets, Aeschylus and Euripides, have to play in this picture, it will be as well to remember that Aeschylus had been dead for more than 50 years, some years before Aristophanes was born, and neither the comic poet nor the vast majority of the audience could possibly have had any personal memory of him. Euripides could have been (though we have no reason to suppose he was) a familiar Athenian figure with personal idiosyncrasies recognizable to many; but even so, unless any feature could in some way be related to aspects of his dramatic technique, it could hardly be helpful to the overall comic effect and might even prove distracting. The scene in *Acharnians* (407ff.) of Euripides composing at home with his feet up, surrounded by the costumes of past productions, is one that at first sight might look like portraiture; but the portrait is very much more of the type of intellectual poet than of an individual; it is closely related to the purposes of the context and has close kin in the portrait of Agathon in *Thesmophoriazusae* (95ff.) and in a long series of works of art with portraits of poets composing.⁴ If we can rely on the independence of the tradition that Agathon was a handsome man, then the scene in *Thesmophoriazusae* does exploit a personal characteristic in the course of a satirical portrait of the writer's poetry. The idea, interesting

¹ Rau (1967) 125ff.; cf. Barlow (1971) 44f.

² *Daitales* 198ff. K, esp. 198, 222 (= frs. 1, 28 Cassio (1977)); note also *Clouds* 964ff. on musical education old and new.

³ Snell (1953) 113-35.

⁴ Handley (1973) 106.

as part of the early history of the concept of *mimesis*, is that the beautiful write beautifully, that it is logical to dress up as a woman to write about women, and so on. But essentially the portrait is of the poetry, not of the person.¹

The plain man's view of the intellectual is, as we have seen, a prominent ingredient in comedy's portraits of the literary scene. So it is, as would naturally be expected, when we come to philosophers and the comedy of ideas. The line is led by *Clouds*, with Socrates as a character; but Aristophanes was not alone in this genre: there are immediately to hand some interesting parallels with plays by contemporaries from which we may select. In *Clouds* (95ff.) the audience's first intimation of the topics which are discussed in Socrates' Reflectory is the idea that the cosmos can be understood in terms of a stove; this is noted by a commentator as having been used already by Cratinus in ridiculing the natural philosophy of Hippon of Samos.² Then in the *Konnos* of Ameipsias, the play that came second over *Clouds* in 423, Socrates is referred to as hungry and lacking a cloak, in a way which recalls the lines in the *Clouds* about 'the rogues, the pale shoeless men of the company of the miserable Socrates and Chairephon' (102ff.). Callias, and the sophists whose company he kept, were the target of satire in Eupolis' *Kolakes*, placed first over *Peace* in 421 (the setting of the house of Callias was used again by Plato in his *Protagoras*); finally, there is the famous quotation from an unidentified play by Eupolis, which goes: 'I hate Socrates too, the beggar, the idle talker, who has thought out everything else, but how to get food to eat is something he's neglected' (352 K: compare *Clouds* 175–9).

Forewarned as we are by now of the nature of comic portraiture and of the existence of a flourishing style of satire against the philosophers in fifth-century comedy, we need not be surprised either that the initial presentation of Socrates in the *Clouds* is of an old man talking airy nonsense while suspended in the air (218ff.), or that Plato in the *Apology* makes Socrates recall the incident and the part it played in prejudicing people against him (19c, 18b).³ The basis of the joke is to be found in comedy's constant tendency to take metaphors literally and to translate abstract or intellectually recondite notions into concrete or familiar ones.⁴ Socrates, in order to think about things above the mundane level (*meteora*), is literally *meteoros* or 'elevated' himself. But at the same time, the word *meteoros* has a range of meaning which will extend to suggest a variety of things including astronomical interests (Socrates claims to be 'thinking about the sun', 225) and supernormal brainpower (Socrates, as if god speaking to

¹ Cf. Bruns (1896) 156ff.; admittedly the joke is funnier because of Agathon's known effeminacy.

² Cratinus, *Panoptai* 155 K; DK 38 A 2.

³ See above, pp. 375f., 381.

⁴ This aspect of comic writing is well explored by Newiger (1957); cf. Handley (1959).

mortal, calls his visitor 'creature of a day'); or again, to be *meteoros* is to be in a state of excitement – no longer to have one's feet on the ground – of a kind which the plain man may find insubstantial and vaguely disreputable.¹ It is perhaps in the combination of a direct visual appeal with this periphery of verbal suggestiveness that the power of this comic image lies. But there is more to it than that. When Socrates claims to be mingling his thought with the air which is its like, and goes on to develop the point in quasi-scientific terms, he is parading a philosophical equation between mind or thought and air which was formulated by Diogenes of Apollonia.² The Socrates of the *Apology* (loc. cit.) explicitly denies all knowledge of such matters; yet it is possible to suppose that, as with other subjects in which he disclaimed expertise, the historical Socrates would have been willing to argue with the professed experts.

The search for a historical Socrates has been pursued with vigour from the philosophical as well as from the literary viewpoint. Though the fortunes of the Socrates of the *Clouds* have fluctuated in the debate, an approach from the side of comic portraiture makes one doubt, as with the poets of the *Frogs*, whether there is much of the personal and idiosyncratic that survives critical scrutiny, and whether in any case it could have had a primary comic function.³ If the portraits of Aeschylus and Euripides are in essence portraits derived from a concept of their poetry, that of Socrates is in immediate contrast in having no body of writing on which it could be based. It has been claimed on the one hand that the emphasis on memory and endurance, and the technique of arguing with a pupil are Socratic features of the Socrates of the *Clouds*, but it can still be asked whether they were specifically so; and the figure who is head of a school of unwashed poverty-stricken idlers and teaches disreputable rhetoric is something which, on any reasonable account, is decidedly *un-Socratic*.⁴ The verbal portrait of Socrates striding through the streets with an air of superiority to his surroundings does seem, from its recollection by Plato, to be an authentic detail (362; see above, pp. 375f.); but the supposed references to 'midwifery' (especially 137) are both of debatable allusive effect in the *Clouds* and open to question as a Platonic rather than a historical element in the Socratic tradition.⁵ Aristophanes, it seems, is giving a portrait not from life, but from the popular image of an educator, which he chooses to hang on to Socrates; it is the worse as biography, but not necessarily the worse as comedy, for that.

¹ See LSJ, s.v. *μετέωρος*, not forgetting compounds and derivatives; on this group of ideas in *Clouds* and *Birds* especially, see Gelzer (1956) esp. 79ff.

² See Dover (1968a) on 230–3 for references and discussion.

³ Basic to this approach (though I do not follow it wholly) is the discussion in Bruns (1896) 181–200 and 201–424 *passim*.

⁴ See Schmid (1948) and Philippon (1932), together with the more sceptical view of Dover (1968a) xxxii–lvii.

⁵ Burnyeat (1977).

By his own account, Aristophanes was pleased with himself when he had written the *Clouds* (521–4). *Acharnians* and *Knights*, in the two previous years, had won first prizes; but this time, notoriously, the result was a third. He made a revised version, which is the version we have. Though we are not clear about the circumstances or (in detail) the extent of the revision, he must have felt – and rightly, as events have proved – that it was a play with a statement to make, a play worth an author's second thoughts. One of the new features was the debate between the two personified Arguments, whether we call them the Worse Cause and the Better, or Wrong and Right, or whatever else (889ff.).

The conflict between generations which has been present as a theme from the first is now elaborated and developed in the form of a conflict of educational ideals; and there is a resemblance in type, as well as in structure, to the debate between the two poets in *Frogs*. Right describes the traditional way of education, painting a picture of decorously-behaved boys at music school and gymnasium learning what their fathers learnt and acquiring a certain gentlemanly athleticism. Wrong skirmishes with him in argument, then gives in his turn a prospectus for the new system, in which the technique of effective argument is supreme: once learn to talk your way out of a situation, and then you can 'indulge your nature, laugh and play, and think that nothing's shameful' (1078). Right defects: unable to beat the opposition, he joins it. From all this, Socrates is absent: 'Your son', he says, 'will learn for himself from the pair of them, and I shall not be there' (886f.). If we ask where Aristophanes' own sympathies lay, whether on these educational issues or on others, the normal (and probably basically correct) answer is that he was conservative, with a strong dash of wishful-thinking idealism about the past. But there are reservations to make. The obvious contrast with what one dislikes in the present is either a recollection of the past, however rose-tinted, or a dream of the future, however fantastic. Comic dramatists, as we have seen, naturally tend in these directions; and they know well what appeal the Good Old Days can have to an audience in a holiday mood. Thus there needs to be room to wonder how far Aristophanes, or any other writer of satirical comedy, is personally engaged in the attitudes which are recurrent in the genre. Secondly, in portraying a clash of ideals, no matter where his own sympathies lay, Aristophanes is much too good a writer to let the contest be too one-sided. In *Clouds*, Right's personality is not wholly sympathetic from the start: the aggressive old man who surrenders in the end to the educational – and sexual – ethics of his opponent's world has already shown a marked weakness for the physical attractions of the young boys whose upbringing he idealizes; Wrong is a rogue, but at times we all admire the dash and cleverness that brings a rogue his success; and so, probably, we are intended to do here. But even so, the balance of appeal need not all be put down to dramatic

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contrivance. A man of vivid imagination who lived through the political and intellectual revolutions of the age of Aristophanes must have felt his own opinions constantly put under test and stress. It would not be surprising if, as many have with the technological advances of the twentieth century, he admitted the excitements of the new advances of his contemporaries while deploring the accompanying decay of the inherited standards of behaviour and belief. The basic impulse to satirical writing is after all, one suspects, that of a divided mind.

9. THE SOCIAL SCENE

The latter part of Aristophanes' *Wasps* is the occasion of an interesting social gathering. Old Philocleon, the play's hero, has at last been turned, by a trick, away from the passion for jury-service which has obsessed him. He is now to be re-educated. He is given smarter clothes and new shoes, and told how to behave himself in polite company. In the event, he turns out to be a grown-up version of everyone's horror-child. Eventually, he leaves his party, which we have had described to us, and appears as a tipsy reveller on his way home with a girl-friend by torchlight (1326ff.): 'And if you're not naughty, Piglet', he says, 'I'll set you free and make you my mistress when my son's dead.' He goes on to explain that he has no money of his own yet; his son is grumpy and mean, and afraid of his coming to ruin – 'for I'm the only father he's got' (1359). There is a cluster of motifs here that interest us.

The tradition that comedy ends with a revel is likely to be a very ancient one, going back remotely beyond any of our historical documentation.¹ When the revelling of a proto-comic chorus transformed itself to represent a celebration held by men or gods, a wide variety of comic possibilities must have been opened up. Food and feasting lend themselves readily to euphoric description; then, if the behaviour of the revellers is also portrayed in words or action, the way is open to a kind of social criticism. Historically speaking, we can claim that the description of Philocleon's behaviour at the party is in a line of descent from the description of the gluttonous Heracles in Epicharmus.² But the reflection of the fashionable world of fifth-century Athens gives another dimension, and raises questions about the qualities of Attic comedy as a mirror of the social scene. Is Aristophanes' representation of everyday life (for example, the language people spoke in conversation) in any sense truer than what we have seen of his treatment of some of the issues and personalities from the public world of contemporary politics or literature? To look at the scene yet again, does the comic exchange of roles between father and son ('for I'm the only father he's got') imply that fathers with young sons in love, so

¹ See, e.g., *DTC* 132ff., 301ff.; Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 207ff.

² 21 Kai, 8 Ol: see above, p. 369, and also p. 365 with n. 5 and p. 366 with n. 1.

familiar from fourth-century comedy, were already familiar enough as stage figures for Aristophanes to raise an easy laugh from his audience by standing the convention on its head?¹ If so, is there more background to the Comedy of Manners in fifth-century comedy than one would happily suppose from the general trend of the surviving plays themselves?

One lost play which has a special interest in the context of these questions is the *Korianno* of Pherecrates, Aristophanes' older contemporary, whose *Agrioi* 'Savages' of 420 B.C. has already been noted as one of the fifth-century examples of the misanthrope theme in comedy.² *Korianno* takes its title from a woman's name, and we know that she was a woman with lovers, for the play is included by Athenaeus (13.567c) among examples of comedies with the names or nicknames of hetaerae as titles. As in the *Wasps*, comedy is created from the generation gap between father and son, but this time, instead of undergoing a transposition of roles, they seem to be rivals: 'Oh, no: for me to be in love is natural; you're past it . . . you're an old man and you're crazy' (frs. 71–2); 'Lord Zeus, do you hear what this wicked son of mine says about me?' (fr. 73). There are also some fragments from a scene with women talking together, waited on by the young daughter of one of them. Fr. 70 reads as follows: 'Undrinkable, Glyke.' 'Mixed you a watery one, did she?' 'All water, I'd say.' 'What *have* you done? How did you mix it, blast you?' 'Two water, Mummy.' 'And wine?' 'Four.' 'Get to Hell: it's the frogs you should be serving.' It is a reasonable, though unverified, guess that *Korianno* is both the thirsty guest and the object of the rivalry in love.

With the hindsight given by our knowledge of later comedy, we can see what a bright future there was for plays with a love-interest and an ambience of family relationships. The genre-painting (if we may so call it) of the women's drinking-session at once calls to mind the famous opening scene of Menander's *Synaristosai* 'The hen party', adapted by Plautus in his *Cistellaria*.³ Fathers and sons as rivals in love-affairs also appear in plays of the fourth century that were to become classics, for example in Diphilus, *Kleroumenoi* 'Taking the lot', which we know from Plautus' version in *Casina*;⁴ Act III of Menander's *Samia* (206–420) develops to a high emotional peak the situation in which a man thinks that his mistress and his adopted son have betrayed him together and produced a child. It is important here not to outrun our evidence. Comparable extracts from the beginning of *Clouds* (assuming we had them as fragments) could be very temptingly disposed against Terence's *Adelphoe* to suggest that *Clouds* is much more concerned with the internal relationships

¹ Wehrli (1948) 24.

² See above, p. 383.

³ See on this Charitonidis–Kahil–Ginouvé (1970) 41ff.; Oeri (1948) 61, 82ff., 86; and cf. below, p. 397 n. 1.

⁴ Wehrli (1948) 56ff. (though 57 n. 2 dismisses *Casina* from its natural company).

of Strepsiades' family than is the case. Moreover, to remind us that *Korianno* is a fifth-century play, and that Pherecrates, like his contemporaries, and unlike his fourth-century successors, had a strong interest in the musical side of drama, we can quote a fragment from a parabasis which is written in the metrical unit which came to be called 'Pherecratean' after him (fr. 79): 'Audience, pay attention to a novel innovation, anapaests in syncopation.'

The problem of evaluation which these quotations present is typical of the difficulties of fragmentary texts. Yet some help with it can be sought from the direction of ancient literary theory. Aristotle, we recall (and indeed others after him) made a distinction in modes of comedy between the comedy of topical satire (that is to say, writing in the mode derived from Archilochus and the iambic poets) and the comedy of fiction (that is to say, making plots with invented characters and general, not particular, reference to the contemporary scene). We met this distinction above, in discussing Aristotle's account of the earliest comic drama (p. 363), and noted his remark that 'plot-composition came first from Sicily; of the Athenians, Crates was the first to move away from the iambic convention and write plots with subjects of general reference'. Crates, for all that Aristophanes looked up to him as one of the Old Masters, has not been kindly treated by posterity; and the few fragments and play-titles which survive do not offer a way to verify Aristotle's placing of him at the head of a literary trend.¹ The matter becomes somewhat more tangible when we are told of Pherecrates by one of the better informed treatises on comedy that he was an actor, that he set himself to follow the example of Crates, that he turned against abuse and made his reputation by introducing new subjects and being inventive in plots.² There is much here one could question, beginning, perhaps, with the nature and validity of the distinction there was supposed to be between satirical and fictional comedy, and ending with the notion that Pherecrates came into playwriting by way of acting, which is open to suspicion as a typical device of the ancient biographer to fill the vacuum he abhors.³ What remains, however, after due scepticism has operated, is a set of observations by someone who knew Pherecrates' work and could link him with Crates as a poet who developed a style of comedy differentiable from that of the great triad of Cratinus, Eupolis and Aristophanes, the true heirs of Archilochus. Accordingly, though we may still not feel confident enough to speak with Gilbert Norwood of 'The School of Crates',⁴ there are good reasons for taking seriously what signs we have in Aristophanes and elsewhere of the emergence of that mode of fictional comedy which was to prove dominant.

¹ Ar. *Knights* 537–40 and *Second Thesmophoriazusae* fr. 333 K.

² Anon. *De com.* II 3aff. Kaibel, III 29ff. Koster.

³ The same is said of Crates (Anon. *De com.* II 28ff. Kaibel, III 26ff. Koster) and of others, sometimes perhaps rightly; yet the main point seems to be to provide a kind of theatrical lineage.

⁴ Norwood (1931) ch. 4; and see Bonanno (1972).

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We are concerned not simply with the quantity of the evidence, but with its quality and the circumstances in which it comes to us.

One of the pleasures of comedy that is sometimes undervalued is the pleasure of familiarity. We feel relaxed and at home with ourselves in the presence of what is recognizable from the world around us; we can then respond all the more readily when, in one of an untold number of ways, the representation transcends the reality. Even when Aristophanic comedy is at its most fantastic, it is justifiable to look for the points of contact between the fantasy and the audience's familiar experience; even when the representation seems to be at a level of unaffected realism we need to ask, if we do not wish to be deceived, what the dramatist's fictional purpose was. Since comedy commonly represents kinds of people and activities from everyday life which do not figure in more serious literature, it offers some specially interesting data for the social and economic historian; but he must be prepared to find that the comic poet's attitude to documentation does not have much in common with his own. None the less, when all is said about the distortions of comic fiction, where the portrayal of everyday life is concerned, there is a way in which the 'familiarity principle' that we have envisaged above can work to give some reassurance. The comic poet will distort reality for amusement, or to make propaganda; he will expect his audience to meet him half-way or further in matters of stage representation; and he will stretch reality in the direction of optimism, making people eat more, travel faster, be richer (and so on) than the corresponding man in the street – but the background detail must have a degree of verisimilitude which will convince audiences and not leave them puzzled or hostile. It is the Aristophanic Euripides in the *Frogs* (959) who uses a phrase which the comic poet can hardly have formed in mind without some thought of its applicability to himself: Euripides speaks of bringing familiar things (*oikeia pragmata*) on to the stage, things people knew by personal experience or from close association and on which they could successfully criticize him.

Our knowledge of classical Greek as a spoken language is a compound. We derive it from Aristophanes and the other dramatists and from prose authors, notably Plato, on occasions when they represent people talking naturally together; with the recovery of more Menander, there are even ways in which we can distinguish fifth-century idiom from fourth-century and so sharpen our knowledge of both. The resultant picture is far from perfect, not least in that the written word can never be quite like the spoken word, the composed dialogue not the same as the conversation overheard. One of the pleasures of seeing an Aristophanic comedy must have been, for contemporary audiences, that of hearing people talk as they talked themselves. Yet in fact, as anyone knows who has tried to translate any substantial amount of Aristophanes into

modern English, the range of style or tone is wide, and a mood is rarely built up with consistency or sustained for long; the comedy breaks through.

At the lower end of the colloquial (or social) scale comes the broken Greek of such characters as the Triballian in the gods' embassy in *Birds* (1565–693), or the Scythian policeman in *Thesmophoriazusae* (1001ff.); vulgarisms in the speech of the politician Hyperbolus are picked on in a fragment of the *Hyperbolus* of Plato (168 K); at least a proportion of the copious vocabulary of obscenities would be likely to have been heard in the market or the wine-bar.¹ At the upper end of the scale, we might put parody of the talk of the bright young men in the perfume shop, their heads full of the language of their rhetoric teacher; and with this might go the reference in *Wasps* to the aristocratic Alcibiades' lisp.² People from outside Attica can be brought on speaking in dialect (it is a hard question how authentic Aristophanes' use of non-Attic dialects was): for example, the Megarian and the Boeotian in *Acharnians* (729ff., 860ff.), Lampito and the other Spartans in *Lysistrata*. A special case of Doric speech in comedy, and one with a lasting tradition, is the doctor, talking the Doric of his Sicilian medical school; there is one line surviving from such a character in a comedy by Crates, and he runs through Middle Comedy to Menander.³ Realism is here shading into theatrical convention, and it does so in another way when at times of high emotion the language of characters is coloured with quotation, parody, and other borrowed plumage from high poetry.⁴ The social portrait given by different kinds of speech easily blends with elements of social or literary satire, as can be seen from the examples given here and many others. When, in the fourth century, comedy strove for a more naturalistic effect, it tended to lose not only the bite but the variety of the age of Aristophanes.

A passage which brings together a number of the points made so far is at *Thesmophoriazusae* 279ff. It begins: 'Here now, Thratta; follow me. Oh, Thratta, look – the torchlight, and all the people coming up, and the clouds of smoke ...' The genre is that which we have sampled in Pherecrates, the women's conversation piece: in fact a representation of someone going with her maid to the Thesmophoria. No great extent of text is needed to suggest that Aristophanes could write as much as he chose in this vein. But there is a twist to the representation, which saves it from the flatness of total familiarity. The character is in fact not a woman, but Euripides' kinsman dressed up as a

¹ Henderson (1975) 35ff. distinguishes 'primary obscenities' from metaphorical expressions which can be either current ('frozen wit') or literary.

² Bright young men: *Knights* 1375ff., cf. Radermacher (1951) XIII 1; Alcibiades, *Wasps* 44f., cf. Archippus 45 K (from Plutarch, *Alc.* 1).

³ Crates: 41 K. Alexis, *Mandragorizomene* 142 K (from Athenaeus 14.621d, q.v.); Menander, *Aspis* 439ff. (a man pretending to be a doctor).

⁴ See for instance *Knights* 1232ff. (mock-tragic recognition scene: above, p. 373 with n. 3) and *Lys.* 954–79, referred to below, p. 397.

woman, showing just how well he can carry it off; and no doubt the maid is imaginary, giving scope to the actor's talent for mime. The routine continues with an invocation of Demeter and Persephone, the offering of a cake which the maid is supposed to produce from its container; and then there is a prayer for a daughter to find a rich, stupid husband and for a son to grow up sensible – but they are referred to not as son and daughter, but in terms of their sexual organs. The kinsman is not, after all, quite the perfect middle-class housewife.

It has been said that Aristophanes sometimes cares more to have a remark made than who makes it. But the comic effect on such occasions is not simply that of the unexpected: the breaking of the image which was being built up coincides with the breaking of the normal social ban against verbal explicitness in matters of sex; and the appeal is suddenly not to our sense of realism but to our sense of fantasy, as Aristophanes lets the character say what the audience will enjoy hearing such a person say (like the stage bishop being driven to swear).

Women have major parts in both *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*; and there many times over, and on a much larger scale, we can examine the compounding of realistic and comic elements in the way that they and the social life around them are portrayed. They are not, of course, any more than Euripides' kinsman, the true image of the middle-class housewives they purport to be. Apart from the consideration that they are women as seen and acted by men, one of the strong features of their interest for dramatic purposes is that they are women taking on male roles. This is true whether we see them assembling at the Thesmophoria (because their ceremony is a transposition of a male one, and they make speeches like orators against Euripides) or gathering together and trying to force their husbands to political action – the making of peace – by an international 'Ban Sex' movement. But the very fact that women are so prominent in these plays, as opposed to the earlier ones, means that some kinds of relationships are explored in ways which there would have been no occasion to do with a differently oriented plot. We can take as an instance *Lysistrata* 870–979: Myrrhine has joined the Movement, and left Cinesias: 'What's wrong with you? No thought for the child, not fed or bathed for five days?' 'I think of him, but he's got a feckless father . . .' (880ff.). 'You don't care that the hens have gone off with your spinning?' 'Good God, no' (896f.). 'But won't you come and – well – lie down with me just now?' 'No way – though I won't say I don't love you.' 'You do? Then why not, pet?' 'In front of the baby? – you must be joking' (904ff.). With these preliminaries Myrrhine leads Cinesias through a routine of teasing and partly undressing and breaking off to get cushions, perfume and the like; this appeals, of course, to the audience's sexual fantasies; but there is no extravagance

in the style, which remains basically familiar and colloquial. Only when she finally breaks off and frustrates him is there a change, when Aristophanes moves to the level of mock-heroic, and has Cinesias complain about the agonies of his tension in dialogue with the chorus in a parody of tragic lament (954–79). We can class this episode as social comedy because, for all its other qualities, it is a depiction of a kind of personal relationship which is universal; it rests not on its comic effects alone, not on any satire of individuals, but on the author's observation of human nature in the world about him.

If it is hard to draw a clear picture of a comic poet's attitude to political events or any of the other affairs of the public world, it is perhaps harder still to pin down personal feelings in relation to the social scene. Often enough, for instance in his constant satire against homosexuals, or his propagation of the old comic theme that women are alcoholics, Aristophanes simply seems to be echoing or writing large what the man in the street holds as his own view or as an inherited prejudice.¹ Yet there are moments of subtler and keener perception. We have noticed already how, in *Lysistrata*, the war is portrayed from a woman's point of view, not least with a good verbal sketch of the wife who is anxious for news and is told to shut up (above, p. 377). A similar detail at the opening of *Acharnians* highlights the unhappiness of the countryman condemned to a wartime life within the city walls, when he has to buy everyday necessities like charcoal, oil and vinegar from street traders rather than enjoy his own produce at home (33ff.; above, p. 377). In *Peace*, when peace comes, the changes it can bring to people's circumstances are shown in two vivid instances: that of the sickle-maker and the dealer in earthenware jars, whose goods have leapt in price, and that of the arms-merchants, whose gear is a drug on the market (1197ff.). Some insight into the personal implications of a misfortune appears from the case of the old man in court, who is defeated by a smart young opponent and achieves a retort which has its elements of pathos as well as of rhetoric: 'I leave the court fined by the amount I'd saved for a shroud' (*Ach.* 691). Some of the realities of dealing with old people show through the scene in *Wasps* in which Philocleon is cosseted into agreeing to hold a trial in his own home, and, among other things, thoughtfully provided with a chamber-pot hung up on a peg (807ff.). These, and many passages like them, offer flashes of insight into people's social and economic affairs rather than studied portraiture. A passage where the portrait is somewhat more sustained is the self-description by the chorus of flatterers in Eupolis' *Kolakes*, the play which, as we have noted (p. 388), competed successfully with the *Peace* in 421 B.C.: fr. 159 reads (in part) as follows:

¹ Homosexuals: see, e.g., the list of 42 people attacked by name for homosexuality in comedy given by Henderson (1975) 213ff. Women and wine: e.g. *Lys.* 194ff., *Thes.* 630ff., 690ff.; more passages in Oeri (1948).

COMEDY

'I have these two outfits of outer clothes, very elegant, and I put on one or the other and take a spin to the market. And then, when I see some simple-minded type with money, I'm all over him. If he has something to say, I praise it strongly, and show amazement, and pretend to be delighted – and then off we go to dinner, to eat someone else's bread, and to keep joking, on the spot, or it's "out" . . .'

The similar character in Epicharmus' *Hope or Wealth*, as we have noted, tells the same sort of story; and both the social type and the kind of portraiture have a developing future in later comedy.¹

In its sharpness of description, whether hostile or sympathetic, and in its strong vein of interest in the life (and to some extent the relationships) of ordinary people, fifth-century comedy had two growth points of enormous potential. With the familiarity brought by centuries of later literary history, it is easy to underrate their importance. How it was that this side of comedy, rather than any of the others, was to prove to be so fruitful, is clearly a key question to be asked in any study of the comedy of the fourth century.

10. FROM ARISTOPHANES TO MENANDER

The gap in time between Aristophanes' *Plutus* and Menander's *Dyskolos* is just over seventy years, or two rather stretched generations. Of the comedy of that period, Gilbert Norwood writes:

Between the excitingly varied landscape of Old Comedy and the city of Menander stretches a desert: therein the sedulous topographer may remark two respectable eminences, and perhaps a low ridge in the middle distance, or a few nullahs, and the wayfarer will greet with delight one or two oases with a singing bird or so; but the ever-present foreground of his journey is sand, tiresome, barren and trickling. (Norwood (1931) 38)

Yet this is the period in which Attic comedy really became international. The popularity of its plays among the Doric-speaking Greeks of the west is in evidence from south Italian vase-paintings with comic scenes dating from the first quarter of the fourth century onwards; Attic terracotta statuettes and their replicas occur in places as far apart as Ampurias near Barcelona, Olynthos, Lindos and southern Russia.² It was in this period that actors came increasingly into prominence as famous personalities,³ that Aristotle delivered in Athens the lectures represented by our surviving *Poetics*, and much theatrical

¹ See p. 369 above, and Handley (1965a) on 57ff.

² South Italian vases (the so-called 'Phlyax vases') are catalogued by Trendall (1967) and listed in appropriate places by Webster-Green (1978). Terracottas: e.g. the famous set of characters from a mythological comedy in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, with numerous far-flung replicas: Webster-Green (1978) no. AT 9–23.

³ Ghiron-Bistagne (1976) 154ff., *DFA* 279ff.; there is firm evidence for organized guilds from the early third century onwards, though they may have been known by their professional name 'Artists of Dionysus' for half a century before that (Dem. 19.192; Arist. *Rhet.* 1.405a23 et al.).

rebuilding and reorganization took place, not least in Athens under the financial administration of Lycurgus.¹ It is also clear that the public had its idols, some of whom wrote very prolifically; and that success at Athens was sought for, and won, by Greeks from quite different quarters of the world, some of whom eventually gained citizenship. Anaxandrides is an example from the first generation of fourth-century comic poets. An East Greek, by report, from Rhodes or Colophon, he scored brilliantly with first prizes at the Dionysia in successive years, 376 and 375, and won a first at the Lenaea at about the same time; he ended with ten firsts in all, and we have a record of him still producing (and winning a fourth prize) in 349. Antiphanes, another great name, was a close contemporary, another non-citizen (we are told that Demosthenes was responsible for making him one), and apparently another East Greek, with three places laying claim to be his home town. Alexis is said to have come from the west, from the Athenian colony of Thurii on the gulf of Taranto; he was a copious writer who lived to a great age; some ancient critics brought him into a specially close relationship with Menander, whose life he in fact overlapped at both ends. The fourth-century Athenian theatre freely drew in talent and freely exported plays, which were certainly written in some number: 617 were catalogued for the period called Middle Comedy – our period – according to the so-called Anonymus, *De comoedia*; and Athenaeus' figure, possibly differently based, is 'over 800'.² How is it that from all this activity the impression made on a modern scholar should be that of sand, 'tiresome, barren and trickling'? And can we, without prejudice to our answer, see anything of the shape of things to come in the last plays of Aristophanes?

The most tangible difference between the earlier plays and *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* is the diminution of the role of the chorus. This we noted before in discussing structural patterns (pp. 358ff.). The parabasis is now gone, and the formally patterned agon reduced to half of itself or less than half; twice in the *Ecclesiazusae* and several times in the *Plutus* at places where a choral performance might have been expected the manuscripts have the heading XOPOY (as one might write CHORUS in English), a notation familiar from fragmentary texts of post-classical tragedy as well as from Menander. Though there is still room for discussion about the textual history and significance of this notation (we cannot claim to be certain in either play how many times the chorus performed or what it did),³ the main points for our purpose are sufficiently clear. The element of poetry and song is diminished: even if, at all likely points, the chorus sang and danced, the effect must still have been weaker than what

¹ Pickard-Cambridge (1946) 134ff.

² Anon. *De com.* II 52ff. Kaibel, III 45ff. Koster; Athenaeus 8.336d.

³ See Hunter (1979).

happens in (say) *Frogs*, since their lyrics were not specially composed for the play. At the same time, with the dramatist's mind no longer so clearly focused on his alternating patterns of scene or speech and lyric, the action will almost inevitably have fallen into sections or stages demarcated by the principal choral performances. These sections will then have tended to take on a compositional status akin to what one would recognize by the term 'act'; and that process is fully realized in Menander.¹ To take an illustration: the action of *Plutus* from 802 onwards, after a XOPOY, consists of a series of illustrations of the effects of the miraculous cure by which Wealth has had his sight restored. First Carion narrates the transformation within the house – the bin full of good barley, the jars full of wine and the well of olive oil, and so on. Then there arrives the Just Man, who had been scorned by the friends he had helped, but now that Wealth is no longer blind, he brings as a thank-offering the cloak in which he had shivered for thirteen years. They are joined by an Informer, who is pushed off in the old cloak to be a bath attendant, while the Just Man is taken in to meet Wealth in person. XOPOY again (958). The parallelism is obvious and traditional, but instead of being grouped into a pattern by interlacing choral odes (like the scenes with the Farmer and the Best Man in *Acharnians* 1000ff.), the three elements come together to form a kind of unit.

We should follow the fortunes of the chorus and of lyric in comedy somewhat further. After *Plutus*, Aristophanes wrote two more plays, very likely his last, which were produced by his son Araros, namely *Kokalos* and *Aiolosikon*; *Aiolosikon*, we are told, lacked parabasis and choral lyric. In this respect, and in being a mythological comedy without personal attacks, *Aiolosikon* is presented by our source as a type-example of Middle Comedy; while in *Kokalos* (it is said) 'he introduces rape and recognition and all the other things in which Menander followed him'.² When Cratinus' *Odysseus* 'Odysseus and Co.' is mentioned together with *Aiolosikon* it appears to be thought of by our source not simply as a mythological play, but as one lacking abuse, parabasis and lyrics as well.³ This could be so. If so, it is a useful reminder that Old Comedy was not necessarily as regular in development as simple extrapolation from Aristophanes would make it; but there remains the possibility that our information has been garbled in the course of passing from one ancient scholar to another, or that behind it all lies a later adaptation of Cratinus' original fifth-century composition. The one substantial piece of choral performance in the *Plutus* is the parodos (253ff.), in which the chorus of old farmers enters in trochaic tetrameters (not lyrics) in dialogue with Carion. They sing a parody of a

¹ This topic, including the definition of 'act', has been much discussed: see, e.g., *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 12ff. and Blanchard (1970).

² Platonius, *De com.* 1 1.24f., 29ff. Kaibel, 1.22ff., 27ff. Koster; the quotation is from *Vit. Ar.* xi 69ff. Dindorf-Dübner, xxviii 54ff. Koster.

³ Platonius, quoted n. 2 above.

dithyramb by Philoxenus, the *Cyclops*; this is in simple iambic stanzas (29off.). They then return to their own role with a song indicated in the text by XOPOY.¹ The Philoxenus parody, though preserved as part of the text, is in fact completely inorganic to it, and could perfectly well have been performed in similar circumstances in any other play. But the notion that a chorus might have a special identity, or do a special performance at least on its first appearance, is one that persists. Four fragments of a marble relief in Athens dated to the third quarter of the fourth century show a dancing chorus of men in soldiers' caps with staffs;² from the same period, Eubulus' *Stephanopolides* 'Garland sellers' had, as its title suggests, a characterized female chorus which introduced itself in a lyric of which fragments survive (104–5 K). These instances, among others, allow us to trace a little of the story until it resumes in Menander, with a chorus announced on its arrival, either in the general character of tipsy revellers (as in *Perikeiromene*, for instance) or, on occasion, with a special function or description to suit the play (as in *Dyskolos*).³

Menander offers no evidence for specially written choral song. There is a little evidence for actors' lyric, which could still occur in special situations (a song at a temple, recalling Euripides' *Ion*; a song and dance in honour of the Great Mother);⁴ recitative, in the sense of lines delivered to a musical accompaniment, is well illustrated in the lively scene of the ragging of Knemon at the end of the *Dyskolos*, which takes on a kind of poetic colour as it rises to the description of the party which the old misanthrope has refused to attend (see below, p. 423). But the basic mode of Menandrian comedy is the speech of everyday human relationships, and his basic metre correspondingly is that which Aristotle (*Poetics* 1449a24) thought of as closest to speech, namely the iambic trimeter.

If, then, the decline of the chorus and of lyric in general is not quite so sharp and simple as a crude contrast between early and late Aristophanes would make it, it is still to be seen as a major change in comedy, part of a trend of development well marked in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* which has consequences for the shape and structure of plays as well as for the nature of their appeal to audiences. The diminishing role of the lyrical and poetic elements must to some extent account for the impression of flatness of style given by the fourth-century fragments. These contributions towards the questions we set out to answer will be augmented as other general trends in fourth-century comedy are

¹ Cf. Handley (1953) 59 with n. 4.

² Webster-Green (1978), no. AS3 with pl. ix; cf. also AS4.

³ 'Paean-singers', according to the papyrus, 'Pan-worshippers' by the generally accepted correction: see Handley (1965a) on 230–2.

⁴ *Leukadia*, fr. 258 Kö; schol. ad Eur. *Andr.* 103, cf. Handley (1969) 96 and Gomme-Sandbach (1973) 400ff.

surveyed. But there remains, before we leave the present set of topics, a scene which merits mention here both for its own sake and as an indication of what could have happened but apparently did not.

It is part of the reversal of the normal order of things in *Ecclesiazusae* that sexual relationships shall be free, but on condition that the oldest and ugliest are satisfied first (611–34). Aristophanes illustrates this situation by constructing a comic routine around a young man, a girl, and a fearsome old hag, soon to be displaced by two even more hideous competitors (877ff.). In this way he creates an opportunity to introduce pairs of songs in which his actors can take turns to answer each other ('There's something pleasant and comic about this, even if the audience don't enjoy it', 888–9). The high point, so far as we are concerned here, is the duet of boy and girl – she, in pain and longing, begs her lover to come to her, while he, again in pain and longing, stands at the door and begs her to come down and open up. Perhaps, as has been suggested, Aristophanes is drawing on the idiom of contemporary popular song; but what the incident recalls, rather than anything else in Greek comedy, is the serenade sequence in Plautus, *Curculio* (96ff., esp. 147–57). The Aristophanic scene has, among its other elements, some of the basic ingredients of romantic comedy and of musical comedy in a much more modern sense than Aristophanes would have recognized; and it is perhaps even more significant from the historical point of view as an indication of potential than as an achievement. The convergence of theme and mode of performance with Plautus is interesting chiefly to remind us of what did in fact not (so far as we know) develop in fourth-century Greece. For although music and poetry were still admitted to comedy, they never seem to have regained the status they once enjoyed in Aristophanes, still less to have taken the interesting route which led to the musical comedy of Plautus.

Myth, we have seen, is a very primitive element in comedy; mythical scenes and characters, often based on a treatment in some more elevated form of literature, continued from Epicharmus onwards to lend themselves to many different comic purposes, including those of political comedy; myth, especially myth as found in tragedy, could provide patterns of character and action which transmuted themselves into part of the comic poet's own stock-in-trade. Though much is uncertain about the chronology and content of many plays, some picture of development can be formed from the results of an investigation by Webster.¹ According to this, in the last twenty years of the fifth century just under half of the dated plays are mythological; for the years 400–350 the fraction is between a half and a third, as opposed to only one tenth of the titles assignable to 350–320. 'Mythological' can, of course, apply to several different

¹ Webster (1952); see also Webster (1970b) 85, 259ff.

kinds of play. There is a sense in which the *Plutus* is a mythological comedy, having the mythical figures of Wealth and Poverty as characters; but the kind of play in which we are interested here is one which takes a whole fabric of plot and characters from myth, and is comic by virtue of exploiting the clash and contrast between the values and incidents of the 'parent' story and their counterparts in the world of men like ourselves or worse than ourselves. Euripides' lost *Antiope* presented, through the contrast between Antiope's sons, a conflict of ideals between the cultured intellectual and the practical man (see p. 320). In the *Antiope* of Eubulus there is a comic Boeotian speaking his own dialect (like the Boeotian of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*); and in a fragment from a messenger speech we hear that the ever-hungry Zethus is to be settled in the 'sacred plain of Thebes' (for the bread is better there), while the more etherial Amphion is sent to hungry Athens, where men drink the breezes and live on hopes. Eubulus' *Bellerophon* again recalls Euripides, it seems: in our one fragment, the hero calls for someone to steady him as his flying horse Pegasus rises; and once more we can compare Aristophanes, in his parody of Euripides' play in the *Peace*, where Trygaeus has a shaky start flying to Heaven on his dung-beetle (82ff.).¹ Examples can be multiplied;² but one story which is specially worth mention is that of Auge, for it involves the motifs of rape and recognition which were remarked on by ancient scholars as basic ingredients of the New Comedy of Menander and his contemporaries, and were notably present in Aristophanes, two of whose last plays, as we have seen, were taken as type-examples of what was to come in the age after him.³ Euripides' play *Auge* is slightly referred to in the *Frogs* (1080) for the sake of its heroine, who gave birth to her son by Heracles in the temple of which she was priestess. Comic plays entitled *Auge* are known from Philyllius and Eubulus. Philyllius' play could well have been written in the closing years of the fifth century, when *Auge* was new (it was one of Euripides' latest productions); and in that period, it seems, there originates a group of terracotta statuettes which include Heracles, a woman veiling her face in shame, an old nurse with a baby and others eminently suitable to have been souvenirs of the cast of such a comedy.⁴ The continuing popularity of the terracotta types and the production of another comic *Auge* by Eubulus give some indication of the appeal this kind of story had. The fragments on food and feasting which we have in quotations by Athenaeus do something to show how the comic poets brought the story down to earth, and they remind us of Heracles' traditional comic role as a glutton; the food-and-drink motif has its visual counter-

¹ See also the texts quoted in *P.Oxy.* 2742, *CGFP* no. *74.

² See, e.g., Webster (1970b) 16ff., 82ff.

³ See above, p. 400 with n. 2.

⁴ Terracottas: see above, p. 398 n. 2.

part among the statuettes in the figures of a man carrying a shopping basket and a man carrying a jar.¹

One can see how stories like that of Auge may have admitted comic innovations and distortions in the traditional manner; single lines from the tragedians could also still be picked up and twisted to good effect. Anaxandrides, it can be said, is being Aristophanic when he takes a famous line from the *Auge* of Euripides and parodies it to make a political witticism: 'Nature willed it: she cares naught for laws' (Eur. fr. 920 *TGF*) becomes 'The city willed it: she cares naught for laws' (Anax. fr. 67 K). But such stories had other qualities too, much less tangible from our evidence. They had been (and surely still could be) so shaped as to yield a satisfactory dramatic pattern, an organic whole; they could be (as they were by Euripides) so treated as to throw into question the divine and human motivation behind the plot, even if the comic poet's means and purposes were different; and they could be so handled as to involve the audience in sympathy with the characters and their attitudes from time to time, to promote a certain feeling of identification, to evoke the smile and not the laugh. In spite of the strong Roman colour of Plautus' writing, the *Amphitruo* probably still gives a good idea of the blend of different effects in comedies of this kind. We begin with the basic and farcical confusions of mistaken identity, when Zeus/Jupiter and Hermes/Mercury masquerade as Amphitruo and his servant, so that the king of the gods can have the pleasure of adultery with Amphitruo's queen Alcmena; we move on to the elements of human sympathy in the portrait of a woman who retains her dignity in spite of the way in which she is being deceived, and in this we can see something of the side of later Greek comedy which is other than sheer light entertainment. That is a side which Menander was to develop. But for the sake of the contrast, we can note now that when Menander recalls Euripides' line about Nature and laws, as Anaxandrides did, it is not in order to make an allusive political witticism, but to give an extra dimension to the everyday affairs of the people in his play from the situation of their mythical counterparts.²

It was in fact the decline in political and personal satire that gave Aristotle and other ancient critics one of the clearest contrasts they could make between the comedy of the age of Aristophanes and later comedy. But how sudden and how clear-cut was the change? For Aristotle, as we noted, the movement away from the iambic or satirical convention had already begun, as far as Athens was concerned, in the generation before Aristophanes, with Crates;³ while on the other hand, the references to contemporary individuals and political events in

¹ Philyllius, *Auge* 3–6 K, Eubulus, *Auge* 15 K; Heracles, Ar. *Wasps* 60 (cf. above, p. 369).

² Men. *Epitr.* 765–7 (1123–5 Sandbach): see also below, pp. 420f.

³ See above, p. 363 with nn. 2–3, p. 393 with nn. 1–2, and the texts referred to in p. 400 n. 2.

FROM ARISTOPHANES TO MENANDER

Ecclesiazusae, *Plutus* and later fragmentary plays of the fourth century show (to say the least) that there was no universal inhibition against such things. That is not to say that there was no tension between attackers and attacked of the kind we found when discussing political comedy in its prime. Isocrates, writing in 355 B.C., contrasts the difficulties faced by people with serious but unappealing policies to advocate (like himself) with the position of orators in the assembly, as unthinking as they are unscrupulous, and with that of comic poets in the theatre, who retain public favour while broadcasting their fellow citizens' mistakes to all Greece.¹ Isocrates was an old man at this time, turned eighty in fact, and one wonders if his mind was not on comic poets of the past, by whom he had himself been attacked, rather than on those of the immediate present.² Nevertheless, it is hard to divorce what he says completely from contemporary reality; and the same applies, though with different reservations, to the political theorizing of Isocrates' somewhat younger contemporary Plato, when he lays down his rigid rules in the *Laws* against personal attack in comedy or in any kind of iambic or lyric poetry (935e). From the comic poet's point of view, personal attack and political commentary were a traditional licence; and like many comic traditions, this one was preserved. For Menander, contemporary affairs are about as far in the background as the Napoleonic Wars are for Jane Austen, yet still (more than Austen) he embodies elements of social commentary in the words and actions of his characters, and still he allows himself an occasional nod in the direction of comedy's past, as in his allusions in the *Samia* and elsewhere to a notorious sponger and butt of the comic stage, Chairephon.³

Accordingly, with politics in comedy, as with its music and poetry, one can point to a declining trend, to a shift of interest elsewhere; and though a dramatist who ran against the trend might attract the necessary sponsorship and acceptance for an Athenian production, and might achieve success with it, we should beware of exaggerating the exceptions, particularly when we are arguing from fragments. One such exception seems to have been Timocles. There is a high incidence of personal and political references in what survives of him, and he is remarkable as a late exponent of this mode of comedy: a pro-Macedonian, who attacked, among others, Demosthenes and Hyperides, he was still writing after their deaths and during the dramatic career of Menander. The parallel with music and poetry perhaps has more to it than coincidence. The decline in quotable abuse might, one supposes, have an effect similar to that of the decline in music and poetry in making the general run of fragments of fourth-century comedy less exciting to read. But these two parallel

¹ Isocrates, *De pace* (8).14.

² Note for this point Aristophanes, fr. 700 K and Strattis, *Atalante* 3 K: Webster (1970b) 28.

³ *Samia* 603 with other references given by Gomme-Sandbach (1973) ad loc.

phenomena have one more common feature. It is that, since Aristophanes' younger years, both music and politics had been growing increasingly more complicated, and therefore less readily exploitable in terms of popular entertainment. The musical developments which contributed to the decline of the tragic as well as of the comic chorus are those which are reflected in the *Frogs* in the contrast between traditional choral lyric in the Aeschylean manner and the modernisms of Euripides, seen at their most characteristic in virtuoso arias for actors, something quite alien to choral writing.¹ In politics it was less easy by the fourth century, and had perhaps become progressively less easy since the plays of Aristophanes' younger years, for the evils of the day to be summed up in terms of the wickednesses of a Cleon or a Hyperbolus. Both *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* are political comedies in the sense that they offer a solution, albeit a typically comic one, to the problems of life in Athens; but in both the solution, and the ills it seeks to remedy, are conceived rather in social and economic terms than specifically in terms of politics: this applies almost equally to the quasi-communistic state set up by the women who take over the Assembly in *Ecclesiazusae* and to the redistribution which follows the miraculous cure of Wealth in *Plutus*.

Some impression of the political atmosphere of the 390s can be gathered from the speech which Praxagora, the heroine of the *Ecclesiazusae*, rehearses for delivery in the Assembly. She knows how to make a political speech, as she explains, because she and her husband set up house on the Pnyx Hill 'when we were refugees' (243), and so she heard the speakers there. The precise reference of some of her allusions escapes modern scholars, and it may be that even for Aristophanes' audience the overall picture was of more importance than the detail.²

The speech, including interruptions, runs from 171 to 240. It portrays a mood of disillusionment which seems to go beyond the comic poet's habitual attack on things as they are. There has been a succession of increasingly bad leaders ('even if a man is good one day, he's bad for ten', 177f.); but the Assembly in its turn has shown itself more moved by a man's attitude to the rate for attendance money than his true worth or worthlessness. The Athenians' judgement of politics (the argument continues) is as inconstant as their judgement of politicians: 'now take the alliance – when we were considering it, they said we'd be ruined without it; once we got it, they were furious, and the proposer instantly took flight' (193–6). Then again: 'We need ships: the poor are for, the rich and the farmers against' (197f.). The charge of fickleness comes again at 823ff., where the proposer of a new tax is said to have won a

¹ See above, pp. 386f.

² See Ussher (1973) xx–xxv for discussion and for the dating of the play to 393 B.C. and not 392 from these references.

golden reputation from his idea until (inevitably) there were second thoughts and he was vilified; the tension between rich and poor is reflected again and again in this play and the *Plutus*, not least in the scenes with the personified figure of Poverty herself (415–618).

The New Order set up by the women in *Ecclesiazusae* has some striking features in common with that of Plato in *The republic*, though the nature of their relationship (if the two are related) remains an open question. For example, both political systems envisage community of land, money and possessions, with maintenance provided by the state. Meals, women and children are all nationalized, and we may note with Murray that the objection ‘How will a man know his own son?’ is a problem posed and answered by both systems, and an advantage of both is the absence of lawsuits.¹

Ecclesiazusae is traditional comedy in that its mainspring is the enactment and illustration of a fantastic solution to a contemporary problem. Such a solution can take the form of escape into a Utopian future just as well as into a place far away or an idealized past, as we remarked in discussing *Birds* (p. 380 with n. 3). Nephelokokkygia, the ideal city of the birds, is in a sense a forerunner of *Ecclesiazusae*; but this time the scene is in Athens and not in the sky, and the innovators, as in *Lysistrata*, are nothing more bizarre than housewives taking over where they think their menfolk have failed them.² On the other hand, as we saw above, *Ecclesiazusae* is modern like *Plutus* in its emphasis on social and economic problems rather than on specific political or personal attack. We can perhaps call it equally modern, as opposed to *Clouds*, in that its satire has moved away from verbal wit and from the cartoon-like portraiture of a comic Socrates and taken a step towards criticizing ideas in the more general terms of their content and consequences. Aristophanes, who was not backward in stressing the novelty of his ideas, does so with emphasis for *Ecclesiazusae* (577–87), but this need mean no more than that they had not had full-dress treatment in a comedy before. The difficulty of postulating a circulated version of Plato’s ideas in *The republic* early enough for *Ecclesiazusae* to draw on it is matched by the lack of any clear reference to the play in Plato, who must at all events have known it. If we suppose that *The republic* and *Ecclesiazusae* are essentially independent elaborations of a common stock of ideas (perhaps we need not postulate a lost treatise by some person unknown) the central interest from our point of view is still that an early fourth-century comedy takes the theme it does and pursues it for amusement in comic terms.

¹ Murray (1933) 188. See particularly *Eccl.* 597ff. with *Rep.* 416d–e; 657, 673ff. with 464d; 610ff. with 423c, 457c–d; 635ff. with 461c–d: Ussher (1973) xv–xx.

² The theme of women’s rule is known from other plays, and some see a forerunner of *Lys.* and *Eccl.* in Pherecrates, *Tyrannis*: Ussher (1973) xv.

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The tradition of *Clouds* continues in fourth-century comedy after *Ecclesiazusae*, and can be recognized in references to Plato, the Academy and other philosophers and their pupils.¹ A scene which recalls the famous one of Socrates' Reflectory is narrated in a fragment of Epicrates:² in this, Plato conducts a seminar on the classification of living things – animals, trees and plants – in which the students have problems with a pumpkin and are patiently taken back to first principles when all have failed. The plain man's image of the intellectual is readily illustrated from some of the other references to Plato: the great man frowns in concentration, raising his eyebrows like a snail's horns; he walks up and down in thought, of course to no purpose; discussion with him is all idle talk, and he has a notion of the Good which can stand as proverbial for obscurity.³ Pupils may be thin and wasted, like the half-dead associates of Socrates;⁴ but the young or old Academician can also be thought of as an elegant, like the flatterers who waited on the great thinkers in Eupolis' philosophical comedy *Kolakes*, and he can be a smart young rhetorician, like the modern young of Aristophanes' day.⁵

The passage just cited on Plato's notion of the Good (Amphis 6 K) can be of further use to us in a more general aspect. It reads in full: 'But what good it can be that you are going to come by through her, master, is something that I understand less than I understand the Good of Plato.' 'Pay attention then', says the master. The context is the familiar one in which a man tells his slave or companion (and hence the audience) about his relationship with a woman, and meets with the incredulity, the worldly wisdom and the attempt to pass the whole thing off with a joke which are common human reactions (and hence good material for dramatists) in such situations.⁶ As we have seen before, and can hardly recall too often, the status of allusions in comedy is vitally affected by their context, which in fragments is often much less easily inferred than in the present example. The element of satire against Plato in the reference to the Good is slight and good-humoured when it comes as part of a chat between slave and master, and when the emphasis of the scene is elsewhere. Two questions suggest themselves. Firstly: in considering allusions to tragedy in all their variety, we can see something of the process by which what began as satirical references stayed on and developed into part of the dramatic fabric

¹ For a survey, see Webster (1970b) 50–6.

² Epicrates 11 K, cf. Ar. *Clouds* 133ff.

³ Amphis, *Dexidemides*, 13 K; Alexis, *Meropis* 147 K; Alexis, *Parasitos* 180 K; Amphis, *Amphikrates* 6 K – all quoted among other passages by Diogenes Laertius, *Vit. Platonis* (3).26–8; for 'idle talk', cf. Ar. *Clouds* 1485 with *Tagenistai* 490 K and Eupolis 352 K (quoted above, p. 388).

⁴ Aristophanes, *Plato* 8 K, with Ar. *Clouds* 103, 504, 1112; *Birds* 1553ff.

⁵ Antiphanes, *Antaios* 33 K, with Eupolis, *Kolakes* 159 K (above, p. 397f.); Ephippus, *Nauagos* 14K, with Ar. *Knights* 1375ff., (above, p. 395 with n. 2).

⁶ Examples are the opening scenes of Menander, *Dyskolos* and *Misoumenos* and of Plautus, *Curculio* and *Pseudolus*.

of comedy; to what extent (we ask) can something similar be said of satire against Plato, the Pythagoreans and other intellectuals? And secondly: how far does comedy itself respond during the fourth century to developments in thought about politics, ethics, the craft of literature and other humane subjects? To answer the first question, as our example suggests, we need to know what characters in what situations are given allusions to philosophers or express ideas with a recognizable philosophical background;¹ on one aspect of the second question something will be said later on.

But to return once more to Aristophanes; it is interesting, and perhaps genuinely indicative of a trend in the development of comedy, that *Ecclesiazusae*, in illustrating the concept of the community of all property also produces what has been pointed out as the earliest scene in comedy in which two old men are clearly contrasted. The contrast is between the man who loyally brings out his household goods and forms them for the state occasion into the order of a festive procession; and on the other hand the sceptic, who finds all reasons for hanging back, but is keen enough to go when there is to be a free state banquet: they are the forerunners of such pairs in Menandrian comedy as Demeas and Nikeratos in the *Samia*, or Demeas and Micio in the *Adelphoi* as adapted by Terence.²

Athenaeus, as we have remarked, read fourth-century comedies voraciously (p. 399 with n. 2). Even a rapid inspection of one of the editions of comic fragments will show what a dominant part in our knowledge of comedy between Aristophanes and Menander is played by the quotations which Athenaeus puts on the lips of the scholars whose dinner-party is the subject of his *Deipnosophistai*. The range of the diners' conversation, though wide, is by no means universal: so it comes about that we have relatively rich material for some topics which Athenaeus regarded as germane to academic party conversation, such as cooks, food in variety, wine, wine-cups and hetaerae; but (even adding in our other material) we do not have the random sample of characters, motifs and dialogue which would result if the same amount of text were recovered by papyrological discovery from small pieces of ancient copies of the plays owing their preservation to chance. The word 'fragment' can mean more than one thing. Two immediate considerations arise. On the one hand, the fact that Athenaeus has special interests in certain themes and puts together passages which display them is one more factor to take into account when questions of repetitiveness or monotony in fourth-century comedy are raised. On the other hand, we know well that Greek comic poets were aware, as popular entertainers in other ages have been, that familiarity (with just a dash of

¹ See Webster (1970b) 54–5 and (1950) 195ff.

² *Eccl.* 728ff.; Webster (1970b) 13.

something new) can be a powerful ingredient of success. With the help of Athenaeus' material we can explore some themes and their variants quite fully and attempt to mark out patterns of development which may illuminate the less well-documented areas that interest us. The figure of the *mageiros*, the professional caterer or cook, has been fully studied and can be quoted as an example.¹

The cook, who is hired to cater for weddings and other special celebrations, is one of a group of characters who come together in plays with a love-intrigue theme. The theme itself and at least some of the character-types have fifth-century forerunners; but it is no doubt to the two generations after Aristophanes that we are to look for the basic development of what was to become, through Menander and the other writers of New Comedy in Greek and Latin, one of the most fruitful forms of fiction.

Young and old lovers and young and old hetaerae are characters we have met in earlier discussions.² The game of sexual pursuit can be complicated by rivalries within or across the age-groups; as helpers and confidants, there are available the household slaves, or the old dramatic type of boon companion, the parasite;³ as hindrances, there can be stern fathers or domineering wives; the cook, the procurer and the moneylender all wait in the wings for their turn.⁴

In the formation of such fictional characters, the blend of fresh observation with literary inheritance is a fascinating one. Sometimes we may feel that the satirical portrait of a particular individual has been specially influential in forming a literary type. Needing an opponent in *Acharnians* for his hero's peace treaty with Sparta, Aristophanes brings on stage a contemporary military commander, Lamachus, in full hoplite gear with extravagantly plumed helmet; Lamachus rants and rages, but to no purpose, and he ends up with a battle and a wound for his efforts while Dicaeopolis enjoys women and wine. Here is a pattern both of a person and of a story which can be built on and transmuted. But of course, Lamachus is far from being the first soldier in literature. The Braggart Captain we all think of (taking our cue from Plautus and his *Miles gloriosus*) is not a regular officer like Lamachus, but a free-lance, a mercenary, corresponding in real life to those Greeks like Xenophon and many after him in the fourth century who sought their fortune in foreign wars, and looking back in literature to such ancestors as the wandering Orestes with his companion Pylades in Aeschylus, and perhaps as far as Archilochus.⁵ One

¹ There are full studies by Giannini (1960) and Dohm (1964); see Handley (1965a) on 393 and index s.v. *cook*, and Berthiaume (1982).

² Above, pp. 391 ff. on Ar. *Wasps*, Pherecrates, *Korianno* and other plays; p. 402 on *Ecclesiazusae* 877 ff.

³ Cf. above p. 398 with n. 1.

⁴ Webster (1970b) 63–7 gives a brief survey with references.

⁵ Cf. Webster (1970b) 64, 132: Archilochus 1 ff. West, Aesch. *Cho.* 675 with Antiphanes, *Athamas* 16 K and the terracotta types listed by Webster–Green (1978) nos. AT 6–7.

attraction of service of this kind was the glamour of far away places and foreign despots' courts, and it is reflected in the tall story told by the soldier in Antiphanes' *Stratiotes* (202 K): 'Tell me, did you spend long in Cyprus?' 'All the time the war lasted.' 'Where, mostly?' 'In Paphos; and there was a remarkable piece of refinement to be seen there – you wouldn't have believed it.' 'What?' 'The King had pigeons to fan him at dinner, pigeons . . . ' (He wore perfume which attracted them, and had slaves scare them off and make them flap). The progress from satirical portrait to type was not, of course, necessarily regular or uniform. There are odd satirical references to contemporary soldiers (as to Lamachus) in fourth-century comedy, but satire against individuals is commoner in the case of hetaerae – perhaps not surprisingly, since they are part of the urban scene in the way that soldiers are not.¹ But the young girl with her lover in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* has her descendants in the girls who are cast as the fictional heroines of love-intrigue plots; and we hear of one in Antiphanes, *Hydria* (212 K):

'The man I'm talking about had a girl living next door to him, a hetaera, and he fell in love with her on sight; she was freeborn, but had no relations, no one to look after her – she was a good girl, one with a golden character, a hetaera in the true sense of "friend", when all the others spoil a good name with their bad ways.'

The typology of characters which can be built up from the fragments is complemented by representations of masks, actors and scenes in works of art, which give us much fuller evidence for fourth-century than for fifth-century comedy.² Having said much to bring out the continuity of comic traditions, we must also recognize that alongside their development of mythological comedy, the fourth-century dramatists were powerful innovators in the drama of everyday life, in the creation of comic fiction. Our difficulty in evaluating what they achieved is the inevitable one, that, for the lack of continuous Greek texts, we tend to think in terms of survivals from the age of Aristophanes and anticipations of Menander. There is a passage of Antiphanes which can be used to throw some light on the literary principles which comic fiction was developing, and it may help us to a conclusion.

Antiphanes' long dramatic career runs from within a year or so of the death of Aristophanes in the mid-380s until the Olympiad 334/331 B.C., ten years or more before the dramatic début of Menander in 321. Fragment 191, which is unfortunately undated, is part of a speech on the relative difficulty of composing tragedy and comedy; and it is plausibly suggested that the title of the play,

¹ Webster (1970b) 63f. See also above, p. 383, on Timon of Athens as the archetypal misanthrope.

² Webster–Green (1978) with supplements published at intervals in *B.I.C.S.*; cf. p. 398 n. 2 above.

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Poiesis, indicates that the speech was a prologue-speech spoken by the personified figure of Poetry herself. As a sign of the times, we can note in passing that a discussion of playwriting of this kind is something that a fifth-century poet would probably have handled, as Aristophanes does, by having the chorus speak for him in the parabasis.¹ Poetry (if it is Poetry) speaks for Antiphanes as follows:

‘Tragedy is a lucky kind of writing in every way. Its plots, in the first place, are well known to the audience before a line is spoken; all the poet need do is remind them. Suppose I just say “Oedipus”, they know the rest: father – Laius; mother – Jocasta; who his daughters and his sons were; what it is that he did, and what he will suffer. Or take the case of Alcmaeon . . . [which we here omit, partly because the text is not properly elucidated] . . . then, when they have no more to say and their plays have completely run dry, they raise the crane (*mechane*) like a finger and the spectators are satisfied. We can’t do this. Everything has to be invented: new names, what happened in the past, the present circumstances, the end and the beginning. If a Chremes or a Pheidon leaves any of this out, he gets hissed off the stage, but your Peleus and your Teucer can do that.’

In interpreting this passage, we shall beware of treating Antiphanes as if he were writing an article on theatre and audience in the fourth century. We need to take what he says about tragedy and comedy much more as advertising material for the kind of play he is presenting than as documentation. That said, it can be seen that he is writing for an audience which likes to feel at home with its drama. Theatrical realities are present, in the shape of tragedy resolved by the *deus ex machina* and unsuccessful comedy hissed off the stage. Oedipus, Alcmaeon and other tragic heroes are alluded to in familiar terms, as in our time Hamlet or Hedda Gabler might be; but we need not go on to believe, as Antiphanes chooses to suggest, that a call for the name of Oedipus’ father (any more than for that of Hamlet’s uncle) would necessarily have met with a hundred per cent response.² What interests us above all is the concept of comedy as artistically constructed fiction, with an invented story, which must in fact be more than a story: it must be a plot, with a beginning, a middle (or present state) and an end, coherent and coherently presented; for incoherence (such is Antiphanes’ self-defensive compliment to the audience) will meet with vigorous critical disapproval; while the characters, however idiosyncratic their circumstances, are to be people with names ‘invented’ by the author – in practice, as the two examples show, the invention often involved no more than a choice from a familiar stock.

Antiphanes, as we have just recalled, was old enough to have begun writing

¹ E.g. *Knights* (p. 359 above); cf. Sifakis (1971) 38ff.

² Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b25, has it that even the best-known subjects of tragedy are known only to a few, though they give pleasure to all.

plays at or near the end of the lifetime of Aristophanes; but his conception here of organically constructed comedy about fictional people is closely akin to some of Aristotle's principles of dramatic composition, and may have been influenced by them; it anticipates, at least in essentials, what we find in Menander. 'Poetry', says Aristotle, 'tends to express the universal, History the particular' (*Poetics* 1451b6ff.). The distinction which interests him is between the way in which a man of a certain type will act, according to probability or necessity, and the particular, 'what Alcibiades did or suffered'. 'In Comedy', he continues, 'this is already clear: for comic poets construct their plot from probable incidents and then add names as they chance to come to mind.' One wonders how far comic practice nourished Aristotelian theory before the formulated principles in their turn influenced comic dramatists.

The Anonymus *De comoedia*, who was quoted near the beginning of this whole discussion for the number of plays of Middle Comedy, has this to say of their quality: 'The poets of Middle Comedy did not pretend to poetic style; they proceeded through familiar speech, and their virtues are those of prose – there is in them little work of the poet. They are all careful with their plots.'¹ If this is so it is not surprising that they do not lend themselves well to the gathering of colourful literary flowers, and that they may seem to be dull writers, especially when one takes into account the consideration that the authors whose quotations and excerpts provide the bulk of our fragments are hardly ever concerned, except incidentally, to illustrate the strictly dramatic virtues of the plays they use. One basis for plot-construction, we have seen, is in mythological comedy, with its pre-existing stories and characters. But for the design of plays with typical fictional characters, we depend on reconstruction from Latin adaptations and from the more traditional side of Menander's comedy. Plautus' *Menaechmi*, with its constant comedy of mistaken identity, can be taken with *Amphitruo* and (say) Menander's *Aspis* to give an idea of the ways in which poets of our period learnt to work out comic situations; and the existence of titles like *Homoioi* ('Two alike', Antiphanes and others) and *Didymoi* or *Didymai* ('Twins' of either sex, Anaxandrides, Antiphanes, Alexis and others) suggests that we are not dealing with isolated cases.²

One of the most productive techniques of mythological comedy – already pioneered, it must be allowed, by Euripides – was to subject the mechanisms of plot and the motivations of characters to the harsh light of the world we live in, to the standards of ordinary people, or rather, as Aristotle has it, of 'people worse than ourselves'.³ If the traditional story pattern and the inherited behaviour pattern, whether the product of external divine agency or inner

¹ Anon. *De com.* 11.49–52 Kaibel, 111.42–5 Koster.

² For discussion of *Menaechmi* in this aspect see Webster (1970b) 67ff.

³ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a16ff.

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conviction, were to suffer erosion or distortion, some reinforcement was needed, some new standard of probable or acceptable human behaviour. It came with the fourth century's growing interest in the human individual and his relationships – in a word, with the science that came to be known as ethics. Fine distinctions between motives and personal qualities are the common ground of later fourth-century philosophers and of the higher reaches of the Comedy of Manners, with the foundation of which we credit Menander.

II. MENANDER AND THE NEW COMEDY

Menander's *Perikeiromene* takes its title from the incident which begins the action. 'The girl who has her hair cut off' has it cut off by the man she is living with, a young Corinthian who is a professional soldier. He cuts it off in a fit of fury when he is told that she let another man kiss her. She then leaves him. Here is part of a conversation between the soldier, Polemon, and a friendly neighbour, Pataikos:¹

POLEMON I've always treated her as my wife.

PATAIKOS Don't shout at me. Who gave you her?

POLEMON Gave me her? She did.

PATAIKOS Very good. Perhaps she fancied you then, and now she doesn't.

She's left you because you're not treating her properly.

POLEMON Not treating her properly . . . ?

Polemon is deeply hurt by this, and not at all reassured to be told that violence will get him nowhere. The girl is her own mistress, and if he wants her back all he can do is try to persuade her; the man, if he can be found, can be brought to face a legal action, but the use of force would put Polemon himself in the wrong. 'Glykera has left me, Pataikos; she's left me, Glykera' – that is still the overpowering fact for Polemon; and (he urges) Pataikos must go and plead with her. 'If I ever did her any wrong at all . . . if I don't love, honour and cherish her . . . if you could just see her things . . .' At that, Pataikos backs away, but he is persuaded. Among the girl's clothes and jewellery, which for Polemon are a proof of his generosity, Pataikos will find the trinkets which were given her as a baby, and so discover that she is his own daughter. He had abandoned her together with a twin brother when their mother died after childbirth and he lost his livelihood in a shipwreck. It is the twin brother who is the cause of all the trouble. He is the man who was seen kissing Glykera; they had been brought up separately, and though he did not know who she was, she had been told about him. From these complications, one can see, will eventually come reconciliation and marriage.

All this seems a long way from Aristophanes, with his Trygaeus in *Peace*

¹ *Pl.* 239–43 (489–93 Sandbach) and continuing in what follows.

flying to Heaven on a dung-beetle to put an end to the war, or Praxagora in *Ecclesiazusae* packing the Assembly with women dressed as men in order to create her social revolution. But time has moved on. If it is rightly reckoned that Menander's first play, the lost *Orge* 'Anger' was produced in 321 B.C., that is the hundredth anniversary of the production of *Peace*; his death at about 50 in 292/291 or a neighbouring year is – near enough – a century after *Ecclesiazusae*. It is typical of the genre of New Comedy, the comedy of Menander and his contemporaries, that the plot of a play should be set in the domestic world of family relationships, and that it should have, prominently, what the cliché calls a love interest – anything from the intrigue by which a young man secures a desirable woman to a quarrel and reconciliation, as in *Perikeiromene*, between partners who are already attached. It is typical of Menander to have seen in this domestic world, which occupies the thoughts and daydreams of so many people for so much of their time, the material for a form of entertainment which would prompt serious reflection in its audiences as well as amusement. The balance is delicate. The headstrong and self-centred Polemon may make us laugh as he meets his match in the calm and civilized Pataikos; but if so, we laugh quietly, for there is a sense in which we are laughing at ourselves, at feelings we could admit to having experienced or could recognize among family and friends. Glykera's position in law and by the standards of fourth-century society was different, as commentators explain, from what it would be in twentieth-century Britain or many another modern society; but we overload the comedy if we make it, in any terms, too much of a tract on women's rights: the serious point, as is typical of Menander, is not just verbally asserted but woven into the plot, and it is that there are standards of equitable behaviour in human relationships which may lie deeper than the surface reactions of one person to another.

The Cairo codex of Menander was published in 1907. It gave, for the first time, large parts of *Epitrepontes* 'The Arbitrants', *Perikeiromene* and *Samia* 'The Woman of Samos' – three plays which were (not untypically) known beforehand from a total of about 20 lines of text between them in the form of identified quotations – and for good measure the beginning of *Heros* 'The Hero' and some lesser items.¹ This body of text, amounting to some 1,600 lines, was the basis of work on Menander for the next half-century. Around it there clustered a number of interesting lesser discoveries, sometimes from plays which could not be securely identified and have in some cases been identified since. From this material it became possible for the first time in the modern world to form a first-hand impression of the dramatic art of the author in such matters as the handling of dialogue, the articulation of plot through

¹ Gomme-Sandbach (1973) 39ff. and 50ff. give descriptions and lists of papyri. There has since been a new photographic edition of the Cairo codex with a preface by Koenen (1979).

sequences of scenes, and the delineation of character.¹ At the same time, the recovery of substantial portions of continuous Greek text gave a new impetus to the comparative study of Menander and his contemporaries with Latin adaptations of their plays by Plautus, Terence and other authors less fortunate in their survival.² There were now fresh reasons for taking an interest in the rich visual material relating to New Comedy, in the shape of scenes from plays, actors and masks represented in a wide range of media – terracottas, bronzes, mosaics, paintings, sculptures, gems – and produced over a period of several centuries for admirers of Greek comedy in all parts of the Graeco-Roman world.³ A second stage of this story is briefly told in terms of a single event – the publication in 1959 from the Bodmer codex in Geneva of a play that is virtually complete, the *Dyskolos* or ‘Misanthrope’. The third stage, that of the following twenty years, has not so far yielded any more complete plays, but the first and last of the three in the Bodmer codex, damaged at beginning and end, proved to be *Samia* and *Aspis* ‘The shield’. When these followed the *Dyskolos* into print in 1969, they went together with the previously known remains to yield the last three acts of *Samia*, with portions of the first two; and the first two acts of *Aspis* with the beginning of the third and some fragments from later in the play.⁴ Among other discoveries of the sixties and seventies were large portions of *Misoumenos* ‘The man she hated’ (1965ff.),⁵ *Sikyonios* (-oi) ‘The man – or men – from Sikyon’ (1965) and a hundred-odd lines of *Dis exapaton* ‘The double deceiver’ (1968), many of them in poor condition, but giving much the most extensive text to date which is available for direct comparison with its adaptation into Latin, namely a stretch of the *Bacchides* of Plautus, beginning at 494ff. While work on these texts was in progress, there became known a most remarkable series of mosaics of scenes from Menander which were found in a house of the latter half of the third century A.D. at Chorapha, Mytilene: they are a fascinating complement to what we have learnt from the papyri and have opened up possibilities for the recognition of more illustrations of famous scenes from particular plays among the growing stock of visual material which has come down to us.⁶

This outline of the progress of rediscovery will be in place here if it serves to show how much the basis of modern criticism of Menander has been chang-

¹ Of course, many good and interesting things were said about Menander and New Comedy before 1907: see (e.g.) Lefèvre (1979) quoting Goethe and A. W. von Schlegel, and Leo (1895) III.

² Fraenkel (1922) remains exemplary in this field.

³ E.g. Robert (1911); Webster (1969) gives an extensive catalogue, of which a revised edition is currently (1983) in preparation.

⁴ *Aspis* absorbed 87 lines first published in 1913, and previously quoted as *Comoedia Florentina*; line references to *Samia* in books published before 1969 are to the 341 lines from the Cairo codex.

⁵ Gomme-Sandbach (cf. p. 415 n. 1) under the sigla I, O10, O11; and add O19–O22, which are, respectively, *P.Oxy.* XLVIII 3368–71; for discussion, see Turner (1973) 15–21, 48–50 and (1978).

⁶ Charitonidis–Kahil–Ginouves (1970).

ing.¹ The impact of sheer novelty is complemented by the challenge of revaluing what we previously knew or thought we knew. Three questions at once suggest themselves: one asks what proportion of Menander's work we now have; whether there are likely to be more discoveries; and whether there are implications for the study of other writers of New Comedy. A recent calculation by W. G. Arnott reckons that the amount of Greek text available to us is something less than eight per cent of Menander's total output.² That would give a figure of the same order as our sample of Sophocles; for Aristophanes we can probably reckon that we have as much as 25 % to 30 % of the total amount of text known to the librarians at Alexandria. But the reality of the matter is both better and worse than the raw figures suggest. It is worse, in that we still only have one complete play of Menander in Greek; better in that there are eight (perhaps more) Latin plays by Plautus and Terence which are adapted from him. The list, with Greek titles in brackets, is as follows:

Plautus: *Aulularia* (*Apistos* or another); *Bacchides* (*Dis exapaton*); *Cistellaria* (*Synaristosai*); *Stichus* (*First Adelphoi*)

Terence: *Andria* (*Andria*, with additions from *Perinthia*); *Heauton Timoroumenos* (same title); *Eunuchus* (*Eunouchos*, with additions from *Kolax*); *Adelphoe* (*Second Adelphoi*, with a scene from Diphilus, *Synapothneskontes*).³

By a prudent estimate (leaving out of count many texts of unproved identity) there are now known more than fifty ancient copies of plays by Menander. These range in extent from the Bodmer and Cairo codices to scraps of a few letters only; and they range in date from the third century B.C. to the sixth or perhaps the seventh A.D.: Menander is in fact one of the best-represented ancient authors among those that survive on papyri.⁴ The chances are therefore good that if collections of papyri continue to be published Menander will continue to be represented; and new methods of taking apart mummy cases in order to recover written papyri offer promising prospects for the future.⁵ It is noticeable that though there are among papyri of Later Greek Comedy a number which do not appear, on stylistic or other grounds, to represent plays by Menander, there is very little which is certainly identifiable as a copy of a play by another writer in the genre.⁶ It could well be, if enough papyri of the Hellenistic and early Roman period are recovered, that we shall be lucky enough to find and identify

¹ For more detail, see Arnott (1975) and (1979) xxvi–xxx, xlvii–lii; Handley (1979); Luppe (1980).

² Arnott (1979) xxx.

³ Some doubt *Aulularia* (but the likeness to *Dyskolos* seems decisive); several other plays, including *Miles gloriosus* and *Pseudolus*, have been claimed as Menandrian.

⁴ See for instance on an unidentified papyrus Handley (1975b) and (1977).

⁵ See Maehler (1980).

⁶ Examples are *P.Heid.* 183, third/second century B.C., Posidippus, *Apokleiomene*; and *P.Oxy.* 427, third century A.D., Antiphanes, *Anthropogonia*: respectively CGFP nos. 218 and *3.

a specimen of the work of Philemon, Diphilus or another of Menander's rivals and successors; but on present evidence the chances must be rated much lower than for Menander himself. Latin adaptations by Plautus from Philemon and Diphilus and by Terence from Apollodorus of Carystus do something to fill out the picture that can be formed from the Greek fragments, but the texts on which we depend for our knowledge of Menander's work are so much greater in extent as to make a just comparison problematical. If, on the other hand, it were possible to set aside a large part of our Menandrian material and reduce him to the size of a Philemon or a Diphilus, how much that is now taken for granted should we have to unlearn? We noted in our approach to fifth-century comedy that the new discoveries of Menander can be useful as a reminder of the differences between whole, partial and fragmentary knowledge (above, p. 356), and the point is equally to be taken now that we have come to Menander's own time. It will therefore be well to resume our attempt to form an impression of his literary qualities before we try to see how far the writing of others can contribute to an overall picture of New Comedy.

There is in Plutarch a story about Menander and playwriting which, true or not, has become virtually canonical in modern writing about him, ever since it was used by Wilamowitz to open his much-admired discussion of 'The Art of Menander'.¹ A friend is said to have pointed out that the time of the Dionysia was approaching 'and you haven't composed your comedy for it, have you?' 'Composed my comedy?' said Menander, 'I most certainly have composed it: I have my treatment of the theme worked out – I just have to set the lines to it.' It is perhaps a pity that we do not have Aristophanes on record in a similar situation, for there is a sense in which the two stand at opposite poles of comic writing. With Aristophanes, brilliance of language is primary, and sometimes we can see how stage spectacle and action are actually generated by a verbal concept transformed into visual terms.² With Menander, it is not that the dialogue is dashed off anyhow (one need only read some to test that); simply that the overall design of the play comes first. That Menander should have been conscious of this principle, even (as it might seem) to the point of being able to turn it, half-jokingly, against himself, is something which accords well with what we have seen earlier of the development of organized dramatic composition in comedy.³ A similar insight can be derived, perhaps, from the very well-known portrait-relief of Menander sitting looking at the mask of a young man, which he is holding up in front of him, with two more masks on a table nearby.⁴ This is one of a long series of representations in art of poets with masks,

¹ Plutarch, *Moralia* 347e; Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1925) 119; cf. Handley (1965a) 10.

² See above, p. 388 with n. 4 and p. 389 with n. 1.

³ See above, p. 400 with n. 1 and p. 413.

⁴ Two versions are known: Webster (1969) nos. AS6 and IS10; Bieber (1961) figs. 316–17; on the series see Webster (1965) and Handley (1973).

and in showing Menander looking at one of a group such as this, the artist may well have been thinking of him precisely in the act of 'setting the lines' to the scene he has now reached in his plan.

It should follow, unless our impressions so far are seriously at fault, that plot and character-drawing in a comedy of this kind will be integrally related. A central feature of the design of the *Dyskolos* can be used to show how this is so.¹ The play is fashioned around a single character, Knemon the misanthrope, the 'Angry Old Man' who gives it its title. He is in fact on stage for about a quarter of the time the play would take to act – hardly more – and half of that quarter is allotted to Acts IV and V. For the rest, he is in the background, dominating the play largely through what we learn from others of him and his extraordinary way of life, and being built up for his one great moment, the major speech in Act IV at 708ff., made as if from his deathbed. The main line of the action is given from the first by the attempts of young Sostratos to gain Knemon's consent to marry his daughter. It is through the lover's story, with its ups-and-downs of unreliable helpers and unexpected allies, that the portrait of Knemon is built up; and as it proceeds the audience see him through the eyes of other characters. Thus, the god Pan gives a prologue speech, and with it the outline of the man, a sketch which will accumulate details as the play goes on and in some ways look different as it does so.² We next see Knemon through the eyes of a frightened slave whom he has chased off his land, and can observe the reactions of Sostratos and his friend Chaireas to this (81–146); then at last Knemon himself makes a brief appearance, and Sostratos is seen in his first direct confrontation (147–88); a little more is added by what we see of and hear from Knemon's daughter, and the first act ends with a portrait of Knemon as he appears to the slave from next door who inclines, as slaves do, to see the worst of things (220ff.). This description could be continued further into the play, but perhaps enough has been said to suggest how the technique works. While the action itself flows in a plausibly motivated sequence (that is, we accept that the people we are seeing would probably or necessarily behave as they do if the given circumstances were real), the various characters are presented in such a way that we have a clue to the value of what they say about Knemon from what they themselves are shown to be; but in turn, by defining him, they also define themselves. Chaireas, for instance, is soon recognized by the audience as a specimen of a familiar dramatic type, the parasite, a man who makes friendship a profession. Of course he can help in a love-affair; of course he knows just what sort of man Knemon is; and of course, when the moment comes, he will deal with the matter 'first thing in the morning'.³ In watching

¹ Cf. Handley (1965a) 11f.

² For references, see Handley (1965a) 23f. and index s.v. *prologue-speech*.

³ See particularly 57ff., 125–34; and above p. 398 with n. 1.

the play, we see with a smile how hollow Chaireas is, but we also see how much more idiosyncratic a character Knemon is than Chaireas thinks. It happens that we have, in the hero of Plautus' *Aulularia*, a close dramatic relation of Knemon's, the self-centred old miser Euclio; and it also happens that in the broad structural terms with which we are dealing the plays are the mirror-image of each other, with Euclio very much in evidence at the beginning, and on stage in all for more than half, and possibly near three quarters of the play's acting time (to judge from Plautus' version as we have it); the lover's story, which corresponds to that of Sostratos, is correspondingly in the background until late on. The contrast in the presentation of the hero is very striking.¹

It is sometimes said that there is no development of character in New Comedy, and it is perhaps useful to say so if the standard of comparison is the novel, or the kind of drama with an action extending over a considerable period of time. What does develop, and what gives a forward movement to plays with a serious interest in character, is the portrait which the audience is given, and the system of contrasts by which that portrait is built up and reinforced.² A character like Knemon differs from a real person in that he exists only in the linear dimension of the play's performance. For the purposes of the play, his character is what it is seen to be at a chosen moment; and a summation, such as we make for a programme note or an academic essay, is a creation which misses something of his essence. Just so, a retelling or summary of a plot made for the same purposes will easily trivialize and flatten action which was conceived in terms of a different medium than narrative.

If we now move a step away from the strategy of dramatic composition towards the tactics, narrative speeches can in fact be taken to illustrate some of the ways in which Menander varies his presentation of an incident. Our examples come from *Sikyonios*, *Misoumenos*, *Aspis* and *Dyskolos*. The action of the *Sikyonios* involves a slave and a young girl taking refuge at the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis. She will eventually prove to be freeborn and marry the hero, but at this point she and the slave are runaways, and in the narrative their status is being debated in front of a crowd which has gathered round. A debate of this sort can be presented by means of antithetical speeches from two actors, as is commonly done in drama: such a scene is the Arbitration from which *Epitrepontes* takes its title.³ But by presenting a debate in narrative and not on the stage, as in *Sikyonios* 176–271, the dramatist exchanges the immediate impact of the speakers' presence for the ability to set a more elaborate scene in the audience's imagination; he can use more speakers, he can characterize them through the narrator's eyes, and – not least – he can abbreviate and select in a

¹ See p. 419 n. 1 above and *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 100–1.

² See above, p. 409 with n. 2 and Webster (1950) 190ff.

³ *Epitr.* 43–200 (219–376 S): the underlying pattern is that of the tragic agon, not the form we associate with Aristophanes.

way which would not work with direct presentation. On this occasion, a further dimension is given by echoing, in words and pattern, what was (and is) a classic example of its kind, Euripides' narrative in *Orestes* 866–956 of the debate in Argos which decided the fate of Orestes and Electra. The echo offers a kind of justification (if one were felt to be needed) for the unusual length and prominence – by Menandrian standards – of the narrative; but it also points the analogy between the slave and the girl in one perilous situation, and the tragic hero and heroine in another.¹

The narrative which concerns us in *Misoumenos* is that of a quarrel. After a long search, Demeas has rediscovered his daughter, Krateia, a war-captive. He wants to ransom her from Stratophanes; Stratophanes wants to make her his wife; she utterly refuses, for he is at this time (in the words of the title) 'the man she hated': she had a special reason for doing so and – as it will prove – a mistaken one. All three parties are thus in a storm of conflicting emotions. Menander does not tackle the problems of managing this scene in direct presentation: it would have been a difficult peak to climb and to descend from. Instead, he brings on a slave, Getas, who has been there in the background, and is now reliving, quoting to himself and commenting on some of the high moments of the scene. He has an audience, in the shape of young Kleinias, who knows still less of what has been going on than the audience in the theatre; Kleinias paces up and down with the slave, listening, working things out for himself and eventually breaking in. The presentation thus exploits several different viewpoints at once, and blends almost the whole range of comic effects from high drama to farce. Something of this can perhaps be seen in a short excerpt:

GETAS Lord help us, he couldn't just be reasonable about it, could he? It was pig versus mule, as they say. But that's not so bad as her – looks away, she does, while he's speaking. 'Oh, Krateia', he says, 'don't leave me, I beg you, don't. You'd never had a man when I took you, and I *was* your man, the first to love you and cherish you; and I do love you, Krateia, my dearest. What is there about me that pains you? I'll be dead, you'll see, if you leave me.'

No answer, none.

KLEINIAS What *is* all this?

GETAS A barbarian, the woman is, a lioness.

KLEINIAS Damn you, you *still* can't see me. How strange.

GETAS Completely out of his mind. By Apollo here, *I'd* never have set her free...²

The interruptions to the narrative, which seem at first sight to reflect the randomness of real life, are in fact an integral part of its structure; and a similar technique

¹ See *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 22f., and for more detail Handley (1965b) 47 with n. 10; on Menander and tragedy, Webster (1974) 56ff.; and cf. above p. 373 with n. 3 and p. 404 with n. 2.

² *Mis.* 302–15, taking for granted restorations etc. which do not affect the point being argued.

is used very effectively, if less elaborately, in the long narrative at the beginning of *Aspis*.¹

The shield which gives *Aspis* its title is part of the spectacle that opens the play. It is broken; it is carried by the late owner's batman, and there follows a procession of captives with bundles and boxes, the spoils of a campaign. With the party, but somehow not of it, is an old man who for some time looks on in silence. The occasion is a sad one, strikingly so for the start of a comedy; the batman laments the loss of his young master, who had gone to war to provide a dowry for his sister and been killed. 'What an unexpected calamity, Daos.' 'Terrible.' 'Tell me, how did he die, what was the way of it?' The story proceeds, punctuated by comments from the old man. It was not a glorious campaign, but a tale of a force grown over-confident after easy success and good plunder; there was a surprise attack by night, and they were routed. The verse-rhythms are sombre, to match the mood of the story, and the manner is akin to that of tragedy, though without specific allusion or parody. The old man's interventions articulate the narrative, but they also gradually add a new colour to the scene. It becomes plain that his concern is no more than a mask for greed. He means to get his hands on the spoils, even if he has to marry his ward, the surviving child of the family, to do so. The plot proceeds through the intrigues by which he is frustrated, and comes to a peak with the return of the young soldier who had been supposed killed in battle: it was a case of mistaken identity, as Fortune, the prologue speaker, tells the audience immediately after the opening scene we have described. This is a remarkable piece of dramatic writing, and an interesting contrast with it is given by the narrative of a battle in Plautus' *Amphitruo*. Plautus makes a lyric of this, and there is a strong Roman colour to its language, but in Plautus we have war with 'the thunder of the captains and the shouting', not the death of a young mercenary after an ordinary military blunder.²

A further contrast is given by our last narrative, at the end of the *Dyskolos*, which looks back to the comic rather than to the tragic side of New Comedy's ancestry and is remarkable in being a musical scene – not, it is true, in any way resembling the full-blooded Plautine lyric of the *Amphitruo* narrative just mentioned, but at least with the accompaniment of a piper.³ The slave Getas and the cook Sikon take revenge on Knemon, the old misanthrope, for the way in which he drove them from his door when they wanted to borrow a cooking-pot; and in a scene which is in effect a farcical reprise of the borrowing scenes of Act III they carry Knemon out from his house and go through a ballet-like routine of knocking at the door and shouting fantastic demands for party

¹ See Turner (1980) 9f. and 11, quoting Bozanic.

² *Amphitruo* 186–262, esp. 219–47, cf. Handley (1975a) 129f.

³ *Dysk.* 880 (piper), 935–53 (narrative).

equipment. Finally Sikon forces the old man to listen to a recital of the proceedings at the betrothal feast which he has insisted on missing, and they then carry him in to the party under threat of being made to dance with them instead. Comedy has an interesting tradition of euphoric elevated style for descriptions of feasts and the like, for which it borrows freely from the language of higher poetry, especially perhaps dithyramb, and in calling old wine 'the Bacchic grizzlehead' (to take one phrase), Menander is alluding to this tradition, just as he is conscious in constructing the whole scene that comedy can by tradition end with a revel (and if the revel avoids the problem of shaping any more serious end, so much the better). As before, the narrative is punctuated by interruptions, and its festive note is diversified by Knemon's misery and Getas' triumphant sarcasm.¹

The four narratives which have just been described and contrasted can be offered as a token of Menander's dramatic range; but they can also perhaps be taken together to make a fundamental point about his playwriting. Here, as so often, he takes a basically familiar situation, and diversifies it by giving it a novel context, a new variant, an unexpected additional dimension, an artifice of structure. One could show these same broad principles at work in his treatment of characters, when he takes typical figures, often recognizable from the outset by their costumes, masks and even by standard names; and then, in the way we have seen, he builds up through the action of the play a portrait which shows that the typical is not, in this or that way, what it seems to be on the surface. Examples ready to hand are Polemon, Stratophanes and Thrasonides, the three soldiers of *Perikeiromene*, *Sikyonios* and *Misoumenos*, each of whom is fixed by type in the tradition of the 'miles gloriosus', but is shown by the play as an individual with characteristics that evoke a response of sympathy and interest rather than superiority and ridicule.²

An important consequence of this concept of playwriting for the critic is that it matters very much to have a full context for whatever it is in a play by Menander that one wants to interpret. That, in the fragmentary state of much of the author, is something we very often do not have, or have to achieve by conjecture. To take a single example, fr. 111 'Whom the gods love, dies young' is several times quoted as a moral maxim in antiquity (and known in English from Byron); but in the context given by Plautus' adaptation (*Bacchides* 816f.) it is said by a slave at the expense of his elderly master.³ It is appropriate here to remember that Menander is a poet of the Hellenistic Age. Though approaching by a different route, from concepts in social anthropology, T. B. L. Webster's treatment of the plays in his last book in terms of armatures and codes rather

¹ Cf. Handley (1965a) on 946–58; and see above, p. 365 with n. 5, p. 366 with n. 1, p. 368 with n. 4, p. 369 with n. 2 and p. 391 with nn. 1–2.

² See above, p. 410 with n. 5, and for New Comedy Hofmann and Wartenberg (1973).

³ Handley (1968) 6, quoting Webster.

than tradition and innovation is extremely revealing if viewed in this light; and in regard to more detailed matters of language and dramaturgy both Sandbach and Arnott (in a discussion entitled 'The Cleverness of the Hellenistic Poet') have mapped out some interesting new territory.¹

A difficulty which criticism of this kind of writing always faces is that of seeming to be too clever in turn (or indeed of being too clever).² Whether Menander's rivals and successors were often equally subtle is, as will have been plain from the state of the evidence, something very much harder to judge. Greek fragments apart, we know Philemon from Plautus' *Mercator*, *Mostellaria* and *Trinummus*, and Diphilus from *Casina*, *Rudens*, the fragmentary *Vidularia* (probably) and a scene in Terence's *Adelphoe*.³ It is eminently credible from the scale on which some motifs are treated in the fragments that both poets had a more relaxed, more traditional, and in a sense more comic attitude to comic writing;⁴ and a story which may be well found if not true has Menander saying to his rival 'Tell me, Philemon, don't you blush when you beat me?'⁵ Philemon, on the evidence of the Latin plays, excelled in comedy of situation; in the Greek that we have the pompous heavy-footedness of some of his writing, as opposed to Menander, reminds one of Plautus as opposed to Terence, and suggests a man with broader rather than subtler theatrical effects in mind.⁶ Diphilus, judging from *Rudens*, had a colourful way with a romantic comedy in a remote setting. Though the extent of Plautus' modifications is (as ever) a problem, it is likely that the original was both more expansive and more comic than *Dyskolos*.⁷ A certain sharpness has been seen in his writing, both in some of his verbal felicities and in the way in which (both in *Casina* and in *Rudens*) there are groups of black-and-white (as opposed to Menandrian pastel) characters in confrontation.⁸ But it remains hard to be confident from what we have of these authors that one is not imagining more than one sees.

It happens that, with the loss of Menander at the end of antiquity, the world of New Comedy reached modern times through Plautus and Terence. The idea of amusing, civilized fiction based on ordinary people's everyday affairs has proved to be an immensely fruitful one, with its myriad descendants and influences from ancient times onwards, and now including not only drama on radio and cinema or television screen, but above all, the novel. Popular fiction

¹ Webster (1974); Sandbach in *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 111 ff.; Arnott (1979) xxxviii–xliv.

² Cf. *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 7f.

³ Webster (1970b) has well-documented chapters on Philemon, Diphilus and (from the next generation) Apollodorus of Carystus, from whom Terence took *Hecyra* and *Phormio*.

⁴ E.g. long speeches by cooks, Philemon 79 K, Diphilus 43 K; and parasite, Diphilus 60–1 K; and compare Philemon 28 K with *Samia* 206 ff., 98 K with *Georgos* 35 ff., Diphilus 17 K. 11 ff. with *Samia* 99 f., 55 K with *Dyskolos* 402 ff.

⁵ Aulus Gellius, *N.A.* 17.4.

⁶ E.g. frs. 23, 69, 91, 106 K.

⁷ Compare for instance *Rud.* 414–84 (asking for water) with *Dysk.* 189–214.

⁸ Sharpness: e.g. 24 K with Menander, *Kolax* 85 ff., and frs. 60, 72, 83, 91, 107 K.

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of this kind has two very obvious characteristics: its characters and stories offer many people an escape into a world of wish-fulfilment, a world with which they can easily identify, but neater and more entertaining than the real one often is; and secondly, there is, to a greater or less degree, an enlightening or educating influence.¹ There is, of course, a very great part of human life, even everyday life, that does not enter into Menander's portrayal of it² (the same is often felt about others: for instance Jane Austen). There are times when our assent is strained by the role he accords to Fortune, or Ignorance, or whatever other divine or abstract force has contributed to the fashioning of a situation.³ There are other ways also in which he is noticeably an ancient and not a modern writer, not least in regard to his characters' behaviour, which he often accounts for very precisely (this is part of the art of dramatic structure) but in ethical, not psychological (certainly not post-Freudian) terms.⁴ The test of his rating through modern eyes could easily be the passage and the play from which we began: can Polemon and Glykera still survive in modern company?

¹ Cf. Thierfelder (1956) on Roman comedy in this regard.

² Handley (1965a) 12f. with some further references.

³ See Webster (1950) 198ff.; Ludwig in *Entretiens Hardt* (1970) 45–110; Bozanic (1977) 145–58; Lefèvre (1979) 320–8.

⁴ Handley (1965a) 13 and n. 3; Webster (1974) 43–55.